

## Shadowing Program at Prague's Marriott Hotel

By Kelly Russell

Long-term studies show that children who spend their childhood in institutional care are greatly disadvantaged for the rest of their lives. In general, compared to children who are placed in stable environments, they have poor vocabulary, more limited communication skills, few positive life experiences, and less abstract thinking. Further, their situation causes them to lack role models, natural motivation to accomplish goals, hold onto a job, or complete studies.

In recent years, these truths have become evident to several local businesses and organizations, sparking both inspiration and determination to help give such children and young adults hope for their future.

"When considering our CSR strategy for the year 2008, our priority was to identify long term direction that we would support on a consistent basis," said country public relations manager for Prague Marriott Hotel, Tereza Agnew. "During the course of our research, the topic of foster care in the Czech Republic was discussed, and immediately caught our attention and dedication on learning that there are 20,000 children in institutional care, 8,000 of them in foster homes."

With these statistics in mind, the Prague Marriott Hotel, as well as other associated hotels, developed a shadowing program to assist young adults in foster care, preparing them for the labor force.

"Our goal was to share what is our most precious asset...and that is undoubtedly our hotel expertise, our know-how," said Agnew. "Having so many professions in the hotels, we decided to create an interactive shadowing program, where the young people leaving foster homes can gain some real life professional experience by working alongside professionals."

As of August 2008, four young adults enrolled in the shadowing program at the Prague Marriott Hotel, while another enrolled at the Courtyard by Marriott Prague Flora Hotel, each receiving training in a variety of jobs, which included Sales and Marketing, housekeeping, front office, and kitchen.

"Each of them had a buddy from our hotel team, a person responsible for making sure our trainees learned what they were interested in and were guided in the area in question," said Agnew.

Preparations for the hotel shadowing program were assisted by *Člověk hledá člověka*, a civic organization whose main mission is to help children and young adults growing up outside of their biological families, specifically in foster care institutions.

"They, as well as we, believed in this approach as a very effective method in helping young people find their direction in their professional life," said Agnew. "The organization's Project Manager, Tomáš Chmelař, offers a parallel- 'What do you think makes more impact? To give someone a fish or to teach him or her how to fish?'"

"If just one of these young adults found something beneficial in this experience and uses what he/she has learned to good effect to ease their passage into professional life, then the mission is successful," said Agnew.

After a successful first year, the mission, believing strongly in its value, plans to continue the program in future years.

"When we asked our 'protégés' for their feedback, a boy who was trained in Sales & Marketing told us that the biggest relevance for his future was the motivation he felt," said Agnew. "You finally see that working hard at school and learning languages can bring great results one day, such as having such interesting job and working with a great team of people," he said."

For further information on the Prague Marriott Hotel's shadowing program for foster children, please contact Tereza Agnew:  
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