

Evelin Ilves

Patron, 'Help the Children' campaign

What connects kids and empty bottles? Right! When recycling points were opened, kids got the chance to earn some money for themselves by collecting cans and bottles. And if you keep at it and collect enough of them, you can make quite a bit of money. Some of the kids have bought themselves books with the cash they've earned; others have treated themselves to something tasty; others have saved up for something bigger and better – new trainers, or one of those new-fangled one-wheeled skateboards. But alongside the button they've been pressing on the recycling machines to collect their reward another button's appeared: one that says 'Help the children'. And overnight those machines have become part of a much bigger charity drive. Kids and adults alike who've been collecting cans and bottles and taking them along to be recycled are now helping children from less privileged families go somewhere they might never otherwise get to visit: the theatre.

Although we wish all families were financially well-off and that there were no unhappy or disadvantaged children in the world, sadly that's not the reality of life. There's always someone who isn't as fortunate as others. There are always accidents that no one can foresee or prevent. And sometimes it's just a case of some people being luckier than others and things working out for them. But that doesn't mean that the kids whose lives aren't as bright as those of others are in any way less deserving. Far from it! Everyone will probably experience moments in their lives when they feel they can't cope or they're just plain unhappy. So what do we do? What else! We help them. Helping someone is one of the best feelings in the world. And if you help another person, especially a child, you not only cheer them up but are bound to come away from it with a smile on your face yourself – not to mention a greater sense of self-worth. So you see, helping someone can spread good feeling far and wide!

To date, since the 'Help the children' button was fitted to those recycling machines and money has been donated to the charity, almost 13,500 children around the country have been taken to the theatre. That's more than 450 classes' worth, or almost 20 schools. A lot, in other words! The biggest donators have been recycling-conscious residents of Harju, Tartu and Ida- and Lääne-Viru Counties. The greatest number of visits has been made to the Russian Theatre, with more than 2600 kids seeing shows there, followed by the Puppet Theatre and the Vanemuine. Knowing that children who speak both Russian and Estonian as their mother tongues are getting to go to the theatre is something that brings us closer together. And the fact that for many of them it has been their first ever visit to a theatre is even better! To top it all off, collecting old cans and bottles means that our towns and cities and country as a whole are

cleaner and healthier places to live. So thank you to everyone who has donated so far and who plans to do so in future. By helping the children, we're helping to build a better future.

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