

From a Birdfeeder to a Visit to the Mayor: Taking On a Responsibility for the Future

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For over three years, the Alcoa Foundation Program “We Are in Charge of the Future” is being carried out in the cities of Belaya Kalitva and Samara (Kirovsky District). The Program was designed and is being managed by the Fund for Sustainable Development in partnership with Alcoa’s industrial facilities in Russia: Alcoa Metallurg Rus (Belaya Kalitva) and Samara Metallurgical Plant. The Program is focused on involving students of local schools into the process of designing and implementing socially significant conservation projects in their communities. Key Program approaches include grant contests, educational master classes and creative contests for students and

teachers, environmental school research projects, environmental activities with younger children and children with limited physical abilities, and exchange conservation camps and expeditions. The priority Program objective in 2009 was to mobilize local community resources — schools and NGOs — to facilitate sustainable regional development.

Work on 12 projects, winners of the 2009 grant contest (www.fund-sd.ru), continued during the whole year. It is notable, that each city has its priority areas of environmentally significant school activities. Thus, school students in Belaya Kalitva monitor the city’s trees and take part in “greenery inventories” and also improve and landscape areas around their schools;

while in Samara, the effort School Patronage of Green Areas in Kirovsky District in Samara City and Nature Monuments in Samara Region, which in 2009 was joined by five correctional residential schools with their own conservation projects, was successfully continued and expanded.

We can say with reasonable confidence that the Program ensures a socialization of middle and high school students (including those with limited physical abilities) and familiarizes teachers and students with the process of project contests and helps them acquire new knowledge and skills in researching and protecting the natural environment, in other words, promotes general environmental competence among its participants.

In the summer of 2009, school activists from Belaya Kalitva and Samara participated in 10-day exchange expeditions during which they not only continued their environmental education in practice, but also acquired new friends and colleagues and became acquainted with the flora and fauna of the Samarskaya Luka National Park and areas surrounding Belaya Kalitva. Presentations devoted to the results of environmental expeditions were made in 12 schools of the two cities, with over 300 students becoming virtual participants in summer conservation activities.

In the autumn of 2009, instructors from Moscow State University and St.Petersburg City Youth Creativity Center conducted master classes devoted to the basics of environmental and social programs intended for schoolchildren. These master classes were attended by 48 teachers, 48 students of 7th-10th grades, including 27 with limited physical abilities, educators, journalists and NGO staff. Schoolteachers from Belaya Kalitva and Samara also conducted some of these master classes at which they provided an account of the expertise and approaches developed and implemented under the “We Are in Charge of the Future” Program.

In December 2009, the best research works by students from Belaya Kalitva and Samara were traditionally submitted to the XI National Teleconference “Children Will Preserve Nature in Russia”, which a contest is held in the framework of the Environmental Commonwealth Project of Moscow State University. Of the 36 educational institutions from 14 regions of Russia and Belarus participating in this contest, seven were also participants of the “We Are in Charge of the Future” Program. Of the 108 works sent to the contest,

Note: 21 schools, 6 additional school education centers and 4 NGOs participate in the Alcoa Foundation “We Are in Charge of the Future” Program since the time when it was launched in Belaya Kalitva and Kirovsky District of Samara (at the end of 2006) and in Lubuchany settlement in Moscow Region (2007). Every year, over 2,000 students of 5th-10th grades become involved in grant activities, environmental mini research projects, creative contests and summer conservation camps.

During this period, 32 environmental/social projects were fulfilled for a total amount of 2,874,380 rubles; instructors from Moscow conducted 33 master classes that were attended by over 2,000 local students and 230 teachers. For the past three years, many of these students have been submitting the results of their research works to the National Telecommunications Conference “Children Will Preserve Nature in Russia” held under the Environmental Commonwealth National Telecommunications Project. Thanks to the Program, growing numbers of youth in Belaya Kalitva and Samara are becoming interested in conservation, take part in environmental activities and work on research projects.

During these projects, schoolchildren become guardians of new nature monuments in Samara Oblast; the first environmental trail in the city of Belaya Kalitva was built and is being further developed; and the areas of the Olympic Reserve Rowing Center in Belaya Kalitva and of a residence school in Samara were cleaned and landscaped. In addition, what is most important is that in 2008 the Program was joined by children with limited physical abilities who were able to visit unique nature corners and take part in projects of their peers.





36 were by students, participants in this Program: 27 from Belaya Kalitva and 9 from Samara.

Students from these two cities won three first prizes, one second prize, three third prizes and five special prizes in the various nominations of the teleconference. For the first time in the history of this contest, one of the supervisors of such works was a ninth-grade student Natalya Petrova from School # 9 in Belaya Kalitva. Ekaterina Konevskaya, an 11th grade student from the same school, became a winner in a contest held by the Soil Sciences Department of Moscow State University.

In April 2010, at the prize-awarding event of the National Teleconference, E.A.Bondarchuk, who presented the prizes and awards, thanked the winners and participants in this contest, young conversationalists and their teachers, for their enthusiasm, competence and creative approaches to studying and preserving the natural environment in their communities.

During the years of the students and teachers' participation in the Program, the words "grant contests", "presentations", "patronage", and "contests of creative and research works" became customary to them. Therefore, the next logical step in the further advancement of the Program was the Youth Ideas Contest announced in March 2010. The primary goal of this contest is to consolidate youth initiatives in the form of essays devoted to projects, which the applicants are ready to carry out (involving children and disabled senior citizens) and which are aimed at making life in their cities more comfortable, safe and healthy.

The contest was joined by 12 schools (9 from Belaya Kalitva and 3 from Samara), 1 non-profit organization, 1 educational institution, and 1 cadet corps from Belaya Kalitva. The works were evaluated by a youth jury

consisting of 15 members and an adult jury headed by Y. Yeldyshev, deputy chief editor of the journal Ecology and Life. A total of 74 essays were sent to the contest; and 120 students of 6th-11th grades took part in this event both as authors of future projects and members of the youth jury.

The most interesting ideas from Belaya Kalitva included restoring the local Youth Park; environmental activities in school (a complex of works proposed by School # 2 involving energy-efficiency and funds saving — for example, funds saved as a result of installing energy-saving lamps or collecting "useful waste", etc. — would be used for creating "green corners" in the school and in the schoolyard, modernizing the school's sports ground, building a greenhouse for growing vegetables for the school's cafeteria, and arranging expeditions to study the surrounding natural environment); participation in planting trees and shrubs and improving yards; organizing and advertising healthy meals in school; and promoting healthy lifestyles. The cadets proposed to build several environmental trails and plant a "green ring" at Zarezhnoye; and students from School # 5 intend to organize an environmental theater and revive the school's sports ground.



The most interesting ideas from Samara are devoted to activities involving children with limited physical abilities, such as creating a virtual museum and preparing lectures for disabled children; organizing joint photo exhibitions and working together in the local Botanical Garden; improving bus stops and green areas in Zubchaninovka settlement and the Alley of Glory; restoring the Pyatidesyatiletiya Oktyabrya Park that was built by the staff of the factory. The idea of creating a

favorable environment for children will be formulated and handed over to the local administration.

Immediately after the end of the Youth Idea Contest in Belaya Kalitva, its participants met with the city's mayor, V.F.Fedorchenko, and his deputy, I.A.Boichenko, to coordinate their plans with the city's development program. The students spoke about the proposals of their peers to improve the city and involve youth and adult community members into conservation activities. They shared their vision of modernizing the Youth Park, creating a recreation area at Nizhny settlement and "green islands" in Zarechny Housing Development that is currently under construction; and also their plans to install social advertisements on Bus Route # 1 (devoted to conservation activities of local schoolchildren) and to organize environmental pickets.

The officials listened attentively to all the proposals and promised help if they fit into the general city development plan. Luckily, most of the ideas turned out to be in line with this plan and, thus, there is a certain degree of confidence that proposals for the next grant contest will be successfully implemented. In addition, the Program participants took down telephone numbers to call in case of need. The head of the city asked the students to present all their ideas in writing and expressed his hope for further cooperation: «We are very glad that such a meeting took place. This is an extremely useful initiative and what is especially valuable is that those who will live tomorrow in our city are so much concerned about its future. It is important that you are making feasible plans and that your ideas comply with those of the adult members of our community.»

In May 2010, the best project ideas were incorporated into three applications for funding (for a total amount of 900,000 rubles) and starting from June, their authors, together with their teachers, will begin to realize their aspirations and plans.

In Belaya Kalitva, students of four schools, the cadet corps, a vocational school, the Children's Creativity Center and the Technical Creativity Center together with the local Red Cross division will improve and landscape city areas under the new project The City of Our Dreams. During the summer and autumn, students and volunteers will plant trees and shrubs on the Alley of Champions; restore the Alley of Heroes; build a recreation site for older community members; plant trees and shrubs around educational institutions; create social advertisements devoted to conservation activities



of children and demonstrate them in shuttle minibuses in the city; organize community members of different ages into environmental groups at city summer school camps; and lead excursions along the city's environmental trail that was built two years ago as part of Program activities.

In Samara, five schools of Kirovsky District will work together on the project School Patronage of the Botanical Garden and Alley of Glory under the supervision of the Environmental and Life Safety Training Center. In 2010, the volunteer group from School #147 will work together with the inmates of Residential School # 113 at the Botanical Garden, which is a nature monument and a recreational area in the city of Samara. A virtual environmental and local lore museum will be created by School # 147. It will include at least 10 virtual excursions in PDF format. A long-term landscaping design will be developed for the Alley of Glory and Young Pioneers Avenue; a plant nursery will be set up at School # 150; the series of school seminars titled "Environmental Hour" will be continued; a sociological survey will be conducted among the residents of Kirovsky District on the subject of "My Green Yard"; and guidelines "Planting Trees and Shrubs in Your Yard" will be written and printed.

Students will have a chance to realize their dreams of a better life in their city. The "We Are in Charge of the Future" Program will grant them this chance. Step by step, they are gaining experience in how to care about the surrounding world, its nature and people. They see the results of their joint efforts and realize that they are capable of changing, if only a bit, life around them. They and many adults together with them are learning to be in charge of their own and our future.