

Sharing Creative Talents With Charitable Causes

Monetary donations are the most popular charitable gifts, but there are other ways people help their favorite cause.

Many artists, writers, musicians, and craftspeople contribute their talents to charity. Whether it is by teaching others how to hone their skills or by raising funds through the sale of their work, they are sharing their skills with others.

Touching Lives on a Deeper Level

Kolby Harrell, assistant director of admissions for South University's Accelerated Graduate Programs, gives his time to Deep, a Savannah, Ga., program that helps public school students learn about creative writing.

Harrell teaches creative writing workshops to middle school students. He got involved with Deep after covering the nonprofit for an article he was writing as a freelance writer.

"I said, 'this is something they need in this community, and I am willing and able to get involved,'" Harrell says.

Deep was founded in 2008 to address the problem of illiteracy in Savannah. Many students enter the program with below-average literacy levels.

Deep's mission is to help youth, ages 8 to 18, improve their writing skills. The program also seeks to help teachers get their students excited about writing and encourage children's voices as students, citizens, and artists.

At the end of each semester, Deep publishes the students' best work in an anthology and there is an open mic and book release event that gives students an opportunity to read their stories in front of an audience.

Harrell says he is not only involved in Deep to help improve test scores. He is inspired by the confidence that students build and the therapeutic benefits they receive from it.

"What Deep is able to do is build these workshops that help student writers' confidence and encourage them and let them know what they have to say matters," Harrell says. "We engage them with good art, music, literature, poetry, and pictures. Even without the workshop and training, they are brilliant and we tell them 'you are incredible and here is why.'"

The cathartic nature of writing gives students a chance to express things they might have otherwise found difficult to.

"I get a lot of students who write about tough things like fathers leaving, loved ones dying, and struggling with identity at that weird middle-school age," Harrell says. "If we don't offer this place for self expression, I am not sure where those thoughts go."

Whatever your craft is, keep doing it. There is a kid somewhere who wants to do it and you can lead by example.

Harrell says he did not think a freelance article would lead to his work at Deep.

"I thought in being a journalist, I would help spread the word about this program and help attract donors or something," he says. "But now I realize that it is more rewarding to be on the front lines and get some skin in the game. Now that I have become involved I cannot see myself doing anything else."

The Art of Compassion

It was while she was a college junior in 2007 that Bethel Tsegaye discovered a cause she could be passionate about.

"I went to Ethiopia and volunteered at the Artists for Charity Children's Home. I returned home to Washington, D.C., but wanted to stay involved with the charity somehow," says Tsegaye, who is now the communications manager for Artists for Charity (AFC). "I was deeply connected to the children and the cause."

AFC is a nonprofit organization dedicated to raising awareness and securing funds for humanitarian causes. It is comprised of artists and individuals from all over the world who volunteer their time and artwork. AFC's Children's Home, located in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, provides care for children who have lost both parents to HIV/AIDS.

"I am part of something truly grassroots and amazing and you are always motivated to work harder and be reminded of how special the work is you are doing when you remember who its for — the kids," Tsegaye says. "You are also part of a network of dedicated activists who work towards the better of good."

Artist volunteers, inspired by the work AFC does, will often create pieces specifically for the AFC annual holiday benefit.

"As a writer, AFC has definitely made a difference on my outlook on life, which has driven me to be more conscious and write about social issues that matter," Tsegaye says. "More importantly, it has affected me as a human being. I am more involved in HIV and AIDS conversations more than ever, as well as other pressing social issues."

There are many resources for creative people seeking a cause to get involved with. Charity Navigator and VolunteerMatch are two of the many websites that allow individuals to search for causes that match their interests.

"Giving your talents and helping people in need, especially children can be the most rewarding thing ever, but more importantly finding the right charity is key," Tsegaye says. "Find one that you are connected with and one that opens their arms to you."

"You have to enjoy the process," she adds. "That is where the gratification comes from."