



Private donations – Gothenburg City Mission

Gothenburg City Mission working against social exclusion with private donations

Summary

Gothenburg City Mission (Göteborgs kyrkliga stadsmission), a non-profit organisation offering social welfare services and providing help for marginalised people in need, runs three centres to counter problems associated with social exclusion, homelessness and poverty. The organisation raises the biggest proportion of the funds to cover their costs through solicited private donations. While this type of fundraising allows the City Mission to work independently, it is time and personnel intensive and requires to try out new approaches, the outcome of which can be unsure.

When Gothenburg City Mission was founded in the 1950s, a priest would collect money for its activities in the church and through the newspaper. Nowadays, the organisation still receives grants and money collected in offerings by the church, but also generates a high proportion of its funds from private donations: of the roughly 50 million SEK (around 5.3 million euros) the organisation raises annually, 40% are donated by private persons, including donations from last wills and from living persons. Donors and donation appeal letters are managed in a database. Each year, a schedule is defined with important activities, defining when letters will be sent out, how they will be framed and when and by whom to send thank you letters. The eight letters sent out annually are targeted at different groups, depending on the donor profile managed in the database.

Ensuring stories have a happy ending

While sometimes the organisation asks donors to support it as such, it is easier to convince people to give when the appeal is connected to a specific activity, reveals Ms. Oesterreich, head of fundraising and communications at Gothenburg City Mission. So usually, donation appeals refer to specific aspects of the organisation's work in one of its three centres the donations help to fund. One of these is a shelter for homeless people. Here, those for whom there are no adequate public services available can stay overnight or drop in during the day to receive food and clothing, have the possibility to shower or wash their clothes, meet others and participate in activities, as well as to receive personal counselling. At St. John's church, also supported by donations, the City Mission maintains a café and meeting place to counter social exclusion. It serves as a community for people who have had drug-related problems, people who just feel a bit different, people who want to belong somewhere and have other support needs, providing the possibility to make friends, worship, run self-help and artistic activities and have a place to turn to. Furthermore, donations help the organisation to offer counselling for youths at a centre as well as in the street, and to financially support young and old people in economically precarious situations.

Based on personal experiences in these fields of work, the appeal letters often contain a narrative of what it feels like to be living in poverty, have needs or experience loneliness. It is important, emphasises Ms. Oesterreich, to tell a story. This may be a description of how a specific person came to be in a desperate situation, to then ask donors help the organisation ensure that the story has a happy ending - by supporting its work financially.

For example in December, the organisation writes about people who had to spend Christmas alone several times in the past, in combination with a pledge for support to a place these can turn to, avoiding another lonely Christmas for them.

The City Mission's donation appeals are always scheduled to match the time of the year. In summer, the organisation asks donors to contribute to running its summer camp, while during the Christmas season, it

Page 1 of 2



Views

expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the European Commission.

Eurodiaconia is supported under the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (2007-2013).



offers to give a donation as a gift to someone else with the presentee receiving a letter explaining that their gift is someone in need having a bed to sleep in for a certain amount of time. Since Christmas is also the time of the year people tend to be most generous, the organisation runs a donor recruitment campaign every year in this season. Next to asking retained donors to increase the amount they donate, the organisation approaches possible new donors whom it buys addresses of from a private company. This is a time and resource intensive work, since newly acquired donors have to be worked into the database and their donation behaviour needs to be analysed and profiled. "But once this is done, the database is an extremely helpful tool that does much of the work for you", Ms. Oesterreich points out.

Ensuring independent social work through a large donor base

Raising its own funds for running the centres, more than under other funding arrangements, allows the organisation to maintain the liberty to conduct its work as its statutes require and as the organisation believes is most appropriate. Ms. Oesterreich explains that Gothenburg City Mission focuses on this kind of fundraising because it wants to be independent of the public authorities, so as to be able to help those people whose needs fall outside of the public social system and safety nets, for which there are hardly any public funds. The biggest challenge is to cover the organisation's ever increasing need for funds. "In Sweden, especially outside Stockholm where more wealthy people reside," she adds, "it is not so common and maybe not even socially accepted to donate large amounts of money". The strategy it follows is thus to have a large donor base with smaller amounts of money, which translates into a necessity to recruit new donors regularly.

The organisation does not engage in face-to-face fundraising or knock on doors, since people nowadays do not carry much cash on them and therefore the return rates of such efforts are comparatively low. The average age of private donors of around 67 years is one of the reasons the City Mission still appeals for donations through personal paper letters, to retain the important older donor group's loyalty. In the future, to encourage more younger people to donate, it might put a larger focus on other communication channels. Fundraising requires creativity and trying out new things, which bear the risk of not working out. "You never know how high returns from a specific effort will be, therefore it is important to evaluate activities against budget targets and in terms of efficiency", Ms Oesterreich asserts.

For organisations soliciting donations she recommends to have staff well trained in communications and fundraising, and to exchange experiences and discuss new approaches with other organisations, to keep up to date with current trends. It is crucial to deploy a donor-centred approach by not asking directly for money but, rather, frame donations as an opportunity for people to become part of doing something good - and to say thank you. Maintaining a well organised donor data base is indispensable. In Ms Oesterreich's words, "it is the heart of fundraising".

Further information:

Gothenburg City Mission (in Swedish): <http://stadsmissionen.org/>

Contact:

Ms. Elisabeth Oesterreich
Head of Fundraising & Communications
Evangelisches Werk für Diakonie und Entwicklung
Tel: + 46-31-7553615
elisabeth.oesterreich@stadsmissionen.org