

A Good Cause: Expat Campaigns for Disabled

By [Katherine Jacobsen](#)

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Denise Roza, third left, at a Best Buddies event. **Denise Roza**

Denise Roza is the director of Perspektiva, a Russian disability nongovernmental organization, which she founded, and the director of Best Buddies Russia, an organization that focuses on empowering individuals with Down syndrome.

The latter organization is organizing its second Dance Marathon Charity on Sunday, "Everyone just really likes to dance," Roza said. She is also involved in an upcoming career fair for the disabled.

Q: Why did you start studying Russian?

A: Well, I started studying Russian, first of all, to read "War and Peace" in Russian. And my college French teacher just happened to be Russian, and he kept on encouraging me to take it. I started Russian in my junior year, and that was it. I just loved the language.

I came here for the first time in 1984 to study Russian, and of course, it was a very different country. And I just loved it! I was just hooked. I knew that when I left, I was going to come back because I met so many wonderful people and felt so accepted. I just felt very comfortable right away.

Q: Do you ever feel overwhelmed or frustrated by what you have to do?

A: When I started Perspektiva, I remember thinking: How is this even possible? There is so much work to do. I have always had support from the people with disabilities, who helped me found Perspektiva, so I think that has always been a motivating factor. And seeing the change.

Q: What are some major changes you have seen throughout your time in the field of disability rights?

A: "When we started 15 years ago, in 1994, the whole concept of the integration model of disability, the whole concept of changing your environment was still really foreign, and here it is finally accepted. People have understood that yes, we have to make the changes for everyone to be included.

And attitudes have changed. ... We are seeing younger parents speaking up for their kids' rights and wanting their kids to be included and wanting inclusive education.

Q: What is most important about your job?

A: Helping people change their lives, to live higher-quality lives and to have new opportunities, as well as equal opportunities.

I think to see that every time we make change, and we do. We change one person and we change two, and it does change attitudes too. You can take small steps and even small steps lead to a big change. It might take us time, but it's those little achievements that are important.

The Best Buddies Dance Marathon is on Sun. from 2 to 8 p.m. Holiday Inn Sokolniki. 24 Rusakovskaya Ulitsa. Tel 246-3103. www.bestbuddies.ru. To get more information about the career fair write to svetlana@bumanmedia.ru, or press@hh.ru.

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