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British Charity ARC Works for Disabled

By Jemma Buckley

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ARC helps the physically disabled take part in activities like horse riding.

Shona McGrahan arrived in Russia in 2003 and learnt of Action for Russia's Children, or ARC, at a meeting of the British Women's Club.

A British-registered charity, ARC supports a range of Russian initiatives that help improve the lives of disabled and underprivileged young people in Russia. McGrahan, 51, began working with the charity and in 2004 became its unpaid co-director. She was awarded an MBE, a British honor, for her work with the charity in 2010.

Q: When did you first become involved in raising money for charity?

A: Before moving to Russia, I wasn't involved in charity work on this scale. In Britain, many get involved in charity such as fundraising at schools, Scout groups or for other local initiatives, but ARC is the first professional involvement I have had with a charity. It's a full-time job.

Q: How does charity in Russia differ from your experiences in Britain?

A: There are plenty of philanthropically minded people here in Russia, but there is a trust issue when it comes to donating money. Russians want to be sure their money will go to the intended place. This is just one of the reasons that all of ARC's projects are thoroughly checked. I think that's really important when you are asking people to trust you with their money.

Q: How does ARC decide which NGOs and charities to support?

A: We have a rigorous selection procedure. We always visit the projects, examine their accounts and look at the staff-to-attendee ratio. We then monitor the project for at least six months. Once we have decided to support a particular charity we will remain loyal to that project and continue to fund them from that point on. We have supported some of our charities for more than 15 years.

Q: Is ARC run by expats or do you have Russian volunteers too?

A: We are a real mixed bag. We have people working for us who are Russian, Bulgarian, British, Dutch, New Zealand, American — from all over the world. If they are the right person for our organization, it doesn't matter where they are from.

Q: Which charity or cause is particularly close to you?

A: Aside from my work with ARC, as a family we support large international charities such as Amnesty International and Save the Children. I also encourage my children to sponsor children in Africa through Action Aid.

Q: What would you say to those who aren't already involved in charity work?

A: Go for it — it provides a great perspective on life. If they'd like to get involved with ARC specifically, then they can find all the information on our website www.actionarc.com. If people have a particular skill that they would like to utilize, then we can help find a place for them in one of our projects.

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