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Giving Teaches Everyone

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By Ellenmorris Tiegerman, PhD



In difficult economic times, charitable organizations suffer the most. There have been many articles in the press highlighting the fact that donations to charities have dropped

dramatically over the past year. Looking at it from the perspective of a donor, the letter or card received in the mail asking for a donation is easy to throw away because it is so impersonal. Charitable organizations should consider using creative strategies to encourage donors to become more involved in the life of the organization.

For example, at the School for Language and Communication Development (SLCD), we have a program called "Adopt a Donor." A benefactor is adopted by a classroom of children with disabilities. The donor visits the students on a regular basis and receives monthly letters and cards from the children describing school activities and events. The benefactor learns how his gift directly affects the daily lives of children in school. He learns how difficult it is for a child with a disability to ask a question, to read, to write and to add. The gift becomes connected to real people who have real problems and as a result, the link between the donor and the recipient is no longer abstract.

For the donor, gift giving needs to take on a reality which affirms the giving process. It is important for donors to see how their generosity creates a significant change and how that change benefits specific children with disabilities – Michael, Allyson, Thomas, Bryan, Mark and William. Finally, it is important to stress to donors that there must be a working partnership between charitable organizations and benefactors to achieve dynamic changes for the disadvantaged, the disabled and the poor. We want, not only to establish relationships with people who donate to our program, but find out what is meaningful to them. If they understand our mission, they will carry an important message to others.

Children can also be "benefactors." [The Bears 4 Kids Foundation](#) is a program that teaches children that when they do an act of kindness, they receive something in return. When children give away a teddy bear, they receive a teddy bear to take home. The principle seems quite simple but the result is truly amazing. Children at SLCD identified charitable organizations in other states and countries. They wrote letters to the children in these other programs and sent teddy bears to "make other children feel better." Despite severe developmental disabilities, each child had something to say about giving a gift. "I sent my teddy bear to a little boy in Mexico. He doesn't have parents. I have a mommy and a daddy. He must be very sad." Children's insights are precious. Letters were then received from the children who received the teddy bears.



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Our children learned about other charitable programs and other communities. There were lessons in writing, reading and story telling. Our children made new friends while learning about the giving process. For children who are usually the recipients of gifts, it is also important to teach them to do acts of kindness such as giving a teddy bear. The act of giving is a lesson for all of us to learn. We need to teach it to our children but we can only do that by example. Start a giving program at home with your children. Let them choose the charity and tell you what is meaningful to them.

Jennifer Gallozzi

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