

## Charity Traps

By Jimi & Cristi Cook

We are writing this on a flight to Guatemala to build a special needs playground for disabled students in Chichicastenango with gratefulness filling our hearts for all of the people that make this work possible. Without charitable donors, volunteers, and supporters, we would never be able to undertake these humanitarian aid missions that positively impact the lives of so many people around the world. This recurring realization always incites feelings of great joy and gratitude for the many, many individuals who sacrificially give – money, time, hard work, and emotions – to ensure our charitable missions succeed. But, it also incites the feeling of profound responsibility. We are responsible, in fact we are accountable, to make sure that all of these gifts are used for the intended purpose of the giver and that we make every effort to ensure that they “matter” for the recipients. It is something that we take with the deepest sincerity and gravity.

With ever-increasing frequency, we are hearing reports of thousands of people being duped, misled, taken advantage of, or flat-out robbed by charitable organizations. There are so many causes and tragedies that pull at our heart-strings and truly need our help, and need it quickly, that we can easily just open up our checkbooks and ask questions later. The problem is that later is *too late*, and then not only have you given to something that is not what you intended, but the true needs are not met at all. These “charity traps” are often tough to avoid, but it is essential that we do not get caught in them. Otherwise, we will become snared in the compelling traps of charitable burnout<sup>1</sup>, toxic charity<sup>2</sup>, or charity backlash<sup>3,4</sup> that undermine the real work that truly needs to be done.

So, our advice includes:

- Be a responsible giver and not a reaction giver – don’t write the check or call in the second you see the graphic images on the television or website or slideshow for the first time, but get more information, do your homework, discuss it with trusted friends and advisors, and make an informed decision using facts to guide your emotions
- Do your homework – check out the organizations you support including the nitty-gritty financial data. Some great resources for this include Charity Navigator <http://www.charitynavigator.org/> GuideStar <http://www.guidestar.org/rxg/products/verification-solutions/guidestar-charity-check.aspx> and Great Nonprofits <http://greatnonprofits.org/reviews/find>
- Follow up – make sure you find out where your contributions really went, what impact they had, and how that impact will be sustainable

Then, please continue to give, volunteer, and impact others – the world does need your help!

<sup>1</sup> <http://halogentv.com/articles/avoid-charitable-burnout-10-tips-for-giving-without-the-guilt/>

<sup>2</sup> Robert D. Lupton. *Toxic Charity: How the Church Hurts Those They Help and How to Reverse It*. Harper Collins, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/3aa75f8e-ab64-11e2-ac71-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2X2zGQGJO>

<sup>4</sup> <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/money/perfi/columnist/block/story/2012-01-02/researching-charity-donations/52340776/1>