

Anne Fisher

A matchmaker for nonprofits and volunteers

WHILE RACHAEL CHONG was working as an investment banker at UBS, the firm offered staffers the chance to volunteer for a Bronx house-building project. Ms. Chong signed on—and found herself hauling lumber, while her sophisticated financial know-how went untapped. Thought she: “There has to be a better way.”

Now there is. Last April, Ms. Chong launched **Catchafire**, a Manhattan-based service that matches highly skilled New Yorkers with local nonprofits that need expertise. Volunteers, mostly midlevel professionals who work at places like American Express, browse Catchafire’s website to find **short-term projects** requiring their talents—budget development, say, or database customization.

Catchafire volunteers have given roughly 3,600 hours, worth \$600,000. Organizations pay a small fee—never more than 5% of what the services rendered would cost on the open market.

Zoe Timms thinks that’s a great bargain. She runs the Women’s Education Project, headquartered on East 25th Street, which provides college prep courses, scholarships and career advice to women in India.

“We’re ready to grow, and we needed to reach corporate sponsors and make a long-term strategic plan,” Ms. Timms said.

Catchafire matched Ms. Timms with a volunteer, an attorney who organized a brainstorming session, inviting more than a dozen movers and shakers from her professional network. Three of them joined the WEP board.

“As a result, we’ve doubled our fundraising,” said Ms. Timms.

Catchafire is now starting a service called **CEO Expert Advice**. It pairs up execs of for-profit ventures that have at least \$1 million in revenues with directors of nonprofits who want to pick their brains. Check it out online at www.catchafire.org/project_types/ceo-expert-advice_35.

It sure beats hauling lumber.

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