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## CAPE Business News

# Donation Dump Or Constructive Giving?

Businesses tend to see this time of year as a time to contribute in some way to their chosen charity organisation. Eleanor Bester, co-ordinator of emergency foster home Heaven's Nest in Cape Town, shares some ideas on how to maximise the value for the cause you choose to contribute to. Her advice is based on her own experience with running Heaven's Nest over the past 6 years.

"Deciding what to donate is not always easy. The best option is to call the organisation you support and ask them what their greatest needs are. In the case of children's homes, there are many things you can donate that will make a big difference to the lives of the children they support."

"Fresh fruit, vegetables, meat and other perishables are always needed. Sleepwear, gowns and slippers get sent with the children when they leave, so these are always in scarce supply. Also always needed are nappies, towels, facecloths and toiletries," says Bester. "It costs approximately R930 per month to care for one child, who does not need nappies. Nappies cost an additional R690 per child per month."

"Educational books would also be welcome and well utilised at any children's home. Many of the children that we take in have had no exposure to even basic education, so most organisations try to remedy this in some way. Heaven's Nest has recently opened a classroom at the centre, where we provide introductory education for the children."

For most charity organisations, money is the most practical donation. It allows them to utilise it in the ways that best promote sustainability and growth. Bester says, "Monetary contributions are what help us run our organisations on a day to day basis. Think about what it takes to run a household, and then consider how many children some organisations care for with very little ongoing financial support."

Donating time to an organisation that cares for children from abusive, neglectful or HIV/AIDS affected backgrounds can be difficult. "In my experience at Heaven's Nest, we deal with a lot of traumatised children. They love visitors, but they are very sensitive to emotions. If business staff members genuinely want to come spend quality time with these children, the children will open their hearts to them. If staff members are forced into visiting, the children sense that immediately and withdraw."

"As a business owner, be sure to communicate with your staff and ensure they want to be involved in a visit. Also contact the organisation you want to visit and check how many visitors they allow at one time and what time of week or day fits in with what are usually very fixed daily routines," suggests Bester.

A final consideration should be whether instead of making a donation at year end, you should commit yourself to smaller monthly donations of money, food or time for the following year. Most charitable organisations would gain greater value from ongoing involvement from businesses and communities, as their ultimate goal is sustainability.

We want to keep providing safe homes, food, education and love to those who need it most. Ongoing monthly support would make that so much easier, but ultimately any donation, at any time of year, is wonderful and much appreciated."