EMPOWERING AT-RISK YOUTH

Off the streets and gainfully employed

Mr Mikhail Krivonos says if you grow up in an orphanage in Russia, you end up having practically no skills by the time you leave. His social enterprise Rabota-i aims to help these youth find jobs. PHOTO: RABOTA-I

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By Angelina Davydova Kommersant

RUSSIA • Rabota-i is a recruitment agency with a difference.
Based in St Petersburg, it helps international and Russian companies recruit job applicants from disadvantaged social backgrounds. These are youth who have recently left state-run orphanages, as well as young disabled people with no work experience - and thus have low employment prospects.

"If you grow up in an orphanage in Russia, you end up having practically no skills by the time you leave. Public care systems are very strictly structured and socially isolating, which means that you also tend to have very low motivation for finding a job. You end up living on social welfare and communicating with only a handful of other leavers," said Mr Mikhail Krivonos.

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

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Every year in Russia, some 10,000 to 15,000 young people leave state-run social care institutions, but few find work and become an active part of society. Many end up on social welfare and drift into crime, or alcohol or drug abuse.

Rabota-i invests in training and coaching candidates, and helps companies adapt to their new employees, providing consultancy and coaching at the workplace for the first six to nine months.

"We are working to fulfil the demand of businesses - the financial support and control of Rabota-i also comes from a number of Russian and international companies," he said.

Last year, Rabota-i provided employment training for around 700 young people in St Petersburg and it plans to expand to other regions of Russia.