

United Way of Russia Looks for Volunteers

By [Katherine Jacobsen](#)

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Elizabeth Sullivan is the chief operating officer of UBS, the mother of two children and also chairman of the board for the charity United Way of Russia. She answered questions about the charity work she and United Way are involved in.

Q: Why are you involved in charity?

A: I've gotten quite a bit from Russia, from Moscow. It is a fascinating city, and it has been a real pleasure to be in this country and to see it as it has gone through so many changes. I feel that it is very important to give back to society when you have gotten so much from it. One of the ways I try to do that is through charity work, for which there is a huge demand here.

Q: What does your job as chairman of the board at United Way of Russia entail?

A: For me, being involved in United Way is an opportunity to work directly with charities that

are directly impacting people's lives. You go there, you talk to the charity, you have a discussion about what they want to do, about how much funding they need, why they need funding.

Q: Do you ever get overwhelmed by the demand for charity?

A: In some ways, the unending demand is almost a sign of success. You really see how much these charities are doing with \$10,000 or \$15,000, they are really impacting people's lives. We get letters from the families, you know, your food packages have allowed my children to go to back to school. Sometimes it's really wonderful to make huge changes in policy, but a lot of time it comes down to changing one family at a time.

Q: Do you believe that charity in Russia is perceived differently compared with other countries?

A: People in Russia need to have a personal connection to the charity before they feel comfortable supporting it. I've introduced many colleagues to charitable activities in Moscow because I can personally vouch for them. Unfortunately, due to some well-known scandals in the early 1990s the idea of charity was soured in Russia. It has taken a long time to build public trust in charity-giving. Also, many people would like to support charities but are too financially stretched to donate money. Russian charities are also still learning how to deal with volunteers and how to effectively incorporate volunteer work into their professional programs.

Q: How can people get involved with United Way of Russia?

A: It depends on a person's interests and availability. Many shelters and orphanages need volunteers who will work with children on their reading, math or other academic skills. This type of volunteering requires someone who is willing and able to work for several months with a child or group of children. Alternatively, charities working with pensioners welcome volunteers to arrange parties around the May holidays. The pensioners usually have very interesting stories to tell about surviving the Great Patriotic War. The personal side is so interesting and the parties alleviate the isolation felt by many pensioners.

See www.unitedway.ru for more about United Way of Russia.

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