

A CHANCE TO WORK

Over the last few years, 'corporate social responsibility' has become a buzz phrase in modern business. The success of a company is no longer decided on the basis of a simple balance sheet. This is especially true amongst companies working outside their own national borders and for whom it is becoming increasingly important to put something back into the society in which they operate. The development of corporate conscience has led to the implementation of a range of schemes that try to make a difference. One of these schemes is 'A Chance to Work', which enjoys the support of several of AEB member companies.

Set up in Washington DC on the initiative of former World Bank President, James Wolfensohn, it is a project of the International Finance Corporation (IFC) — the private sector arm of the World Bank Group — and has been active in Moscow since 2003. A Chance to Work selects children that have grown up in the tough state orphanages, and aims to help them find their place in life. Graduates of these institutions find it hard to adapt to life in society and of the 800,000 orphans in Russia, A Chance to Work estimates that only 2% continue their education and become settled in life.

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organising 6-month internships in the project's prestigious partner organisations such as PricewaterhouseCoopers,

Wimm-Bill-Dann, Raiffeisenbank and Renaissance Insurance. During this time, the candidates are treated as regular employees and are expected to carry out the duties of any other employee. They are initially employed in positions such as couriers and secretaries, but many are promoted beyond these positions to posts such as financial analysts.

The project is based in offices donated by the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RUIE) and is coordinated by a closely knit and friendly but professional team. PR Consultant, Mekhty Alizadeh, explained that the goals of the project are three-fold: to help the children get settled in life, to help society by reducing social stigmas of orphans and to promote corporate social responsibility in Russia. It is the combination of these goals that makes A Chance to Work such a positive project. Not only does the project give the children work experience but also, through the promotion of corporate responsibility, it in turn extends this help to other aspects of society. The responsible conduct of business and the development of corporate philanthropy can help Russia grow socially and commercially by attracting investment through the nurturing of a reputation of responsible business.

The results of the program have been incredibly positive. After just two years, 90 of the 120 participants have found permanent contracts and many more are currently waiting on the results of interviews. This is a fantastic achievement for the team at A Chance to Work and reflects the determination of its participants. At the moment, 20 companies participate in the project, of which 10 are AEB members. All of the participating companies are national and international leaders in their fields, such as BP, KMB Bank, IBS Trading and ABN AMRO. Being involved in such prestigious companies not only gives the children a real sense of achievement, but is also an opportunity to experience the business environment.

The young participants apply to the project either in response to advertisements placed in orphanages, or through other organisations such as Charities Aid Foundation (CAF). The criteria for a candidate is that they must be between 18 and 30, have no criminal record and no history of mental illness. The candidates must then attend

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a two-day training course, where they learn how to present themselves in an employment environment and to how communicate with employers, how to compose a CV, interview techniques and so on. They also go through a mock interview with one of the coordinators and finally their CV's are sent to potential employers.

The relationship between A Chance to Work and its partner organisations is very close. The project managers are keen to know how each employee is getting on, whether they are satisfied with their work and if they have any questions or concerns. Mekhty explains that the companies are "Very enthusiastic and very surprised with the kids." The fact that after their internships, the majority of the kids have been employed by the same company that they did their internship in shows how positive the reaction of the partner organisations has been. Some companies such as White & Case have even become worldwide partners, supporting both the Moscow project and its sister project in Washington DC.

The project is conscious not only of providing the children with a job for 6 months, but also with building their long term prospects. Because of this, the project is run in cooperation with other charities such as Russian Orphans Opportunity Fund (ROOF), Bolshaya

Peremena (Big Change) and Women and Children First. These organisations offer evening classes which give the children the opportunity to get high school diplomas and even to apply to university.

Throughout their time in the program, the participants are provided with a strong support network. Each child is appointed a personal mentor to address their questions and concerns, and try to help and motivate them. "We have very good mentors and they have built very friendly relations with the kids" Mekhty says, "They trust them and always tell them the truth so that they can find a solution together." Within the companies, the interns also have a supervisor who is ready to answer their questions and to explain the internal rules and workings of the company. Both mentors and supervisors produce weekly reports on each participant and deliver constructive feedback to the employees.

Ekaterina Berlina is an example of the positive impact that A Chance to Work can have on its participants. Katya joined A Chance to Work in October 2005 and in December she was employed as a courier clerk at Deloitte. Deloitte is a strong partner of A Chance to Work and has been involved since the project was initiated. Katya explains that when she first arrived she was intimidated and was unsure of what she had entered

into. Since then, she has applied herself conscientiously, and in just three months impressed her supervisor, Olga Khorasanova, so much that Olga plans to increase Katya's responsibilities in June. "What I like about Katya is that she is a very positive person...she is really motivated and she is eager to take on more and more responsibilities," explains Olga. Katya isn't only making strides in her professional life; she is also keen to improve her education and is concurrently studying for a diploma in International Economics. So far she has completed the first course and hopes to work in finance or economics. Katya is a vibrant young lady and speaks very passable English. Deloitte is keen to encourage this skill, therefore, the company provides English classes twice a week in the Deloitte offices. Katya shows the difference that A Chance to Work can have on young lives and as she explains; "In my 18th year I have everything that I could want, I have a good husband, I have a good supervisor (глава!), a very good job and good studies."

At the moment, A Chance to Work is 100% financed by the IFC and enjoys their full support. Mr. Lars Thunell, Executive Vice President of the IFC and Edward Nassim, IFC Director for Central and Eastern Europe have both taken a great personal interest in the project for which the team are extremely grateful. They are however looking

for business partners to help co-finance the project. Though this is not because they lack funding. "The IFC is a big

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and rich enough organisation," Mekhty remarks. This wish comes back to the desire to promote social responsibility in Russian business. Strengthening the link between business in Russia and A Chance to Work will help to make corporate social responsibility a natural and intrinsic part of a corporations' psychology.

Mekhty hopes to build on the success of the project and to expand its horizons. He is always looking for more organisations to become involved in the scheme and welcomes questions and enquiries. Currently, the programme gives 60 children a year the chance to build a future, but Mekhty hopes to increase that number through forging links with more varied organisations. "We are very thankful to all the companies that work with us and hope to make links with other companies. It is only the beginning," he explains. There are also plans afoot to expand into other parts of Russia, namely to Yekaterinburg, St. Petersburg and Nizhny Novgorod where there are also companies that could offer placements.

The children and young adults that have been involved in the scheme are well on their way to building bright futures. However, the project's results extend further than this: A Chance to Work seeks to make a positive impact on the lives of individuals and the business community. These ambitious goals are admirable and the success of the project after just two years is a tribute to the team at A Chance to Work. The enthusiasm to integrate the participants into business also shows the desire amongst businesses to support society. The current trend for increasingly responsible business conduct indicates another bright future — for the growth of corporate social responsibility in Russia.



Deloitte is one of several AEB Member companies that supports A Chance to Work.