

EMPLOYMENT

Unemployment affects 201 million people in the world, a number that's equivalent to the population of Brazil

Job opportunities for the disadvantaged

"Rabota-i" offers employment for orphanage leavers and disabled youth in Russia

By Angelina Davydova Kommersant

"Rabota-i" is a social recruitment agency, based in St. Petersburg, Russia, which helps international and Russian companies recruit job applicants from disadvantaged social backgrounds.



Mikhail Krivonos, the founder of "Rabota-i" Credit: Rabota-i

Tatyana, 19, a recent graduate from the SOS Children village Pushkin, outside St. Petersburg, now works as a cashier at an IKEA store.

"Before this I only worked unofficially, and this is my first proper job - I really had to fight hard against my fears, but I tried and it worked out", she says.

Six years ago Mikhail left his job at an international consulting company. He set up a social enterprise "Rabota-i" ("rabota" meaning "work" in Russian).

panies with adapting to their new employees, providing consultancy and coaching at the workplace for the first six to nine months.

Every year in Russia some 10,000 to 15,000 young people leave state-run social care institutions (between 300 and 400 in St. Petersburg), with only 7% to 10% finding employment and becoming part of actively contributing to society.

"When we first started in 2011 we might interview 30 young graduates for existing job vacancies with only five of them getting back to us after the interview and only one securing a job - and then later leaving the job on the second day.

Last year "Rabota-i" provided employment training for around 700 young people in St. Petersburg. "We try to help the ones who find it the most difficult to find jobs, young people up to 29 years old, who've not had an employment experience of longer than six months", says Mikhail.

"Our main aim is to help these disadvantaged young people have normal lives, to actively participate in society and to start a financially independent life", Mikhail adds.

The company has also been actively cooperating with other social enterprises and NGOs that provide social adaptation programs. "Rabota-i" has attracted more than 600 NGO social workers engaged in working for social care institutions or with disabled youth to spread the word about employment opportunities for young people.

"We hope to create a framework available for organizations around Russia, including relevant approaches to vacancies and candidates, and ultimately to turn the organization into both a kind of a network, and also into a sustainable model which can easily be reproduced", Mikhail also adds.

IMPACT Journalism Day by Sparknews

60 stories for a better world

Today, for Impact Journalism Day, 50 newspapers join forces to highlight stories that change the world.

Beyond the constant stream of negative news, there are many stories of hope and concrete solutions. Stories of change makers tackling some of the world's most pressing issues with innovative ideas, in order to change the lives of millions for the better.

The media can play a crucial role in telling the individual stories behind this global movement. That's why for the last five years Sparknews has invited newspapers to take part in Impact Journalism Day, harnessing the power of collaborative journalism to bring stories of change to the surface.

For the fifth edition of Impact Journalism Day, the media are joined by organizations that believe spreading these stories is a first step toward change. These include the United Nations as well as One World Young, which annually gathers together 1,500 young leaders



Christian de Boiredon, founder of Sparknews and Ashoka Fellow & The Sparknews Team

from social and corporate sectors who are involved in positive innovations. A large community of well-known personalities and ordinary citizens have also joined the chorus in signing a manifesto to show that everyone - governments, the private sector, civil society, NGOs, and everyday people - can take action for a better future.

Discover those who have successfully brought answers to challenges such as good health, access to water, quality education, decent employment and clean energy. Each serves as a concrete example of the power of individual or group initiatives to help reach the UN New Sustainable Development Goals.

We hope you enjoy the read... and that you become part of the solution. Sign the manifesto (sharesstoriesofchange.org) and share the stories that impress you most on Facebook and Twitter (#ImpactJournalism, #StoryOfChange, @Sparknews, @Azernews).

The miraculous tent offering shelter to refugees



A homeless family on the streets of Mumbai but their recently invented weatherHYDE Credit: billionBricks

By Priscilla Goy The Straits Times

For six years, a married homeless couple were separated and forced to live apart in Delhi, India. The husband was in one gender-segregated communal shelter and the wife in another. Last year, for the first time, they were able to move into their own "home".

Their new "home" is a tent, designed by Singapore-based, non-profit organization billionBricks. The tent can be set up by one person in 15 minutes without any tools. It is weather-resistant, offering protection from the city's extreme temperatures which can range from 5 - 45 degrees Celsius (40 - 115 Fahrenheit). It is also spacious, with the ability to fit a family of two adults and three children.

It's unique design has attracted global attention. In July of last year, videos about the tent garnered more than 23 million views within a month of being posted online. Even celebrities shared the videos. Well-known Hollywood actor Ashton Kutcher called it "innovation at its finest" and rapper Lil' Wayne said it "could save millions of lives".

Mr. Kumar had been working in architecture for 12 years when he decided to start billionBricks in 2013. Though originally from India, he has lived in Singapore for more than a decade. He sketched out his tent's first design concept in 2014, after being troubled by an incident the year before. Riots in a town in northern India had left thousands of families homeless and more than 30 children died when temperatures fell to below freezing at night.

The Singapore-designed weatherHYDE tent is made to be weatherproof. In the winter, the tent's triple-layer, reversible cover provides insulation, while reflective material on the inside retains body heat. Conversely, in the summer, the other side can be used to reflect solar heat and help people inside the tent stay cool. "But that is

only one of the benefits a weatherHYDE tent offers over other typical communal shelters and tents," said Mr. Kumar.

Apart from battling the elements, the weatherHYDE tent provides more privacy because the triple-layer cover also blocks out light, so shadows from movement inside the tent cannot be seen. Its setup is easy and does not require anchoring to the ground with tent pegs, making its use possible in urban settings (areas often hit by natural disasters).

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The organization has several sponsors, including DBS Bank's corporate foundation, DBS Foundation, and Singapore-based design firm Space Matrix. Mr. Kumar hopes to continue to raise money through the weatherHYDE e-commerce platform, where the tents can be purchased and donated on a buy-one-give-one model and shipped anywhere in the world.

Last year, billionBricks also launched a crowdfunding campaign on Kickstarter and raised more than S\$145,000 (just over 100,000 USD) in two months, enabling them to provide 500 tents to needy families. The tents cost S\$279 (USD) each. The 500 pre-ordered tents are expected to be shipped from China to India and the US sometime this July.

BillionBricks, in its application for the internationally-acclaimed A' Design Award stated that the tent "does not provide a poor solution to the poor; it provides a dignified solution". The tent went on to be named one of 12 winners in the Social Design category in 2015.

Meanwhile, there have been several refinements to the tent's design since the married couple gave it a test run. There are new locking mechanisms and both sides - not just the non-reflective layer - are now waterproof. billionBricks are also relaunching its weatherHYDE website (www.weatherhyde.org), with a section where donors can type in a tent's unique ID number to learn more about the homeless family who received the tent they donated. Beyond providing shelter, billionBricks also hopes to talk with US groups to create jobs for people with disabilities to have them manufacture the tents.

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Feelif technology: Feeling life under your fingers

New ways of helping children learn Braille and geometry



A visually-impaired child using Feelif technology Credit: Jure Erzen

By Maja Prijatelj Videmšek Delo

Mia, an elementary school student at the IRIS Centre for the Blind and Visually Impaired Youth, is sliding her finger on the tablet screen covered with a special grid. By following the vibrating points, she skillfully detects the shape of a square on the screen. She then tries to solve the Memory Game and is delighted each time she finds compatible plates with animal motifs and is rewarded with appropriate animal sounds. She is already familiar with the Feelif device as she has tried it several times, and she is also contributing to its development with her suggestions. This innovation from 4WEB in Slovenia can also improve the lives of millions of other blind and visually impaired people around the world.

The blind and visually impaired can be very skillful at using tablets and smartphones with touchscreens. The groundbreaking innovation of the Feelif multimedia device now enables them to feel the shapes of objects on one-dimen-

sional surfaces too. Until now, the closest thing to this was a Braille graphic screen which displays shapes with raised pins but it is prohibitively expensive; it costs around 50,000 euros. Only educational institutions for the blind and visually impaired are able to afford it.

Feelif is about a hundred times cheaper. Željko Khermayer, the inventor and founder of the digital agency 4WEB, claims that this device can open up new dimensions of using information in a digital format, such as feeling shapes, making drawings, and using interactive stories. This ability may come naturally to those who can see but until now it was inaccessible to the blind and visually impaired.

A tool for learning Braille and geometry

Željko had the Feelif idea in 2013 while watching a documentary on the deaf-blind community in Slovenia. He was deeply touched by the fact that these people were deprived of many experiences due to their loss of vision, and they were also cut off from the rest of the world because of the high costs of communication technology. He decided to help.

IMPACT Journalism Day by Sparknews. i HASIT E SUBHI El Watan LA NACION AZERNEWS DELO The Daily Star L'ECONOMISTE DU FASO 10VORIS SRF LE SOIR Le Messager EL TIEMPO POLITIKO KOMPAS RESPEKT L'ECONOMISTE Al Masry Al Youm LE FIGARO Mon Quotidien ElHeraldo Fraternité Motin l'actu THE IRISH TIMES L'Orient Le Jour l'express EL PAIS THE NATION FOLHA DE S.PAULO The Asahi Shimbun T24 DONG-A ILBO RZECZSPOLITA Komersant THE STRAITS TIMES le soleil AJ+ 24 heures Le Courier de Russie THE PHILIPPINE STAR City PRESS The Republic of the Congo REGIONE KHAO SOD USA Today THE HINDU Tribune de Genève The China Post HAARETZ La Presse EGYPT INDEPENDENT Les Échos du Nord Positive.News Daily Monitor H KAÖHMEPINH CORRIERE INNOVAZIONE JEUNE AFRIQUE

Driving from a wheelchair

Family business from North Moravia develops breakthrough vehicle for disabled drivers



By Jana Klímová,
Magdaléna Fajtová
Respekt
Credit: Elbee Mobility

Many men have boyhood dreams of constructing their own car. The vast majority grow out of the idea, or settle for a go-kart. But Ladislav Brázdl and his partners made sure their dreams came true: Elbee Mobility, their family business in the small town Loštice in the Olomouc district of North Moravia, the Czech Republic, is now manufacturing its own Ebee cars and is even beginning to tap into the world market.

The Elbee is a weird vehicle. It opens from the front, and you don't climb in, but ride straight into it with a wheelchair. It's an unrivaled concept that saw the Brázdlis and the Elbees voted among the top 100 bright ideas in Central and Eastern European countries at the end of 2015.

Elbee Mobility was a spin-off from the business ZLKL (a Czech abbreviation for Loštice Light Construction Works), an outfit that originally had nothing to do with cars.

Built up by Ladislav Brázdl Senior on the ruins of agricultural buildings that used to be part of a local collective farm, the family business today has about two hundred employees and an annual turnover in excess of 350 million CZK (more than 14 million US dollars).

Ladislav Brázdl Senior bought the farm with a business partner when it collapsed after the Czech revolution. His big break came in 2003 when he decided to buy out his co-owners' shares. Then, instead of reconditioning the old machinery, Brázdl Senior invested in modern and more reliable technologies.

When a design engineer asked him about an idea he had in mind, Brázdl Senior went after his dream of creating his own product: an urban micro-car designed specifically for disabled drivers.

"This was it," says Brázdl Senior,

remembering that first meeting. "It was something unique that we as an engineering business could produce in part, and at the same time it supported our own development as a manufacturing business."

The road to assembling the final product was a long one. The decision to make a front-opening vehicle meant considering how to raise both the hood and steering column to allow wheelchair users to drive inside.

This direct driver access to the vehicle was a fundamental principle of the whole project. Ordinary vehicles adapted for wheelchair users simply do not resolve the problem of what to do with the wheelchair. If wheelchair users don't have enough strength to stow their wheelchairs themselves, they need someone to help them.

A major advantage of front-end opening is that wheelchair users can park the car facing the sidewalk. If they have rear-end opening they can reverse up to the curb, but for many wheelchair users, this is a very complex operation, especially if they

have restricted neck movement. With face-forward parking, the driver can see where he or she is going and where to release the wheelchair ramp so as to ride out of the car safely, among pedestrians on the sidewalk, and not onto the roadway.

Homologation is the approval process of certifying vehicles as roadworthy, and this was essential when the Elbee was still in development. Official certification was granted for the Czech Republic in 2010, for a vehicle with a two-stroke engine capable of a top speed of around 50 miles an hour. Three years later the car was approved for the entire European Union. The first model went to market at the end of 2014.

The historic first customer was František Trunda from Brno, who lost both legs below the hips years ago, and for whom the car has provided a renewed sense of freedom. "It's changed my life," he says. "I can now go for a drive out of town or go to see my brother. I don't have to wait until someone has time to go with me."

So far, the business has produced many vehicles which are now on the roads throughout Europe, namely in France, Italy, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

One limiting factor and a risk for the project, specifically in the Czech market, is the price of the car. The current price is 600 thousand CZK (almost 25 thousand US dollars), and although the effective purchase price can be cut by two-thirds thanks to various subsidies and reliefs, it is still cheaper for wheelchair users to modify a normal car, and indeed many have already drawn on all available subsidies to do this.

The entire project has already cost the family business 200 million CZK. But further investors are lining up who might boost development, perhaps by introducing serial production or joystick control.

"We're making something that's really emotive," says Ladislav Brázdl Junior, "and this inspires us to continue the project. We've had reactions from people saying that thanks to the Elbee they're now learning to drive and they're regaining strength and ability. In our small way we're restoring their lives."

EDUCATION 103 million youth worldwide still lack basic literacy skills

Feelif technology: Feeling life under your fingers

EDUCATION, FROM PAGE 6
Željko then started developing innovative technology for the blind and visually impaired, like applying vibrations, sounds, and voices to help users identify shapes displayed on the tablet screen or which they drew themselves. The small elevated points on the grid allow for better orientation as the user slides his or her fingers on the screen.

The Feelif was developed with the help of elementary school students and therefore the content is focused on school subjects, says Katarina Pavšek, a member of the 4WEB team. The application will be very useful for learning Braille and geometrical functions, and will enable quicker learning and independent studying. 4WEB is also looking for ways to apply the technology to adults. They are testing a device on the Slovenian market and the first users will receive it within a month.

As it is meant to be fun, the Feelif will also stimulate the learning process. It is well-known that blind and visually impaired children often have a hard time staying attentive. "They need more encouragement during their learning process," explains Katarina. She adds that existing learning methods are still needed to help children get fine motor skills.

10-year-old Damjan who lost his sight due to an illness was most excited about being able to draw. "If you draw with a pencil, you can not feel shapes with your fingers. With Feelif this has become possible. It's really easy to learn how to use it," says Damjan.

Mrs. Maja Koritnik, mother of a visually impaired child remarks, "Parents of blind and visual impaired kids see the benefit of Feelif's work in a simple and innovative approach; the source of the idea is a honest readiness to help others, and at the same time the idea is a reflection of social responsibility Feelif's team."

88 million potential users

The Feelif multimedia device consists of a tablet, a relief grid placed over a screen, and an application which connects all these parts into an experience that can be felt by the fingers of a blind person. It costs 500 euros. "When we are sure that the product is at an excellent level, we will make it available on the global market; first in European countries, and later in the USA," says Katarina. There are about 14 million potential users of the device in both markets, and 88 million potential users worldwide.

The company is also developing an open platform which will create a network of people linked to the blind and visually impaired: the blind and visually impaired themselves, their parents, their teachers, and those who want to create appropriate content for them. This platform will facilitate the sharing or selling of content, which in turn could create new business opportunities for the blind and visually impaired, and their parents.

4WEB is searching for funding to develop this open platform, but considering their success as an innovator, this shouldn't be too hard. At this year's Webit Europe Festival in Sofia, Bulgaria, they were the second best innovation among 2,425 startup companies. 4WEB also won the Slovenian competition of social innovations and was one of the five finalists at the Podim conference for startup companies in the Alps-Adria region. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) listed the Feelif device as one of the 150 best innovations in the world. Željko Khermayer, the founder and CEO of the company, has also been named as one of the 100 most influential innovators in Central and Eastern Europe.

We are living a story of change

Around the world, there is a movement of ordinary people making a difference every day.

An illiterate Burkinabe farmer who managed to stop desertification thanks to a traditional farming technique. A German doctor who turned a disability into a talent, training blind women to detect breast cancer earlier than any gynecologist can. A 26-year-old Indonesian medical student who tackles poverty and waste by offering the poorest to trade trash for healthcare.

Solutions exist everywhere to create a world where sustainability and profits are compatible, inclusive democracy is restored, citizens from all over the world have access to education, healthcare and appropriate food, men and women have the same rights, and climate change is controlled.

If you believe that people don't need to wait on others to create positive change and that change can be achieved by anyone.

If you believe that building this world starts by changing the way we talk about it, restoring confidence and inspiring everyone.

Then join a growing movement of hope and change:

Sign this manifesto on sharestoriesofchange.org and commit yourself to spreading these stories of solutions, help them cross borders and have a greater impact.

Join the movement

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by Sparknews

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