

"IT'S GOING TO LIVE."

Community Voices

Not all 'charities' are legitimate

Double-check before you donate used clothing, household goods to what you assume is a charity

January is one of the busiest times of the year for the donation of used clothing and household items as people clean and organize after the holidays. As a result, many people look for the quickest, easiest way to donate their used goods. The same thing occurs when people head into their spring cleaning season.



Sheryl Chalupa

Unfortunately, if donors are not careful their generosity can have unintended consequences, such as boosting the income of a for-profit group, rather than aiding a local non-profit, charitable organization. While many of these solicitations are made by bona fide charities that deliver much needed local services, some actually benefit for-profit businesses or organizations providing no services here in Kern County.

Goodwill Industries International Inc. is urging consumers to double-check before making donations. First, donors should check with the state Attorney General or Secretary of State's office to find out if a charity is legitimate. Second, they should check with a charity-rating agency such as Charity Navigator or GuideStar or online resources such as GreatNonprofits or Philanthropedia to find out more about specific charities.

At Goodwill, we find that people want to do the right thing by donating gently used items. Unfortunately, in the rush of their busy lives, they sometimes drop their unwanted items at the nearest collection bin or set items out at the curbside without knowing the receiving organization. It may seem as if they are making a charitable donation, but that's not always so.

By checking with state authorities, consumers can quickly identify whether an organization is, in fact, registered as a legitimate charity. Rating agencies provide a wealth of information about charities, including how effective they are and whether their finances are in order.

On a practical level, consumers should be cautious of donation bins that don't clearly state the mission and contact information for the organization. While some bins are operated by genuine charities, many actually benefit for-profit organizations. More and more states nationwide are now requiring that unattended bins be clearly marked, but it is important for people to make informed choices about their donations. Consumers should also be cautious of door hangers or bags soliciting donations at curbside by organizations they don't know.

A good way to go is to give to local charities you know and trust to make a positive impact on our communities and our county. Fraudulent charities can try to trick you by using slightly changed names of established groups, so be sure to carefully read the name of the charity on the bin or the solicitation request before giving. And avoid donating to organizations that can't immediately provide you with information about the causes they are asking you to support. You can make sure your donations are benefiting the people who need them most by asking a few key questions:

- Will the proceeds generated from your donation be used to provide local programs and services?
- Will your donation be used to support a cause you believe in?
- What percentage of the revenues generated by your donation will directly support the mission of the organization?
- If the collections are conducted by a for-profit organization, how will your donation help people in need?

Donations to Goodwill are sold in local stores. The revenues fund job training programs and support services that enable people from all backgrounds to obtain and maintain economic independence and an increased quality of life right here in Kern County. In 2010, over 1,100 people benefited from Goodwill's training and employment services. By giving to Goodwill, donors are playing a vital role in helping people go to work.

I thank you for your ongoing support of Goodwill Industries and wish you the best in 2011. For more information about donations or to learn more about Goodwill programs and services, visit www.giscc.org.

Sheryl Chalupa of Bakersfield is president and CEO of Goodwill Industries of South Central California.

...more post-traumatic stress disorder, the massacre isn't so mysterious, the symptoms of untreated schizophrenia killed people.

This is not an extraordinarily rare or inexplicable occurrence. According to the psychiatrist E. Fuller Torrey, 4 million people in the United States have

serious mental illnesses, and 1 million of them go untreated. One hundred thousand are homeless and 300,000 are in jail or prison. Tormented by depression or delusions, about 15 percent kill themselves, and they commit about 1,600 murders a year.

President Obama was too swift when he said we shouldn't point fingers. Our ire should be directed at the mental-health "advocates," federal bureaucrats and crusading civil libertarians who fight to maintain a status that makes it so hard to treat the mentally ill. They are the madness lobby.

They aren't responsible for James Earl Ray or his crimes. They deserve the blame for a system that willfully lets people fall through cracks and pretends diseased minds can make rational decisions. At its best, this system is cruel, abandoning the ill to their suffering; in exceptional cases, it is reckless in leaving dangerous people to do harm to themselves or others. The madness lobby helps make the literally lunatic act of violence a routine part of the American landscape.

A group of "anti-psychiatrist" thinkers provided the philosophical impetus for emptying our mental institutions. Thomas Szasz, Michel Foucault and others have demonstrated the power of ideologues to increase the sum total of human misery. Szasz compared psychiatry to slavery, while ideologues



Rich Lowry
SYNDICATED COLUMNIST

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