

“Charity-Sharity”

A project that grew from a love of fabric – and each other!

By Carole Splater, “Friend” of ASG

We are a group of about 14 women who share a love of fabric. Several of us are members of ASG and the rest may be considered “friends” of the organization because we love fabric and sewing, and devote a due share of our energy toward sewing projects which benefit others. We call our group “Charity-Sharity” because we distribute most of our fabric to charitable organizations and we share the rest with each other! We have been successful both in uncovering good fabric that the owners no longer want or can use and in distributing the same fabric to charitable organizations and individuals that are very grateful to get it.

In 2001, we started sharing fabric from our own “stashes” with each other and found that there was too much, even for us. So we began giving it away to a few charities that we knew would be able to use it in their work. The project grew rapidly and we now gather fabric all year long from those who no longer need or plan to sew what they have but are reluctant to throw it away.

Our list of charities and individuals receiving fabric has grown also, more recently because of a feature article in the LifeStyle section of the Saturday, August 7, 2004 issue of the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*. Little did we realize that the 3-page article with photos about our group and our project would result in literally vanloads of fabric – “good stuff” – being donated to us. We’ve heard the same story over and over from many women (and a few men) who “just didn’t want to throw it away” and were thrilled for us to find a good home for it!

Many of us met while working at a fabric outlet years ago, but others just “wandered in” to our group with a friend. We meet “officially” three times a year: in January and June to sort and distribute the fabric we have accumulated since last time, and in December to have lunch somewhere nice and exchange little gifts, usually buttons! Because of the deluge of fabric which has buried us since the article, we have been sorting and distributing at unscheduled times. There was simply too much to save for our next luncheon event in January. After all, we are not just about working hard but about having fun, too!

Our scheduled Charity-Sharity events are on a Saturday at one member’s home. The morning is devoted to picking through the fabric, sorting it into the various categories by charity, and having lunch. A very important part of the luncheon is show ‘n’ tell time while we enjoy dessert. Everyone is free to share sewing and non-sewing projects for the enjoyment and inspiration of the group.

Everyone in the group feels that we have discovered and are filling a larger need than any of us realized existed. We are doing a huge favor for those who have fabric they no longer want or need but do not want to put it “out at the curb” and, in turn, we find others who can use it, mostly charities. As for the charities we serve, we are giving them precisely what they need for their many different projects, including tote bags for sheltered women and children, youth sewing classes, crafts for juvenile centers, sleeping bags for homeless persons, quilts and lap robes for third world countries and hurricane victims, and children’s clothing for missions.

It is our hope that American Sewing Guild chapters all over the country will also discover this need in their communities and begin distributing fabric to those who do good things with it. Many will thank you, and your members will enjoy giving fabric to those who can do good things with it. An end result is the bonding that occurs with each other that comes with a common goal. With Charity Sharity, perhaps the threads of the fabric form the ties that bind us together, but we love and respect each other for our other qualities, as well. And we all find a piece or two of fabric that is exactly right for us!

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How to get started with your group’s own Charity Sharity project:

1. Start small by finding a few charities that your members know about, such as church groups, scout groups, shelters and schools. Find out what kinds of fabric they need and the size pieces they can use.
 - a. Do they require 100% cotton for “real quilting” or will they accept blends.
 - b. Do they use very small pieces or do they need, for example, 10”x12” pieces to make stuffed bears. (We have such a group.)
2. Schedule a time and place to gather fabric from members’ stashes appropriate for the projects. Sort and distribute, letting the member best acquainted with that charity deliver the goods.
3. When you are ready to get fabric from sources outside of your group, be sure to **plan ahead** in the event your project catches on as ours did!
 - a. Determine a place to store fabric if you get a lot at once. A member’s basement or garage is ideal, if someone is willing to devote the space. Perhaps someone has a business with an extra room or a church that has an extra room you could use.
 - b. Get the commitment of the members to participate in the sorting and distributing. My home is the central clearing house for our group, but many members collect fabric from one source and get it to a receiver without it ever entering my house.
 - c. We make the rule that those wishing to donate must bring it to the home of one of the members but we make an exception and pick it up when someone simply cannot deliver it themselves.
 - d. Another rule is that those groups or individuals receiving fabric must agree to pick it up. Again, we make a few exceptions but we start by indicating that the donation must be picked up. And we **never ship!**
4. Our big break came when we sent an e-mail to the editor of the “Lifestyle” section of our local newspaper, the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*. She assigned a free-lance reporter, Kathy Sutin, to attend one of our meetings and write a story on what she observed. Kathy came with the intention of gathering a few facts and leaving, but she had so much fun observing the group that she stayed the entire time and even printed the recipes served for lunch!

If you are able to get such publicity, be prepared for an onslaught of fabric! People are so excited to have a place to give their fabric that they will overwhelm you. That is why it is important to have a place dedicated to collecting it and members who are willing to follow through with the job.

If you want to start a little smaller, write a paragraph telling that the group recycles fabric to deserving charities and individuals. Members can put the paragraph in their own church papers, school papers, work newsletters and even on the bulletin boards of fabric stores.

The fun of doing this is twofold. First, you are providing fabric for very worthwhile causes to groups that are very glad to receive it. And remember the second part of your group’s mission: to *share* with each other. Our rule is: “If you collect the fabric, you get first crack at it!” Many of us have more than we need and yet we have all found pieces for our personal use.

If you have questions about starting such a group you can e-mail me at gcgreentree@sbcglobal.net