What teaching charity gives children: skills for life

November is National Philanthropy month, but Charity for Change gives children a better future every day

By Richard Schwartz, board chairman Charity for Change

Let’s face it, we have a generation growing up to believe that community is the number of followers you have on Instagram, support means clicking a heart and connecting means texting, sometimes while in the same room.

November, which is National Philanthropy month, is when we consider the extraordinary change that fundraising and philanthropy have in our world, and for Charity for Change, that change is fundamental to our program.

With an emphasis on student achievement, character development and community engagement, Charity for Change’s program was designed to instill the spirit of giving in children through charity interaction presented in a fun, interactive and relevant learning environment.

Through philanthropy, children can develop empathy, organizational skills, collaboration and leadership. Children become witnesses to the differences they make when we provide them a platform to cultivate change.

The Charity for Change program educates the mind and heart by engaging elementary school children in academic activities to improve character and charitable habits, while improving math and literacy skills. Each classroom learns about three charities in five sessions throughout the year and sets a fundraising goal. To meet that goal, children bring in change from home to donate and host mini fundraisers. They can “earn” additional dollars for their charities (donated by community partners) with successful answers to interactive math games each week.

Charity representatives visit the classrooms and teach about the services they provide, helping students connect how their donations help others. Children participating, regardless of socioeconomic background, can develop awareness that they have the capacity to give and help others and be contributing members of their community.

The program works. Since 2008, more than 62,000 children who have participated have raised $132,000 for 100 area charities that they have researched and selected. This year, the Charity for Change program serves children in 100 sites across Collier County, Palm Beach County, Maryland and Missouri. In Collier County, approximately 4,000 students are served.

In addition, children learn about how their decisions impact the world around them. They learn important skills necessary to become well-rounded individuals: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. These components provide a foundation for higher academic achievement and increased pro-social behaviors, reinforcing students’ ability to succeed in school, careers and life.
Teaching character and giving has been proven over decades of research to replace negative behavior and reduce bullying and violence. Charity for Change establishes a reinforcing system of positive influences that build compassion and understanding.

The effects of this program include increased self-efficacy, empathy, self-esteem, and sense of responsibility while decreasing negative behaviors such as academic failure, bullying, truancy, bad behavior and dropping out of school.

The Corporation for National and Community Service, a federal agency that promotes acts of citizenship and responsibility, found that people who regularly lend a hand tend to be healthier and that these wellness benefits increase if they start charitable work earlier in their life.

When we teach children to give, we give them the tools they need to succeed, and that helps everyone. Isn’t that what’s philanthropy is about?

About the Author

Richard Schwartz is chair of Vistage Florida and chairman of the Charity for Change board of directors. Working with Charity for Change President and CEO Karen Conley, the board helps to raise funds and grow the reach of Charity for Change’s educational programming.