

Controversy Surrounds Planet Aid Organization's Collection Boxes

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PITTSBURGH (KDKA) — This frigid winter's been tough on everybody here in McKeesport, but especially the destitute and the homeless.

So the winter clothes giveaway by the organization, Planet Aid, couldn't come at a better time.

"They gave me a coat earlier this winter, and now I have a hat. I've been using this hoodie, but as you can see it doesn't close. So now I have a hat," said Cindy Haney, of McKeesport.

But these giveaways are a first for Planet Aid, which has been collecting clothes in boxes scattered throughout in western Pennsylvania. Most all of the goods collected by Planet Aid are sold and the proceeds go overseas to Africa.

"We work with farmers' clubs in Africa to help them become more sustainable. We provide teaching for teachers, so they can go back into their communities," said Roger Durst, of Planet Aid.

That's something that rankles local thrift stores like Goodwill and St. Vincent DePaul.

"So, when an organization comes in and takes these resources and gives nothing back, we're concerned; and we think people should know where their resources for Planet Aid are going," said Fred Just, of the Alliance of Non-Profit Stores.

The nation watchdog group, Charity Watch, is raising concerns as well.

In a recent review of Planet Aid's financial statement, they determined that only 34 percent of the money raised actually goes to their programs. They spoke with our Los Angeles affiliate KCBS-TV.

"They are really playing some accounting tricks here because once you reallocate all their clothing collection costs back into fundraising – where it really belongs – they actually spend a very low percentage of their budget each year on their programs," Laurie Styron, of Charity Watch, said.

KDKA's Andy Sheehan: "Do you think that you're taking away from local charities like Goodwill and St. Vincent DePaul?"

Durst: "Not at all. As I said 15 percent of the clothes that are disposed of by people each year are captured. The other 85 percent end up in landfill – that's a fact."

But this year donations are down, and the Alliance of Thrift Stores says people should choose wisely.

"We guarantee that that anybody who donates to us that the resources stay here in Western Pennsylvania, either in the service of people or the running of the agencies," said Just.