

## Innovative fundraising can be perilous



When a man with the build of a boxer comes up to you, holds a potato in your face and tells you that “*We don’t do potato throwin’ here*”, you could be forgiven for being a little scared.

You also know that it’s probably time to explain your somewhat left-of-centre fundraising techniques.

Such was the tumult I experienced when hanging out with Friends of the Earth street fundraisers last Friday as they took a short play about the dangers of farming for biofuels to north London.

Titled ‘Don’t be bio-fooled!’, the play, produced and performed by Arcola Theatre, featured three male actors playing a Farmer, a Politician and a Businessman fighting over a crop of potatoes. Not just fighting over them, but throwing them.

Throwing enough of them to draw the ire of the stocky site manager at the Sheldon Square development in Paddington, who looked ready to man-handle any potato-related person in the vicinity. When the peaceful souls of Friends of the Earth and the theatre company explained that they had permission to perform on the site, he retreated. And chuckled.

At the campaign’s launch at the Innocent Festival on the previous weekend, FoE street fundraisers scored huge sign-up numbers, increasing their average daily rate from two per fundraiser to five by signing up a total of 52 donors - despite poor weather on one of the days.

Last Friday morning's efforts, however, did not bode so well. Summer had failed to grace the team with its presence and the result was a barely inhabited courtyard in the centre of a business park. After the potato throwing threats, the team, having not signed anyone up, decided to get back on the barge they had hired for the day and ride up to Camden Lock.

We rode on the barge, cold and damp. After being chased by a drunk fisherman, we finally disembarked at Camden where the actors promptly began performing.

They drew a crowd. People were interested. People listened. And people, just a few of them, signed up. One new supporter I spoke to said he had never signed up with a street fundraiser before. He had stood around to wait for the performance and, having sat through it intently, was more than willing to speak to a fundraiser who had spotted him from the wings.

Although they didn't sign quite as many new supporters as they had at the Innocent Festival - I was still impressed with their feat.

Innovation means having good days and bad days, and not being frightened of the latter. Their event motivated individual street fundraisers and attracted the curiosity of the public, making them less inclined to keep on walking when approached by a stranger with a clipboard.

I'm new to the world of charities and fundraising, but even I can see that if you can present your cause in a way that inspires both your staff and potential supporters – even on a rainy Friday afternoon – you might just be on to a winner.

Posted by [Celina Ribeiro](#) - Tuesday, August 19th, 2008