

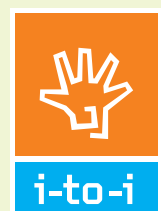


First Direct

Direct action making a difference, helping children in India - putting community first.

"It was emotional when we had to leave the kids, but we reminded ourselves that our contribution, however small was better than nothing at all and made a positive difference to their lives. Most importantly, we put a smile on the faces of the children (as they did ours)..."

Sue Fuller, Foreign Services, first direct



The challenge

As part of its overall Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy, first direct has been involved with local initiatives in the Leeds and Hamilton areas for a number of years with a Community Partnerships scheme.

To complement this work, the company wanted to find a way to add real hands-on value abroad by working on specific projects to bring direct assistance to disadvantaged communities overseas.

The approach

By linking with i-to-i, first direct was able to consider a broad spectrum of worthwhile projects and find ones particularly appropriate to its wider CSR objectives. The company was particularly interested in community development and teaching programmes and made the decision to send two teams of five or six people to work on specific projects each year.

It was decided that the first project would take a team of five workers to volunteer at a community development project in Bangalore, India. The team would work with a number of centres that offer education and support to 'children in crisis.' Here they would work with disadvantaged youngsters, many of whom make a living by rag picking and are also victims of solvent abuse.

The first direct team was tasked with various activities. These ranged from teaching English and playing games to providing a well needed hug for the children at the specialist camps and centres set up to offer support and hope to a vulnerable sector of society.

The benefits

The project was designed in line with the company's wider policy of investing in people. It was intended that all first direct employees should gain from the experience - not just those who volunteered - and that the project itself should benefit greatly from the wealth of skills brought by the first direct team. The whole experience has greatly affected each member of the team in a positive way, with each bringing back actions to re-evaluate their home/work lifestyle priorities. Their own words convey the impact the project made on them:

"The children of Savanagar were wonderful...ages ranging from babies right through to teenagers. Holding the young babies it was difficult to think that the other 50,000 children on the streets have no where safe to stay... our support can make a difference.

"We all took a turn at talking to the children about the last few days and what we hope for their futures. Hopefully many will move on and stay away from drugs. Hugs, handshakes and tears followed from us all. The most touching moment was a child wiping our eyes and asking us not to cry.

"It felt good doing what we did and it has made me think of other ways I may be able to help...

"The camp was an amazing experience that we are all better people for having done... All that's left to say is a big thank you to everyone here and at home who helped organise the trip."

To ensure that all the employees could feel involved, the team of volunteers produced daily diaries displayed on their intranet. These served to inspire people throughout the company to continue making a difference through activity as well as contribution.

The results

The first direct family is driven by passion and pride for its culture and values to make a difference to everything it undertakes. The team took the essence of its corporate beliefs half way around the world and succeeded threefold:

Having a positive impact on the lives of the children they encountered during their time on the project.

Gaining personal development and a new perspective on how they will determine what is really important in their lives.

Consolidating first direct's commitment to be a positive influence on the global community.

The first trip has sparked an immediate thirst for more, with first direct already planning its next project with the i-to-i team.

Visit: www.i-to-i.com Call: 0870 333 2332

i-to-i UK Ltd, Woodside House, 261 Low Lane, Leeds LS18 5NY. T: 0870 333 2332 F: 0113 205 4619

