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LIFESTYLE LIFE &amp; RELATIONSHIPS CHARITY

## OPINION

# *Do something meaningful with your unwanted Christmas gifts*

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If this Christmas is anything like last year, it's likely you've just been visited by The Ghost of Christmas Landfill.

According to a study commissioned by ING, about [10 million unwanted gifts](#), costing an eye-watering \$400 million, may be about to be unceremoniously dumped into the nation's rubbish bins.



There is a right way and there is a wrong way to donate your unwanted gifts. STOCKSY

If the thought of contributing to that mountain of landfill makes you sick, you might want to think about donating your family's unwanted gifts to help another family in need.

CEO of St Kilda Mums Jessica Macpherson says that donating unwanted Christmas gifts can be a win-win situation.

"You don't have to feel the guilt or ungrateful and you've actually done something that's really helpful," says Macpherson.

But here's the catch: there is a right way and there is a wrong way to donate your unwanted gifts. And if you do it the wrong way, your donations are likely to end up in landfill anyway and you may cost the charities you are trying to help both time and money.

If you want your donations to help rather than hinder, here are a few simple rules to follow.

## 1. Quality

Op shops and charities don't want your junk. The rule of thumb is: if you wouldn't give it to a friend, then don't give it to an op shop or charity.

Former op shop co-ordinator Jules Downton says only about 20 per cent of donations are actually able to be resold.

"Op shops have changed, people come in to buy quality not junk. When you can go to Target and Big W and spend a few dollars on something crappy, why would people go into an op shop to buy it?" says Downton.

Downton says people will bring in poor quality goods due to a mix of misguided good-heartedness and a desire to off-load their junk at the charity's expense, rather than their own.

"When I tell people to take their junk to a recycling centre, they'll say, 'but that costs money', and I'll say, 'exactly'."

St Kilda Mum's Jessica Macpherson says the burden and the cost of disposing items that can't be rehomed should be on the person who owns them, not the charity.

"It's not really fair to make it our problem," she says.

## 2. Different charities and op shops want different things

If you want your unwanted presents to reach families in need, then you need to donate the right items to the right places.

For example, books and toys which are new and in good condition are very welcome by St Kilda Mums and its [sister organisations](#) in other cities and states, but many op shops find plastic toys hard to sell.

"We can sell wooden toys," says Downton. "But often the plastic toys in op shops are only there for the kids to play while their parent shops."

St Kilda Mums will also accept unopened toiletries and even certain incomplete items such as half a breast pump, or a few spare spindles for a safety gate or rain cover for a pram.

“We do ask people to check with us first,” says MacPherson. “Sometimes we can, sometimes we can't and we will do everything we can to reuse something if it's fit for purpose”.

### 3. No dumping

Op shop closed when you come by? Whatever you do, resist the temptation to dump your donations at the door on the assumption someone will be along to pick them up.

Dumping goods outside op shops and charity bins is a huge problem for charities. It's also illegal.

“In previous years, we have suffered a lot from dumping over the Christmas period,” says Macpherson. “To come back from our Christmas holiday to a huge pile of contaminated donations is horrendous for us and just compounds the waste.

“Don't tell yourself you're saving the planet by dumping stuff outside op shops or charities. You're not. Anything that's left outside will have to be immediately put in the rubbish.”

### 4. Wait until February

Op shops and charities rely on volunteer labour. That means they are often closed or understaffed during the Christmas holiday period.

This is also the time of year that they are frequently inundated with donations.

“What often happens over summertime is not only do we have all the unwanted gifts, a lot of people take on home improvement projects where they empty their attics and garages,” says Macpherson. “We really felt the effects of the Marie Kondo movement last summer.”

Holding onto your donations until February when the charities return to their regular operating hours will really help them – and maximise the chance of your presents actually reaching people who need them.

“When the kids go back to school, we've got volunteers who act as drop-off points right across the city,” says Macpherson. “Hang onto those unwanted gifts until February then shoot us an email and we'll introduce you to a volunteer that lives in your neighbourhood. And not only will you be able to drop off the books and toys to her, you'll probably have a chance to make a new friend at the same time.”

If you're unsure what and when to donate to which charity then phone ahead, email them or pop into the store and ask. That few minutes could mean the difference between your unwanted gifts helping a family in need or ending up in landfill.

**Kasey Edwards is the author of the young adult series, [The Chess Raven Chronicles](#), under the pen name Violet Grace.**



**Kasey Edwards**



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