

VOLUNTEERING

delivering skills

Logistics company DHL has entered into a long-term partnership with a children's disability charity. Both organizations are finding that there are benefits: the charity is improving its management systems while the company's employees are honing the skills needed to run an international business

Text books will tell you that the middle of a merger is not the best time to launch any major new initiatives. Allison Murray begs to differ. When Deutsche Post announced plans to bring all its UK operations under the DHL brand, she saw a prime opportunity to update the company's community programme.

To an extent, the move was inevitable. The integration of logistics firm Securicor Omega and the transport company Danzas Air & Ocean with DHL International created a very different company. Overnight it became the largest transportation and logistics company in the world. For its UK arm that meant a fivefold increase in employees and an expansion to more than 300 locations nationwide.

Clearly, uniting these companies under one banner and then encouraging so many employees to work together effectively was not going to be accomplished overnight. But as corporate responsibility manager at the newly-formed DHL Express UK, Murray firmly believed that community involvement could be a powerful tool for uniting the new company.

The result was the 'Yellow Wheel Appeal'. Launched in September 2004, the flagship initiative provided free shipping of goods and fundraising support to Whizz-Kidz, a children's charity that provides mobility equipment such as wheelchairs and tricycles to disabled young people. The decision to work closely with Whizz-Kidz followed an extensive survey of DHL employees, coupled with an assessment of the new company's goals.

'This was the first employee engagement programme rolled out across the entire company, including all the new businesses,' explains Murray. 'Not only did it develop the new brand, but it also got people throughout the company thinking about corporate responsibility.' The community team ensured that the new colours of the DHL brand were reflected in the campaign logo.

DHL's ambitions for the charity partnership went beyond a mere donor-recipient relationship. Murray and her team saw huge potential for helping to improve Whizz-Kidz' organizational capacities while meeting DHL's training needs. Following discussions with Whizz-Kidz and input from Business in the Community, DHL Express UK created Skills in Motion, a staff volunteering programme in which employees work the equivalent of three full days at the charity.

'I approached the human resources manager at Whizz-Kidz and asked her to identify five projects where the organization would benefit from business skills development that DHL could help with,' says Murray.

the company

DHL Express is part of the German conglomerate Deutsche Post World Net, a logistics company. Its UK division employs 18,000 people in more than 300 locations. It:

- launched a disaster response and management partnership in 2005 with the United Nations Development Programme and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
- was one of the first companies to be verified to the Good Corporation standard, which uses a set of social and environmental indicators to assess business performance
- is one of seven global transport and logistics firms working on social and environmental performance indicators for the sector as part of the Logistics and Transportation Corporate Citizenship Initiative
- became one of the first companies, through its DHL Express Nordic division, to publish data on how much greenhouse gas it produces. It did so as part of the Business Leaders Initiative on Climate Change

■ DHL has provided free delivery of mobility equipment and fundraising support for the Whizz-Kidz charity, but an important contribution has also been to lend the skills of its employees to the organization



Armed with the project requests, which ranged from improving Whizz-Kidz' customer service to developing a new role at the charity's mobility centre in Birmingham, Murray approached DHL departmental heads to ask for help in finding individuals with the necessary skills.

'Right from the start, we positioned the partnership as an employee development opportunity with the potential to help Whizz-Kidz, rather than simply as a volunteering opportunity,' she emphasizes. As such, each project, whatever its focus, has been designed with DHL's competency-based performance system in mind. Based on 26 core competencies, the system is used as the basis for staff appraisals across the company. Each staff member's input with Whizz-Kidz is therefore recognized and discussed in their performance appraisal.

'Skills in Motion' helps staff improve their skills in eight of the competencies covered by the performance system, in particular on teamwork, staff development, communications, project planning and partnership management.

An evaluation by the Maplecroft consultancy has found that the DHL staff taking part have all been 'extremely positive' about the programme's impact on their skills development, especially in terms of their ability to work effectively in teams. 'The programme always partners a DHL

staff reported a high degree of personal satisfaction at seeing their business skills put to good use

employee with a Whizz-Kidz employee, so the project's effectiveness depends on their ability to work together,' says Murray. The consultants also discovered that DHL employees were acquiring new skills, especially in mentoring, communication and leadership.

The benefits are also being felt by DHL employees not directly involved in the programme. Maplecroft's research identified a greater awareness of disability issues within the company as a result of the Whizz-Kidz partnership. One in five employees said they felt the company was a better corporate citizen than before the programme began, and participants reported a high degree of personal satisfaction at seeing their business skills put to good use in a charity.

Simon Daggett, a senior project manager in DHL's marketing department, is a case in point. He worked with a Whizz-Kidz manager expanding one of the charity's training programmes across the country. 'He learned how to develop projects and how to write direct mail pieces,' says Daggett of his counterpart at Whizz-Kidz. 'That sounds quite basic, but in marketing terms it was quite a big thing for the charity. He obviously told others about it, because the next time I came in, I had two people asking how to use the project plan.'

Zaga Makhecha, human resources manager at Whizz-Kidz, feels the charity has benefited from the relationship. She's now working with a DHL partner to

integrate a management competency framework into the charity's own employee development approach. 'Our staff need these competencies as well,' she says. 'Skills such as external networking, project planning and marketing are universal.'

What DHL had expected to be the biggest challenge – persuading managers to allow their employees to have time off – turned out to be quite the reverse. 'Most managers said afterwards that they would have been happy to grant more time if I'd asked for it,' says Murray. Management was enthusiastic because the programme had a clear business focus: each project was drawn up with a clear description of the employee development opportunities and the wider business benefits for DHL.

'It's crucial to take time to develop the documentation for each project,' explains Murray. 'Demonstrating that it's a well-developed programme with clear deliverables is key to selling it internally.' Letting the charity decide for itself the areas where it needed support was also very important, she adds.

Following the pilot with Whizz-Kidz in 2005, DHL has since extended the Skills in Motion programme to three further charity partners. It currently has eight additional employee engagement projects at UK-based charities Digital Links, British Red Cross and Merlin. A further round of projects will begin this autumn.

Poppy Lyle, corporate relations manager at Digital Links, anticipates that her current partnership with a media relations manager from DHL will help raise the profile of her organization. After two initial meetings, the pair have devised a six-month public relations plan for the charity, which renovates used computers donated by companies and sends them to organizations in developing countries, also providing training and support.

'To get this insight and assistance from a business is

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ibe comment DHL

Using a CSR programme to help embed core values throughout a newly expanded organization is imaginative. A company's responsibility includes good citizenship and helping charities to be effective, and this is one way of delivering on this. One neat aspect of this initiative is the linking of DHL staff development with something that is of real benefit to a service-based charity. Clearly this is to their mutual advantage. The fact that the paradigm is now being applied elsewhere indicates it can be adopted by others.

Some outstanding features:

- the choice of charity involved DHL staff
- one-to-one partnerships between company and charity were seen as the key to success of the programme.
- DHL staff clearly show pride in their company being a 'good citizen'
- it is a continuous and expanding programme involving other charities

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