

SCAM ALERT



BY BRYDEN GAGE



Giving Can Be Good

Recently, researchers from the University of British Columbia did an experiment. The plan was to give \$5 to \$20 to several students to either spend on themselves or to spend on others. The results of the survey showed that the more people spent on others, the higher their happiness rating.

So maybe money does buy happiness, after all. The caveat? Don't spend it on yourself!

While it is good to give, it is important to know who gets the money. For every legitimate organization raising funds for a valid cause, there are scam artists who impersonate charities in an effort to take advantage of people's generosity and make a tidy profit for themselves.

Then there are charities that may give a portion of donations to the actual cause, but not necessarily the amount donors would consider acceptable. When making a donation, ask how the funds raised are distributed. In some cases, a high percentage of the funds are used for administration, marketing or fundraising, leaving a small amount for the cause.

If you plan to donate money this spring, the BBB would like to offer the following advice:

- When in doubt, check it out. When an unfamiliar organization asks you for a donation, don't give without gathering details about the charity, the nature of its programs and its use of funds. Visit the Canadian Revenue Agency at www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tax/charities for a list of registered charities in Canada. To search for licensed third-party telemarketers in B.C. making calls on behalf of legitimate charities, visit the Business Practices & Consumer Protection Authority website at www.bpcpa.ca

- Think before you give. If you are solicited at the mall or on the street, take a minute or two to "think." Ask for the charity's name and address. Get full identification from the solicitor and review it carefully. Ask to see written information on the charity's programs and finances.

- Giving later might be better. Never feel pressured to give on the spot. Legitimate charities will welcome your money

tomorrow. If the solicitor pressures you with intimidation or harassing phone calls, don't hesitate to file a complaint with BBB.

- Watch out for cases of mistaken identity. With about 9,000 registered charities in B.C. alone, it's not surprising that some charity names sound alike. Be careful that the one soliciting you is the one you have in mind.

- Don't accept vague claims. If something is being sold to benefit a charity, be wary of vague statements such as "all proceeds go to charity" or "your purchase will benefit a charity." Look for a disclosure that indicates the actual or estimated amount of the purchase price that the charity will receive to fund its programs.

- Unordered merchandise is free. If a charity sends you greeting cards, address labels or other merchandise with an appeal for donations, you are not obligated to make a donation or pay for the items.

- Watch out for charity fraud. Legitimate charities do not demand donations; they willingly provide written information about their programs, finances or how donations are used; and they never insist you provide your credit card number, bank account number or any other personal information.

- Tax receipts. If you are looking to make a tax-deductible donation, only a registered charity has received a Registration Number from the Canada Revenue Agency and can issue donation receipts for gifts.

Learn more about giving to charities by visiting us at vi.bbb.org

Happy giving!

Bryden Gage is the Acting Executive Director of the Better Business Bureau of Vancouver Island. If you believe you have been the target or victim of a scam, please call the Better Business Bureau Vancouver Island at 386-6348 in Greater Victoria or at 1-877-826-4222 elsewhere on the Island, so others can benefit from your experience. E-mail info@vi.bbb.org