

Good-To-Give

*a weekly column of charitable giving tips
from The DMA Nonprofit Federation*

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The Newspaper Headlines End — The Work Continues

Dispatching rescue teams after an earthquake... providing food and water to those who have none... finding emergency shelter for those left homeless by a natural or manmade disaster. These are the types of good works we normally associate with nonprofit agencies skilled in providing human relief services. But it's not a very complete picture.

For most relief organizations, the critical work in the first few days following a disaster is just the beginning. Just as important are the long-term efforts, some of which take years, to help return an affected area to some of its former normalcy.

The terrible human disaster of the December 26th tsunami of this past year is a good example of how nonprofit organizations play a dual role in providing relief operations.

Nonprofit agencies already working in the area acted quickly to provide clean water, food and medical assistance, while also coordinating rescue and relief efforts provided by military units. Their work brought relief to millions of affected people and helped save thousands of lives that might otherwise have been lost to typhoid, cholera and other diseases.

But the responsibilities of these nonprofits didn't end once the immediate needs of life were met. Today numerous charitable agencies are addressing the long-term problems still facing the more than 5 million people left homeless or without the means to earn a livelihood.

One international agency, SOS Children's Villages, quickly set up relief centers for the thousands of orphaned and displaced children in India and Sri Lanka. It then turned its focus to helping locate surviving family members and to creating permanent living situations for thousands of children with no surviving family.

For the Catholic Medical Mission Board the long term goal has become to create sustainable healthcare programs that will provide medical help for orphans, adolescents and women in the most affected communities. Similarly, Food for the Hungry's efforts in Indonesia's Aceh province, the area most hard-hit by the tsunami, have gone beyond simply providing food to rebuilding destroyed structures and developing training programs to teach new trades that will enable people to earn a living.

The list of nonprofit agencies working to return life to normal in these areas is long, with each focusing on specific goals, some of which will take years of commitment from the charities. Oxfam America, for example, is providing grants to small businesses to help them get back in business. UNICEF undertook a fast track school construction program in Indonesia to create 200 temporary school buildings in just one month, but has also committed to rebuilding and renovating 500 permanent schools, helping them meet earthquake-resistant standards. Habitat for Humanity is rebuilding and repairing tens of thousands of damaged homes, while also creating technical centers to aid local residents in their own rebuilding efforts.

It's easy to forget that a major natural disaster, such as the tsunami, doesn't end just because immediate aid has been received and the newspaper headlines have stopped. Such disasters mean years of effort and millions of dollars in funding for the nonprofit agencies helping in the affected areas. It's a commitment worth remembering when you are considering making a charitable gift.

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Good To Give is a weekly column provided free of charge by The DMA Nonprofit Federation as a means of helping the public be better informed donors in their support of charitable causes.