



DIRECT FORUM

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Direct Forum is a free e-mail newsletter containing useful direct marketing tips, news updates and how-to information. It's convenient, informative and I am not trying to sell you anything.

1. A few hints on how to write a successful fundraising letter
2. How effective was Plan B?
3. Social media—dispelling some myths

A few hints on how to write a successful fundraising letter

Creating a personal story or telling one that strikes an emotional chord will often elicit a better response from potential or existing donors. That's why a lot of fundraising focuses on well-targeted letters that make use of personal testimonials.

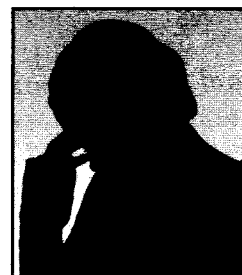
There are many charities that either can't afford to engage an agency or a freelance writer or believe they can do it themselves when it comes to creating a direct mail package.

Here are a few tips for those who do it themselves.

TIP 1: Crafting your Case Study

Like fresh food, Case Studies have a short shelf life! Case Studies need to be actively recruited so strike while the iron is hot.

Often the person whose story you want to feature will forget things or feel differently or lose the impetus to participate if they are not approached immediately. It is also imperative that people who agree to tell their stories be allowed to see what you've written to make sure it makes them comfortable.



INTERVIEW WITH 'JANE DOE'

TIP 2: How do you create a compelling letter?

First, you must consider your audience. Today's donors expect you to state what you need the money for, precisely what you're going to do with it. The old fashioned notion of asking for a blank cheque: "Your funds will go where the need is greatest", should be avoided. This will enable you to deliver a much stronger "ask".

It also helps to build a bond with your donors if you acknowledge their previous donations and give them feedback on the impact their last donations have had.

The copy should also reflect the situation. If you're dealing with a disaster, your letter needs a tone of immediacy. A more general campaign first needs to explain the need and how the donor's money will achieve a long-term solution

TIP 3: Tone of voice

The tone of voice should be sincere, honest and open.

A lot depends on who the letter is from. A Chief Executive Officer or President might be appropriate for broader aims, while a the person whose story you are telling will give the letter authenticity.

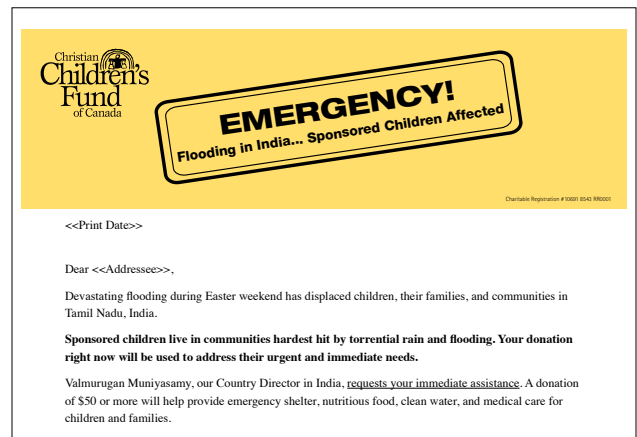
Great advice for writing a natural, engaging letter is to pretend you're having a cup of coffee with a friend and sharing the story from the viewpoint of who the letter will come from. Simply reading it aloud will give you an idea if it sounds sincere and credible or not.

TIP 4: Photography

All too often, what should be powerful and expressive photography illustrating the plight of a subject ends up too far down the list of essentials. Remember, often people abandon reading if they are not fully engaged and photographs help do that.

Also beware of client image libraries. Too often they have been overused or not compelling enough. Check out professional photo banks. Some offer charities photos for free or at reduced rates.

People worry about: too little money going to the cause itself (76%); lack of clarity regarding how donations are spent (60%); too much going on staff salaries (57%).
(Source nfpSynergy)



I was once asked to write about child labour but was not allowed to use an image of a child in a sweatshop. It had all the ingredients of what my letter was trying to express: plenty of eye contact, in the right place and situation. It was pulled because the committee that approved the piece thought it was too disturbing and replaced it with a picture of four happy children, walking arm in arm down the street.
Go figure?

Continued overleaf ...

TIP 5: Don't just write a letter; write a package

Consider what goes on the outer envelope too. Decide on envelope size bearing in mind the cost implications. Consider what should go on it including: the image, teaser copy, your mailing address, should it have a postal indicia or a live stamp.

All these are important factors. After all if the outer envelope is not inviting, compelling or attractive, the contents inside won't matter since no one will read it.

TIP 6: Let someone you trust read your letter

See how it makes them feel. Does it touch them emotionally? Were they engaged with the story? Did it lose them at any point? Is it believable? Is it right for the target audience? You'll know by their reaction and answers if you've got it right.

TIP 7: The professional-amateur dilemma

One way to solve this problem is by hiring a freelancer writer as a consultant. Most good freelance writers will be more than happy to act as consultants or advisors. The audit or advice they provide will not only save you a ton of money but may also bring in more funds.

TIP 8: The first line is crucial

Like a first impression or an opening salvo, the first line of your letter is crucial. It will dictate if people will read the rest of your letter or not.

For example, here alongside is a brilliant start of a letter by **Tom Gaffney** for **Covenant House**.

Right away you know it's a story:

TIP 9: People scan they don't read

A large percentage of people scan the letter so make it visually exciting with short or paragraphs of uneven length.

Add images where appropriate with captions to explain what you are showing.

I let my wife Ellen read every piece of copy because she is not only my trusted proofreader but also my harshest critic, as evidenced in an article in my column *Direct and Personal* for Direct Marketing. Email me if you wish to read the article.



Dear Friend,

She came to our front door Tuesday morning, dressed in dirty rags, holding a little aluminum paint can in her arms.

Continued overleaf ...

TIP 10: Finally your style of writing.

Involve the reader. Bring your reader along with you into the world you are about to describe.

Show them what is happening right now. Tell a story and let your readers imagine they are right there with you. Just like a great novel a great story can transport your reader right into the thick of things.

**Here's the rest of Tom Gaffney letter.
It demonstrates good story telling.
Enjoy!**

You're going to have trouble believing this letter. I mean, what I'm about to tell you is so strange and incredible, you'll never forget it. But please understand that every single word of this story is true!!! I'm really praying you'll take a few minutes to read it. Thank you.

Dear Friend,

She came to our front door Tuesday morning, dressed in dirty rags, holding a little aluminum paint can in her arms.

From the second she stepped inside our shelter, she mystified us. Whatever she did, wherever she went, the paint can never left her hands.

When Kathy sat in the crisis shelter, the can sat in her arms. She took the can with her to the cafeteria that first morning she ate, and to bed with her that first night she slept.

When she stepped into the shower, the can was only a few feet away. When the homeless girl dressed, the can rested alongside her feet.

"I'm sorry, this is mine," she told our counsellors, whenever we asked her about it. "this can belongs to me."

"Do you want to tell me what's in it, Kathy? I'd ask her? "Um, not today," she said, "not today."

When Kathy was sad, or angry or hurt– which happened a lot – she took her paint can to a quiet dorm room on the 3rd. Floor. Many times on Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday, I'd pass by her room, and watch her rock gently back and forth, the can in her arms. Sometimes she'd talk to the paint can in low whispers.

I've been around troubled kids all my life, (over 41,000 homeless kids will come to our shelter this year!). I'm used to seeing them carry stuffed animals (some of the roughest, toughest kids at covenant house have a stuffed animal). Every kid has something – needs something – to hold. But the paint can? I could feel alarm bells ringing in my head.

Early this morning, I decided to "accidentally" run into her again. "Would you like to join me for breakfast?" I said. "That would be great," she said.

For few minutes we sat in a corner of our cafeteria, talking quietly over the din of 150 ravenous homeless kids. Then I took a deep breath, and plunged into it...

"Kathy, that's a really nice can, what's in it?"

For a long time, Kathy didn't answer. She rocked back and forth, her hair swaying across her shoulders. Then she looked over at me, tears in her eyes.

"It's my mother," she said.

"Oh," I said. "What do you mean it's your mother? I asked.

"It's my mother's ashes," she said.

"I went and got them from the funeral home. See, I even asked them to put a label right here on the side. It has her name on it."

Kathy held the can up before my eyes. A little label on the side chronicled all that remained of her mother: date of birth, date of death, name. That was it. Kathy pulled the can close, and hugged it.

“I never really knew my mother, Sister,” Kathy told me. “I mean, she throw me in the garbage two days after I was born.” (we checked Kathy’s story. Sure enough the year Kathy was born, the New York newspapers ran a story, saying that the police had found a little infant girl in the dumpster... And yes, it was two days after Kathy was born.)

“I ended up living in a lot of foster homes, mad at my mother,” Kathy said. “but then, I decided I was going to try and find her. I got lucky – someone knew where she was living. I went to her house.”

“She wasn’t there, sister,” she said. “My mother was in the hospital. She had Aids. She was dying.”

“I went to the hospital, and I got to meet her the day before she died. My mother told me she loved me, Sister,” Kathy said crying. “She told me she loved me.” (We doubled-checked Kathy’s story... Every word of it was true)

I reached out and hugged Kathy, and she cried in my arms for a long, long time. It was tough getting my arms around her, because she just wouldn’t put the paint can down. But she didn’t seem to mind. I know I didn’t...

I saw Kathy again, a couple of hours ago, eating dinner in our cafeteria. She made a point to come up and say hi. I made a point to give her an extra hug...

I’ve felt like crying tonight. I can’t seem to stop feeling this way. I guess this story – the whole horrible, sad, unreal mess – has gotten to me tonight. I guess that’s why I just had to write you this letter.

Please – I know you and I have never met before. But I need to ask you something very important, and I’m praying you’ll consider it, if you can. Do you think you could help Kathy... and our other kids at Covenant House? Please?

There’s one very important thing you need to know about Covenant House and our kids and it is this – a donation to covenant house is the absolute best way you can help the terrified and helpless homeless kids on our streets!

This year more than 41,000 homeless kids... Kids who are 12, 16, 17 years old ... Will come to our doors. We’ll give these kids food, and a safe bed to sleep in (the streets are incredibly dangerous!) And medicine, and counselling if the need it (most kids do).

But most of all, we’ll give these kids love. For thousands of these kids, the love we give them tonight will be the first love they’ve ever known! We are here for kids like Kathy 24 hours a day, in 9 cities across America, 365 days a year. No kid – no kid! – is ever turned away ever!

Thanks to the love and help of thousands of caring people – people just like you – Covenant House spends more than the entire federal government to help these kids. (That’s what I meant when I said that giving to us is the best way to help these kids.)

But so much more needs to be done. And we can’t do it alone. Do you think maybe you could help? Please? Any donation you can send - \$15, \$25, \$50 – any amount, will be a godsend to our kids. Please do it today if you can. Please.

I want to assure you of one very important thing. We’re going to do all we can to help Kathy, to let her know she is loved. And I know, with your help, we are going to reach Kathy, and help her in a way on one has ever done before. You have my promise on that...

And when we do reach her, it will be because of you. It will be because people like you haven’t stopped caring, and haven’t stopped loving. Yes, it will be possible because of you. It will be possible because of you.

Thanks so much for reading this long letter. And please, pray for us if you can. Your prayers really help a lot.

In God’s love

/s/

Sister Mary Rose

President

P.S. Our financial need is really urgent right now. Please help, if you can. (Thanks for caring...)

How effective was Plan B?

Last month in my article: [Acquiring New Donors — Plan B](#). I said that most of us have tried Plan A: Acquiring new donors either by renting a list or swapping/exchanging your list with other charities.

And suggested that perhaps we are all looking for new donors in the wrong places. Lapsed donors, which make up about 30-50% of a charities house list should really be consider as new prospects.

The pressure to generate return on investment has naturally led many organizations to focus on increasing donation values rather than recruiting new donors. The proportion of households giving to a charity has been gradual decline lately, That's one more reason why we should look at our lapsed donors.

I also mentioned that I was testing two methods of luring lapsed donors back and once I got the results I would share it with you.

Here is the result of the first initiative. **Roohina Abdullah**, in charge of the database of **Special Olympics Ontario** was kind enough to report the following:


"I do believe that about 25% lapsed gave to our November mailing."

What made Plan B work?

One of the best ways to appeal to your lapsed donors is to engage them on a more personal level, providing bite-sized updates and case studies. There are over 17,000 Athletes who actively participate in Special Olympics games, yet I feature just one each time.

Another reason why so many lapsed donors responded is that many only give once a year and the end-of-year is the ideal time to reach them.

Here is the two-page letter alongside. You be the judge.



Special Olympics Ontario

Here's an amazing story of hardship and determination, of passion and pride and of guts and glory — the hallmarks of a truly dedicated Special Olympics athlete.

Mrs. Jane Sample
1234 Main Street Apt 431
Toronto, Ontario M1M 1M1

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XX1234

Dear Jane Sample

Sara Albers has what is called Agenesis of the Corpus Collosum with a Dandy Walker Variant. In layman's terms this means her cerebellum did not develop properly and continues to interrupt her development – a challenge she faces daily.

The condition was so serious at birth that her doctor was not sure whether she would ever walk or talk.

But just look at her now! This year at the Special Olympics World Summer Games in Athens, Greece, she won a gold and a bronze medal.

Sara runs with an unusual gait, has to wear glasses and is virtually deaf, but she has an incredible fighting spirit.

At the Games, in the 200-meter dash in her division of 12-15 year olds, she captured a bronze with a time of 32.48 seconds, improving her personal time by over four seconds.

Sara was nervous before the event. In the preliminaries she was in lane number 8, the worst lane to be in. She did not have her glasses and all she could see was a foggy finish line but she was determined to do well. She handily qualified by placing first.

In the finals she got a better lane – lane number 2 – but was flanked by two strong runners who just flew past her at the last few seconds.

In the Long Jump she won a gold medal in her division with an incredible jump of 2.68 meters.

Sara had butterflies in her stomach as she strode up to the starting line. Being deaf she could not hear the crowds cheering her, especially her seven family members who went to the games to support her. They included her mother, Jennifer Albers, her dad William, sister Rachel, brother William, her aunt Martha Doran, her uncle Steve Doran and another aunt Karen Glancy.


Her first jump was average but in the second attempt she did really well, outperforming all the others. As she completed the jump she looked back for the white flag to make sure it was a clean jump. Then there was a faint, barely audible 'yes' from her lips as she clenched her fist with joy. She had beaten her own record by 0.22 meters.

Standing proudly on the podium, as the Canadian national anthem played, she humbly accepted the gold medal. The entire Albers clan beamed with tears of joy and pride as the crowd stood up and applauded. This was their little girl, the one supposedly destined never to walk.

Jennifer Albers, Sara's mother told me, "Sarah was always interested in sports; she loved to participate with other children but the physical gap between what she could do in comparison to the average child was very apparent and heartbreaking.

"Getting involved with Special Olympics Ontario was easy!"

"I wanted her to continue participating in sports so when she was nine years old, I Googled 'sports for kids with



Sara with her coach Angela Behn

Yes, I would be proud to support more dedicated Special Olympics athletes like Sara.

I have enclosed a donation of \$ _____

Mrs. Jane Sample
1234 Main Street Apt 431
Toronto, Ontario
M1M 1M1

I would like to volunteer. Please call (416) 447-8326
Please return this form with your donation in the postage paid envelope.
Official receipts will be issued for gifts over \$10.
Confidentiality of your gift: We appreciate the support of each and everyone of our donors. Thanks to you, we can continue to provide a better quality of life for people with intellectual disabilities. From time to time, Special Olympics Ontario exchanges its donor list with other reputable non-profit organizations in order to recruit more people to our family of supporters. If you do not wish your name to be exchanged, please let us know: 18 Wyldest Drive, Suite 310, Toronto, Ontario M5C 3K2. Tel: (416) 447-8326. Fax: (416) 447-8328. Toll free: 1-888-333-6616. Charitable tax No. 11950 8435 RR0001

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NOTE: SEE REVERSE TO PLEDGE AIR MILES

disabilities' and up popped Special Olympics Ontario. Sara started with this organization in floor hockey but when summer came she told me emphatically that she wanted to try track and field with her hockey mates.

"She has been competing with Special Olympics for the last five years in the 100-meter, 200-meter and 400-meter dashes, and in long jump and shot put.

"In the Regional Games, Sara competed in all the above events and handily qualified. Then she went on to the Provincial Games, competing in the same five events, and once again qualified. At the National Games she came in first in the 200-meter dash with a time of 36.39 seconds and first again in long jump with a distance of 2.45 meters.

"Then, Sara faced her biggest challenge yet.

"When we found out in October 2010, that Sara had been chosen to compete in the Special Olympics World Summer Games in Athens, Greece in 2011, she started training really hard. Two days a week she would get up before school at 5:30 in the morning and run on the treadmill and lift weights. In addition she trained three days a week for another two hours each day – all courtesy of a gracious donation of a membership to **Goodlife and University of Western Ontario Track Club.**

"Sara does not know the meaning of the word 'can't'. My husband and I have never have put limits on her because she never put limits on herself. When she asked us if she could skate, we let her. Ride a bike? We taught her. Often we just hold our breath and allow her to try. Things were told she would never be able to do, she now does.

"We are a very tight-knit family who support each other. Sara has two siblings, Rachel is 13-years old and William is 8-years old. Rachel plays competitive soccer for Byron Optimist League and William plays house league soccer for Oakridge.

"Special Olympics Ontario is an incredible platform for athletes with intellectual disabilities.

"It gives them a chance to belong, to excel among their peers, and strive to achieve their best without being ridiculed, without feeling like they don't belong. These athletes are very special; they have enough of a hard time dealing with life. And yet they continue to be happy and optimistic, encouraging and supporting each other.

"This organization and the great people who support it have given my daughter the confidence and the opportunity to accomplish so much. I am very grateful and humbled."

In conclusion Jennifer added, "It truly takes a village to raise children and Special Olympics Ontario and its supporters are for us a very important component of our village in raising Sara. Thank you!"


Your generosity gives our athletes an opportunity to shine, build their self-confidence and grow stronger each day. **Wont you please help again?** The amount of the gift you wish to donate is up to you. All I ask is that you make a donation to encourage more kids like Sara to fulfill their dreams.

With your help, we can continue to build a better village of support for other real champions like Sara.

Sincerely,

Glenn MacDonell
President & C.E.O.

P.S. Athletes like Sara are proof that an intellectual disability need not be a handicap. Each one of them is a true athlete with remarkable inner strength and courage, to overcome hardships with passion and pride and with guts and glory. All they need is **your and our continued support.**



A beaming Sara after winning a Gold Medal for Long Jump

Social media—dispelling some myths

Every other day we hear about isolated huge successes by an organization in capturing hundreds of followers. Like **Soi Dog Foundation** did last year when they generated \$100,000 monthly gifts from **Facebook** users.

Soi Dog Foundation is a charity in Thailand that helps neglected and abused homeless, dogs and cats.

What was most remarkable about them is that they established a loyal following not by creating groups of followers on **Facebook** but by creating a single page where groups could participate by allowing individuals to “mass message” to their own friends.

This single page allows you to look back at its progress as well as go back to its historical roots.

You can check them out by going to:

www.facebook.com/SoiDogPageInEnglish

More recently the online campaign to bring Uganda’s Kony to justice—**KONY MAKE HIM VISABLE 2012**—has been a huge success with a following in the millions.

One of the many newsletters I subscribe to is by Australian fundraiser **Jonathon Grapsas**. In his April newsletter he wrote about dispelling the myth of social media.

He said: *One of the most frustrating things about the digital world is that it is full of illusion, and quite a lot of BS.*

Here are some of my favourites:

- *Social media is the next big thing and will transform charities fundraising programs*
- *Digital is completely different to the offline world, and as such different teams should be working on each program*
- *Email and landing page copy must be short*

Wrong, wrong and wrong.

The problem is these myths permeate all over and are considered truisms by most. The reality is that

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good practice direct marketing crosses channels. Sure, there are some nuances, but there are more similarities than differences.

I would like to add that there's a huge clamor to get into about social media, but it's a very fleeting noise. There are many organizations that start up a page or group on social media but then fizzle out.

The reason is that as in all methods you need talent, know-how and persistence in order to be successful.

OPT IN, OPT OUT, OPTIONS:

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To participate, send me an email with your suggestions.

To post a comment, please include your name, email address and your thoughts.

Let me remind you again that your name and/or e-mail address will never be shared, sold, circulated, or passed along to anyone else.

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