

How to avoid charity scams when volunteering, donating this Mandela Month

During Mandela Month, South Africans are called on to donate their time and money towards good causes. However, a key concern is whether these donations are meeting real needs and going towards legitimate organisations.



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“The first question to ask yourself when selecting a cause is whether it is servicing a real need. Instead of volunteering for an activity that will look good on your Instagram handle or give you an ego boost, ask whether the results of the volunteering will actually end up helping people, animals or the environment in any real and meaningful way,” says Romy Heldsinger, CEO at volunteering platform Forgood.co.za.

Another common issue when it comes to giving back is charity fraud. Cybercrime is on the rise and occasions like Mandela Month, which call for monetary donations via the internet, are being leveraged by scammers who have spotted an opportunity to capitalise on donors’ goodwill. This can take the form of fake websites, convincing emails, and crowdfunding platforms. In some cases, these non-profits might be fully registered, but devote little of the money they raise to the programmes they promote, or people they purport to be assisting.



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Impact of charity fraud

“The impact of charity fraud is twofold – on the one hand, donors and volunteers are cheated of their time and money and are less likely to risk it again in the future. On the other, non-profit organisations and social initiatives lose out on money and skills they desperately need in order to continue functioning which can have devastating long-term effects,” says

Heldsinger.

Forgood allows individuals to find hundreds of skills-based volunteering and donation opportunities online. Causes registered on the site are verified by the organisation and guaranteed to be legitimate, trustworthy, and dedicated to making a real impact. The platform also employs strict quality control measures where users can rate causes based on their experience. If a cause's rating is consistently low, it is removed from the platform.



Vetting an NPO

"After years of experience, we've developed extensive criteria for vetting an organisation before it can be added to our database. All our causes need to provide proof that they are older than one year, such as a non-profit certificate, their latest tax compliance certificate from SARS, and a public benefit organisation certificate. We also request their logo, contact details and list of skills and resources that they need," says Heldsinger.

She shares her tips on how to verify volunteering or donation opportunities and websites:

- Check the credentials of the organisation. Before making a donation or signing up to volunteer, ask to see the not-for-profit certificate, public benefit organisation certificate, and evidence of SA Revenue Service clearance.
- Keep track of their activity on social media. Non-profits that are actively making a difference will usually share their activities via their social media channels. This is a good way to see how they are using donations and ensure they are still active.
- Check if the site you're considering donating money through is secure. To ensure your data and credit card info are safe, look out for URLs that begin with "https" instead of "http". Additionally, make sure to use trusted payment gateways, such as PayFast, when making donations.

- Double check the organisation name and URL. Scam websites and email addresses may mimic an established, well-known charity – but if you look closely, you'll spot that the name is slightly wrong.

“The generosity of South Africans has supported many amazing organisations and initiatives, from feeding underprivileged children or providing clean water for those affected by floods, to keeping rescued animals in shelters. By remaining vigilant, we can ensure that our donations go to the right causes and continue making a positive impact on the world around us,” says Heldsinger.

For a range of verified causes in need of your assistance during Mandela Month, go to www.forgood.co.za.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>