

Ways for college students to help with tsunami relief

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Staff Writer

"Kids missing, sharks washed ashore and people worrying about their Christian Dior shirts," said Vikram Chatwal, a New Yorker vacationing in Thailand, to *Newsweek* on Jan. 10. "It was just so random."

The Dec. 26 tsunami stunned the world. With an estimated death toll of 226,566 (MSNBC), stories of destruction continue to sweep through our media.

The question on many American minds is what can we do from millions of miles away?

"There are always fundraisers that can be organized to go to relief efforts," said sophomore Adam Waxman. "We're at a stage now where we've moved beyond the immediate crisis. There's been a large amount of humanitarian effort that's been given committing to providing for the basic needs of people during the immediate aftermath."

As of right now, donations are the best way to help out tsunami relief. Several corporations and individuals have already raised nearly two billion dollars; by Jan. 3, Amazon.com collected millions of dollars for the American Red Cross through donations. Lowe's, a home improvement store, guarantees to match all donations up to \$100,000 for Habitat for Humanity. Even Wal-Mart joined the donation trend by setting up collection bins throughout the stores.

"There's been enormous response and (the tsunami relief is) not lacking in that," said

Coordinator of Campus Ministry Max Carter. "Folk can continue to feel good about sending money to legitimate relief organizations, like Red Cross and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and know that the means are in place to which that money can be translated to real aid on the ground."

To ensure the safest, legitimate donations, check the relief agency's website. They should post exactly where the money goes in their section about donations, so before making a contribution, look for the statistics.

"Some organizations have popped up that are absolutely illegitimate. They just have the names tsunami or Southeast Asia in there, and are absolutely bogus," said Carter.

These organizations have been found to send only 20 percent of the funds to the site and the administration ends up pocketing the remaining 80 percent. However, main organizations like AFSC are honest and usually give 20 percent to the administration. All this information is attainable either through a phone call to the administration, or a posting on the website in the donations section.

The American Red Cross pledges to use each dollar to the most effective cause, whether it's for food and clean



WWW.REDCROSS.ORG

Red Cross aid workers helping tsunami victims

water, medicine or building houses. Even the smallest donation counts: \$2 will buy a mattress, \$5 a mosquito net, and \$15 will buy a kitchen set for a family of five, according to www.redcross.org.

Tsunami relief has gotten a huge response already, but people must not forget that there are other places that need our help.

"There's a concern that a lot of funds will go toward victims of the tsunami and earthquake because that's sexy," said Carter. "Somehow volcanoes and earthquakes get our attention. But, pictures of starving Ethiopians or Sudanese for some reason don't do the same thing to us."

HIV/AIDS, famine and ongoing violence are still a major problem throughout the world, and using all the charity funds in Southeast Asia will cut off the efforts in Africa. Carter suggests when making a donation, donate money to organizations that are at work around the world and say: "give money to where it's needed the most."

"I know the AFSC is working as hard in Africa, Iraq and South America as it is in Southeast Asia," said Carter.

Assistant Professor of Religious Studies Eric Mortensen feels that since most students don't have a lot of money, they shouldn't be expected to give donations.

"I think the best way to get involved as a student is to try to keep the issue up, keep thinking about it and comparing it to other issues," he said. By comparing it to other worldly issues, people will not only figure out ways to help those in Southeast Asia, but also relate that knowledge to other global problems like disease and famine.

Donations are a good, tangible way to get involved, but as Mortensen said, they are not the only options open for college students.

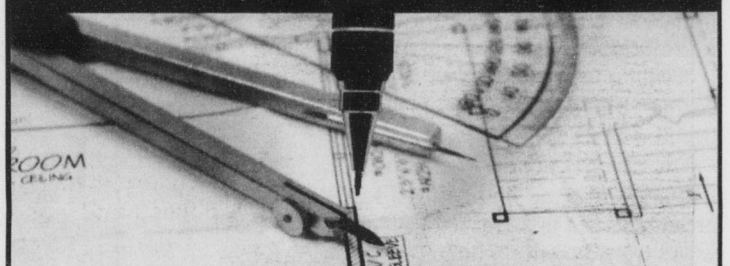
"I think where we can be really helpful is working with Oxfam or other international agencies and aid organizations that have suggestions about long term development

(in Southeast Asia) and applying pressure to our elected officials to see those policies implemented," said Waxman. "It's easy to sit down and write a letter to your congressman."

Mortensen suggests maybe trying to contact a Sri Lankan or Indian community here in Greensboro and look for something like a school that was destroyed by the tsunami. Organize a group of students and find out what that school needs and come up with some sort of fundraiser to get things like textbooks.

"I still think that from a bigger level, on a college campus one of the best things you can do is the philosophical stuff," said Mortensen. "One of the biggest things we're going to face with this tsunami thing is the fact that it's gonna fade from media attention. A month from now, no one will be talking about it, but the situation for the people won't be any better." ❧

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