

CHARITIES RETAIN CANADIANS' TRUST

Charities better than government at meeting needs: Poll report

EDMONTON, October 19, 2006: Charities continue to have an overwhelming level of trust among Canadians, despite concerns that they are not doing a good job of communications, according to a public-opinion poll released today by the Edmonton-based The Muttart Foundation.

Almost 80% of Canadians say they trust charities some or a lot, according to the poll carried out for the Foundation by Ipsos Reid. More than three-quarters of the nearly 3,900 respondents said that charities are better than government at understanding the needs of Canadians, while seven in 10 say charities do a better job than government at meeting the needs of the average Canadian.

At the same time, respondents are not as complimentary about the performance of charities in making information available on issues Canadians think are important. Half or fewer think charities do a good job in providing information about programs and services, the use of donations, fundraising costs and the impact of the work done by charities.

“Many charities say that much of this information is already available,” said Bob Wyatt, executive director of The Muttart Foundation. “But clearly, Canadians don’t think it is. It’s critical that we respond to these concerns. The charitable sector must find more effective ways to deliver their message to its key stakeholders – the public it serves, donors and government.”

From the perspective of the recent federal cutbacks impacting the voluntary sector, Wyatt said that communications about the role of the sector in Canada were clearly lacking.

“Communication is a two-way street. That was recognized when the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector signed an accord in 2001 that committed to open dialogue. The results of the recent expenditure review exercise were accomplished without any discussion with charities and, in fact, some avenues of dialogue were among the areas cut,” Wyatt added.

“Talking About Charities 2006” reports on the results of 20-minute interviews carried out between May and July with 3,864 Canadians. This size of study provides a margin of error of plus or minus 2.2%, 19 times out of 20. It is the third in a series of polls carried out by The Muttart Foundation to inform charities and policymakers about the views of Canadians on charities and issues affecting charities.

The results of the 2006 study confirm the earlier studies that show strong support of Canadians for charities that serve communities throughout the nation. In addition to trust for charities themselves, the leaders of charities enjoy high levels of trust, according to the study. Charity leaders are trusted a lot or some by more than three-quarters of Canadians, trailing behind only nurses (96%) and doctors (93%). The next highest level of trust was for business leaders at 70%. Federal and provincial politicians, while improving their standing from previous studies, are still trusted by only 33% and 38% of Canadians respectively.

A lack of communications figures in another finding, Wyatt said. According to the study, more than half of Canadians believe that charities should be expected to deliver programs when government stops funding. Commenting on this finding, Wyatt said: “Clearly the sector must do a much better job of explaining the costs of delivering services to Canadians. If government decides to stop funding to a program, it would be highly unlikely that private donors, foundations and corporations could or would pick up that financial gap. This message does not seem to be getting through, and that’s troublesome.”

Other findings from the 2006 study include:

- 93% of Canadians believe that charities are important to Canadians
- 60% of respondents do not know there is any regulation of charities in Canada, and even among those who believe there is a regulator, few know who it is
- 62% of respondents believe it is unacceptable for charities to employ fundraisers or firms whose compensation is based on commissions from donations
- 88% of respondents say that charities improve our quality of life.

Copies of the full “Talking About Charities 2006 report” including provincial and demographic breakdowns are available on The Muttart Foundation’s website – www.muttart.org.

The Muttart Foundation was founded in 1953 by Gladys and Merrill Muttart. It provides grants to Canadian charities and carries out research activities about, and of interest to, the charitable sector.

- 30 -

Bob Wyatt will be available for interviews on or after October 19. He will be in Toronto, but can be reached on his cell at (780) 913-8881.