

## **Making a difference**

**By Ruth Ostrow**

**THE flyer in the mail was heartbreaking stuff. It was the story of a sweet little girl, Helen, who'd been diagnosed with leukemia. "One afternoon she started limping and we didn't know why," wrote her father. "It gradually got worse until one day I was in the backyard and heard this terrible screaming."**

By the time I'd finished reading about this family's ordeal, I was in tears. But given that I'd already made my annual contribution to the Children's Cancer Institute of Australia, I was about to throw their letter into the bin when I noticed something disturbing.

Inside the flyer was an envelope addressed to the charity with a 50c stamp on it. Let's say the institute mailed out 5000 for argument's sake ... that's \$2500! I suddenly went into shock. Is that where my contributions are going?

I thought I was giving money to save little Helen, not for a stamp to be put on an expensive envelope (embossed, yellow, high-quality paper) that gets tossed in the rubbish bin.

When I rang to complain, I was told that the mail-out with the stamped envelope was sent to only a few thousand "exclusive" donors, which you'd hardly call us motley journalists. That still doesn't excuse thousands of dollars of wasted money; nor the sheer number of unnecessary mail-outs this charity sends me each year, given that I'm already a committed contributor. I've asked them to stop three times, to no avail. This is the same crew that got into trouble with Consumer Affairs Victoria last year over Cherie Blair's tour.

Nor am I happy with Greenpeace, to which I donate regularly. Until I rang and complained, glossy flyers and newsletters were coming in the mail. "I give money to you guys to save the Amazon trees, not kill them! Why aren't you sending me electronic mail?" "We will, now that you've requested no further printed matter," said the rep. "But why is the onus on me to ring and make you ecologically aware? And what of the millions of other members who simply toss the material in the bin?"

There's something inherently wrong with the way many charities are run, which is why honest people who want to give money often don't.

It's an issue in urgent need of addressing. Guys, we know you try hard, but please make it easy for us to give. Stop behaving like unthinking dumbos – for little Helen's sake.

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