Scris de Shajjad Rizvi Miercuri, 16 Februarie 2011 11:17



I met Shajjad about one year ago. I was surprised to see the amount of passion he puts in what he does and of his determination to produce a change in the Romanian society. In an interview for CSR Romania, he talks about his work with the volunteers of Little People Romania, but also about the experience he gained in the relationship company-NGO. (Rebeca Pop)

You and your wife, Katie, started Little People Romania, an NGO that supports patients affected by cancer and their families, more than 14 years ago. What motivated you to start this in Romania, a foreign country for both of you?

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Which are the biggest problems you have faced so far in convincing the companies to offer you their support?

We feel CSR is all about closing social gaps, and with the current crisis there is an even greater need to provide avenues to help the social sector. Providing effective psyco-social support for children, teenagers and young people fighting cancer has been the missing element in cancer care in Romania. Our programs work, they are saving lives and creating the change that is so desperately needed across Romania (and not just in one city). As any young cancer survivor will tell you, many times it is our programs that provide that special touch that is needed to help them pull though.

Yet we really have a hard time convincing the big givers to give. We are not a "photo op" organsation; you will not find the overly emotional and sometimes, in my opinion, degrading image of a child who is under chemo on our media sites. As opposed to that, "hope" is the most powerful weapon we have in the fight against cancer and that is what we portray to the general public and to the companies we ask for funding. Maybe our approach is not shocking or emotional enough, but we work everyday with the kids and their families and we will not disrespect them for the sake of getting funding.

We currently work in 5 oncology wards, daily reaching 80% of all kids under treatment. Our organisation has the largest patient reach in Romania and that will increase to 100% of all children by the end of this year. Our programs are setting the standard internationally. Based on our successes with the Temerarii community, we have been asked to consult other patient groups in Hungary, the Czech Republic, Australia, the UK and Canada to help them set up something as successful and effective. The European Coalition of Cancer Patients chose our organization as a lead partner in an upcoming European-wide program for youth. Temerarii is 'made in Romania'. It is made up of exceptional Romanian youth who have spent their young lives fighting cancer. Today, they play a huge role with current patients. They take a patient's hand and say: "I've been there – we can beat this!". The effect is huge! Lance Armstrong, who is a world famous cancer survivor, said that what we do is a leading example in the fight against cancer! So it baffles me that we don't get the funding from the big givers... However as anyone will tell you who is working within this field we cannot afford to fail, so no matter what we have to provide – and that is were the our volunteers play a huge role – we will go on and we will continue to do what we can to give the best possible care for Romania children.

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What was the most rewarding experience you have had so far in collaborating with a company?

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The current trend in corporate volunteering I feel needs a rethink. I heard from a number of NGOs and we have encountered the same issues, that unless our programs provide avenues for large numbers of employee volunteer involvement, corporate funding will not follow. It is great if your are doing big clean ups or tree planting, but tough if your work is focused on dealing with orphans or healthcare. We are at times asked to create events with the target of keeping staff happy and fulfilled, which distracts us from the main reason why we are doing what we are doing in the first place. What I believe would help is Corporate teams coming up with ideas of employee involvement that would create awareness and raise funding for a cause and free the NGOs from the task of creating events just to satisfy the KPIs of corporate.

Shajjad Rizvi is a British who came to Romania more than 20 years ago, aiming to get involved in solving the social needs. In 1996, he started Little People Romania, an NGO that supports patients affected by cancer and their families.

Interview by Rebeca Pop, Editor CSR Romania. Copyright CSR Romania

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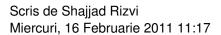
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