

Does CFC-Focused Promotion Pay over Time?

What the Make-A-Wish Foundation's Data Shows

One important way to see the impact of CFC-focused promotion is to look at what happens over time when a charity stops its Combined Federal Campaign advertising.

One good example is the Make-A-Wish Foundation, which stopped all CFC promotion six years ago. It was part of Charitable Choices for many years, with a listing and a large display ad in our CFC Charity Guides and our Military Insert.

Since Make-A-Wish stopped its CFC promotion, its rank among national and international CFC charities has gone down significantly, from #32 in 2017 (when it raised more than \$242,000) to #74 in 2023 (when it raised just \$99,195 in CFC donations). **Had it stayed at #32 in 2023, it would have raised about \$85,000 more.** *(In 2023, the #32 charity, The Trevor Project, raised more than \$184,000).*

In contrast, during the years Make-A-Wish promoted its work in our guides and other CFC promotion options, its rank stayed steady. From 2009 to 2016, its rank went from #17 to #21, varying slightly from year to year.

A CFC charity's rank over time compared to other charities is the key. Almost every charity raised a lot less in 2023 than it did in 2017. But a big decrease in a charity's rank shows that it did much worse than the average CFC charity.

By looking at a CFC charity's rank over time, you can see the Return on Investment (ROI) that CFC-focused promotion can have.

Most large CFC charities stay fairly consistent in their rank over time, even though their CFC donations may be going down. Most charities' ranks do change year to year, often because of events like the pandemic (big increases for Food Banks), the war in Ukraine, and natural disasters.

These year-to-year changes are why it's so useful to look at a charity's rank over time. For Make-A-Wish, a decline from #32 to #74 in six years is very unusual.

For a charity like Make-A-Wish, it's especially important to compare how it did over three-year periods, such as 2017-2020 and 2020-2023. This is because the broad order of CFC charities changes over a three-year cycle.

There are three broad categories: Local Charities, National Charities and International Charities. In 2023, Locals were first, Nationals second and Internationals third. In 2017 and 2020, this order was the same. This is why comparing Make-A-Wish's data from 2017, 2020 and 2023 is so useful. In essence, you are comparing apples with apples.

When Locals are first, many Nationals that compete with Locals for CFC donations don't do well. This is the case for Make-A-Wish, which competes with many local and regional Make-A-Wish charities. This is also the case for national animal charities, since there are so many local animal protection charities.

Why is this order so important in the modern CFC? It's because most donations (82% in 2023) are made through the CFC giving website. To find a charity, donors use the site's search engine. The search engine's results reflect that year's order of charities.

When Locals are first (as in 2017, 2020 and 2023) and donors search on "Make A Wish," all the local Make-A-Wish charities come up first. Similarly, many national animal protection charities (Humane Society of the U.S., for example) are buried on page 2 or 3 of search results, after all the local animal charities.

For Make-A-Wish, when you focus on 2020, you also see its steady decline in rank since it stopped CFC promotion. In 2020, it ranked #51, vs. #32 in 2017. In 2020, if it had stayed at #32, it would have raised about \$63,000 more.

We think this data suggests that, even when a charity is raising less in the CFC over time, CFC-focused promotion can make a very big difference in its CFC donations.