

United Fund for Belgium, the link between companies and charity

By Mrs Catherine Alexandre, Executive Director of United Fund for Belgium



United Fund for Belgium helps companies and their staff to offer donations and time to charitable causes, safe in the knowledge that this is being done in the most effective and reliable way possible. Through the efforts of more than 50 companies, UFB is responsible for ensuring that around EUR 700,000 of donations are well spent. These companies include members of the Belgium-Japan Association & Chamber of Commerce, such as Japan Tobacco International, Linklaters or Marsh & McLennan. As a non-profit organization, United Fund for Belgium channels the entirety of these donations to around 80 charity organizations. It finances concrete projects focusing on 4 social areas: the reduction of poverty, child welfare, support for handicapped children and adults, and social integration.

According to Catherine Alexandre, Executive Director at United Fund for Belgium, "Our partners and supporters are essential to our existence. United Fund for Belgium only exists thanks to its donors, which are all companies that are committed to being responsible corporate citizens and making a positive impact in the communities in which they operate". She goes on explaining that, "It is our role to create a direct link with the social network on behalf of the CSR departments of these companies. Every year, thousands of persons benefit from the actions we organize. We especially favour small and medium sized associations that do not dispose of a highly developed fundraising system".

Those remarks are echoed by Japan Tobacco International: "It is fantastic that UFB screens and selects projects throughout Belgium (the entire country) which are worthy of our support. That reassures us that the donations are well allocated. In addition, 100% of the donations are distributed to charities and that is exceptional". Indeed, UFB distributes the full amount (100%) of the donations it receives. It is able to do this because it covers its operational costs through special donations, proceeds from events and the income from an endowment fund – the Martin Kallen Fund – that has been created for this purpose. Redistributing 100% of donations is unique in Belgium.

Another particular feature of UFB's activities is the care with which it selects

projects for support. UFB funds projects in a balanced way in all regions and all provinces of Belgium, and its representatives visit every association before any project is financed, to assist the association and to ensure that the project is worthy and viable. The members of the Allocation Committee which selects the projects to be financed are all volunteers who have long been active in their local communities and are very familiar with charitable activities in their local areas.

This is important to Linklaters, an international law firm that wants to be an active and positive contributor to society at large. As Linklaters says, "UFB has proven over the past few years to be a very reliable, well governed and professional association that Linklaters can trust". Linklaters refers to "UFB's excellent screening and selection skills in relation to charities".

So, what kind of projects are financed by UFB?

As explained earlier, the focus is on the reduction of poverty, child welfare, support for handicapped children and adults, and social integration. An excellent example is the Home Baudouin, supported by Japan Tobacco International (JTI). The Home Baudouin is a shelter for people at the margin of society and in urgent need due to the misfortunes of life – whether due to family tragedy, addiction to alcohol or drugs, or other reasons. It can provide accommodation for up to 70 people, spread over the three dormitories of a building situated close to

the Brussels Grand-Place, as well as in 5 individual studios elsewhere in the city. The home also provides meals and social guidance in order to get people out of their situation. Its staff can offer help in French, Flemish, Arabic and English, and there is a weekly medical service.

Last year, King Philippe visited the Home



Baudouin to mark its 130th anniversary – it is the oldest such shelter in Brussels. But the Home Baudouin had a very practical problem. Its kitchen no longer satisfied the standards of the Federal Agency for Food Security (AFSCA). It needed renovation, which is where United Fund for Belgium - and Japan Tobacco International - came in. Thanks to funding provided by Japan Tobacco International and its staff, the kitchen was fully renovated and the vital work of the Home Baudouin could continue.

Another example is the Marjan association based in Duffel, in the Province of Antwerp. Its activities include the provision of information, awareness raising, advocacy and lobbying for people with disabilities. It also organises all kinds of activities for people with disabilities, including swimming for people with physical, sensory, cognitive, auditory or visual impairments at the pool in Duffel. But it is difficult for some people to participate in this enjoyable activity, simply because there is no lift to help them in and out of the water. The UFB is now helping to finance the installation of a lift.

In more detail, last year around 38% of the funds provided were meant for projects to support handicapped children and adults, around 35% went to child welfare, and around 27% to the reduction of poverty and the promotion of social integration. This included 25 projects for the improvement of facilities (kitchens, window frames, carpentry, etc.), 26 projects for specialized equipment (lifting aids, adapted playground, material for physiotherapy rooms) and the provision of 35 specially adapted vehicles (minivans, refrigerated food delivery vehicles, etc.).

In that context, Linklaters describes why it works with UFB: "Our community investment programme in Belgium focuses on two major themes: growing the capabilities of non-profit organisations, and helping young people to realize their aspirations. The activities of United Fund for Belgium fit perfectly into this programme, and Linklaters fully endorses UFB's mission to efficiently support small- and medium-sized charitable institutions and projects located in Belgium with a focus



on child welfare, the reduction of poverty, supporting disabled people and social integration".

United Fund for Belgium tries hard to be responsive to the needs of the Corporate Social Responsibility programmes of its partners. Marsh & McLennan, a group active in businesses such as insurance broking, risk management, talent, health, retirement, investment and management consulting, explains that, "Our Corporate Social Responsibility programs are led from the top and focus on partnerships that make a lasting difference and we want to help the local community. Since 2011, UFB is a solid partner, and we have a strong relationship, focus on Belgian charities. UFB makes a substantial difference to underprivileged people and communities across Belgium and all the money we give going directly into programs. That is also important for us."

UFB recognises the desire on the part of donors to enhance the quality of their corporate commitment, either by establishing a closer relationship with some of the supported charities, or by stimulating

a higher level of employee involvement, or both. The UFB team acknowledges these trends, and wants to be responsive, whenever feasible, to requests from CSR or HR departments of corporate donors to give presentations, identify particular types of social initiatives, and help organize volunteering activities or in-house campaigns.

Indeed, Linklaters' experience shows that working with UFB need not involve only making donations. Many people want to volunteer their time as well, and UFB helps companies help their staff in doing exactly this. Linklaters has assisted UFB by giving legal advice on a regular basis, as well as by running the Brussels 20K race and participating in UFB's Christmas market and Easter egg actions. In 2016, Linklaters also hosted UFB's annual "hand-over ceremony", at which multiple charitable organisations presented their activities and explained how the gifts received from UFB will benefit the people they care for.

Marsh & McLennan has a similar perspective of its cooperation with United Fund for Belgium. According to Jean-Pierre de Chestret, the Chief Financial Officer of Marsh Belgium, "We encourage people to take one day, during their working days, to be a volunteer. 42% of our employees are engaged in these volunteers' days. And our annual engagement survey shows that they are happier at work than the others!"

If your company wants to help people in need in Belgium by supporting United Fund for Belgium, please contact: C. Alexandre, Executive Director UFB, tel 0475 919103.

