



ADVISORY

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Contact: Marianne Chilco, Director of Communications
416-757-1220, ext. 248 or mchilco@canadianfeedthechildren.ca

Protecting against fraudulent wolves in charitable clothing

Canadian Feed The Children is one of over 80,000 registered charities across the country that rely on a variety of fundraising activities to give Canadians the opportunity to fund vital programs and services. But no matter how important a charitable cause or how urgent the need, reputable charities must make it a priority to honour donor preferences and privacy at every turn and with every contact.

And contact methods are plenty: telephone, mail, email, Internet and direct dialogue through events, on the street, in the mall and door-to-door. These forms of contact are used to strengthen existing relationships between donors and their chosen charities, as well as to inspire support from new donors. With such a wide range of activities that puts charities in direct contact with consumers come ripe opportunities for the more dishonest among us to take advantage and misrepresent themselves as a charity for personal gain.

Most of us think of fraud as carried out by a corrupt ring of criminals, with sophisticated resources and schemes aimed at relieving innocent victims of large amounts of hard-earned money. This may be true for high-level fraud, but in many cases, the approach can be surprisingly simple, and local. One situation recently reported to us from a small community in Eastern Canada involved a young girl who knocked on the door of a local resident, gave a name recognized by the resident as a local family, then said she was raising money on behalf of Canadian Feed The Children. The resident was moved to give the girl cash to support the charity, but then became suspicious. Police were called and it was later determined that the young girl misrepresented herself on two counts – she used the name of another young girl in the community who had no involvement in the matter and had used the name of our charity, though no fundraising arrangement had been made with the girl.

This is one example of how the names of well-known charities can be used to the advantage of those with less than charitable interests. This bold type of fraud harms the reputation of the charity and can often destroy the donor's trust and natural instinct to help. This is one of the reasons that Canadian Feed The Children made the decision to no longer accept cash at the door. Like many charities, we have professional canvassers in malls, on the streets and going door-to-door in some cities to accept new monthly donors or one-time gifts. These canvassers wear photo ID badges that clearly identify them as canvassing on behalf of Canadian Feed The Children, have materials displaying our logo and registration number, and never accept cash. This information is on our website so that any donor faced with someone asking for cash on our behalf could determine it was not a viable canvasser.

The Canadian Revenue Agency says that you should never feel pressured to make a donation on the spot. If you feel unsure, it is perfectly acceptable to postpone your donation until you have researched the charity. Ask for written information, visit the charity's website, or search the CRA Charities Listings at www.cra-arc.gc.ca. CRA suggests when a charity calls or comes to your door, you may want to ask some or all of the following questions:

1. What is the full name of the charity?
2. Is the charity a "registered charity"? If so, what is the charity's registration number?
3. Will I get a receipt for income tax purposes for my donation?
4. What is the mission and goal of the charity?
5. What activities does the charity do?
6. Can you send me more information before I donate? Does the charity have a mailing list or newsletter to which I can subscribe?

Canadian Feed The Children
174 Bartley Drive Toronto ON M4A 1E1
416-757-1220 1-800-387-1221
www.canadianfeedthechildren.ca
Charitable Registration No. 11883 0983 RR0001