

British Charity Partners Switch Focus to Moscow

By Dan Shea
Staff Writer

One could be forgiven for imagining oneself at a cocktail party in Britain in an earlier part of the 20th century. Percolating throughout the stately home was the music of a live jazz band, clad in seersucker suits.

A young Kingsley Amis could have sauntered in at any moment -- and there was nary a guest to be found without a gin and tonic or Pimm's in hand.

Indeed, the evening's sponsors were Stephen Wordsworth, deputy head of mission at the British Embassy in Moscow, and his wife, Nicole, who hosted about 50 people at their residence, the former British military mission to Russia.



Vladimir Filonov / MT

Wordsworth, center, speaking at the Partners in Hope fundraiser in Moscow last Thursday, flanked by De Selliers.

Yet the particular occasion last Thursday had more to do with turning away from Britain and looking toward Russia. The Wordsworths were hosting a reception and auction for Partners in Hope, a London-based charity that concentrates on helping Russian children by funding seven projects, ranging from Love's Bridge, which aids homeless teenagers in Perm, to Dobro, a Moscow-based center for autistic children.

Founded in 1985, Partners has for 20 years relied overwhelmingly on the generosity of Britons, but Thursday was dedicated to the fund's The Big and the Small campaign, which aims to move the charity's donation base from London to Moscow.

"We can't continue to rely on Londoners to help kids in Moscow," said Guy de Selliers, chairman of the Partners board of trustees. "As people in Britain see Russia recover its strength and wealth, it becomes difficult to persuade them to give money to Russia. It's time for support to come from Russia."

De Selliers said that in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet welfare state, there was no charitable fundraising tradition or infrastructure among the Russian public or Russian companies. Charities like Partners in Hope thus had to rely on money from abroad, and in many ways The Big and the Small campaign can be viewed as a measure of how that culture is beginning to change.

As for the campaign's name, The Big and the Small campaign seeks to attract big Russian firms to help small Russian children. The effort also represents a big step for a small charity: Partners in Hope, which has raised \$2 million in its nearly 20 years of existence, hopes to raise a further \$500,000 by Christmas.

Still, donors like Russian furniture manufacturer Shatura are enthusiastic and hopeful that Partners will meet its goal.

"Miracles do happen," said Georges Zurbach of Shatura. Zurbach, who has personally visited Partners-sponsored projects Love's Bridge and Rodnik, a Moscow-based center for children with learning difficulties, said that Shatura would begin a retail promotion for Partners in its 300 stores starting July 15, and that the company was also asking its 3,000 employees to "give as much as you can" in an internal fundraising effort.

International firms that operate in Russia have also signed up to the campaign. "I am very happy to give this money away," said Patrick Earl, a finance manager at law firm Linklaters, as he presented Rodnik with a \$20,000 check on behalf of his company.

While the campaign is directed at the private sector, Zurbach expressed hope that the government might

learn something from the seven projects. He said he had seen firsthand how the deputy mayor of Perm had been so inspired by the Love's Bridge project that the municipal government there was considering beginning a similar program to combat homelessness.

In Moscow, however, Alexandra Kostomarova, foreign contacts coordinator for the Moscow Children's Hospice, said that, despite the help of Partners, Vneshtorgbank and Vneshekonombank, it was difficult to find sponsors. "I hope the mayor will pay attention to us and find time to listen. My dream is to have a stable organization," Kostomarova said.

Similarly, Anna Volzhina of Rodnik said that she was "very happy" to receive aid from Linklaters but that her organization also faced difficulties, with a large number of students seeking help from Rodnik. "The government doesn't help," she said. "We have long waiting lists, and the situation in general is unstable."

At the end of the evening, De Selliers was optimistic, despite being unable to estimate how much the auction, which included such items as a trip for two to London to the premiere of the film "Pride and Prejudice," had raised.

"The fundraising culture in Russia is still not developed, but Russian companies are beginning to recognize their social responsibility," De Selliers said.

"I invite all to our sites, both to see the tragic nature of what we deal with and also to see the fantastic work people are doing. I urge everyone to consider what they themselves can do, and what their companies can do."

For more information about Partners in Hope's projects, go to: www.partners-in-hope.co.uk or e-mail: jennifer.gaspar@partners-in-hope.co.uk.

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