

Personal account Janet Abbott

Fundraiser at ThePromise on helping people on London's 'wobbly' bridge

The best advice I've had

When I started as a volunteer fundraiser at Save the Children 15 years ago, the inspirational head of corporate fundraising said: "No one ever died asking for money." This reminded us of the very real dangers faced by Save the Children's workers in the field and spurred us on to "make that ask" no matter how nervous we might be.

The biggest challenge I've faced

Probably the job I'm in right now. I work with a trust fundraiser and together we constitute the entire fundraising department of a charity called ThePromise. So when we do events, I run them, if we want individual donors, I nurture them, and if we want corporates, I pitch to them. The upside of being in such a small team is that I feel intimately involved with our work with disabled children in Russian orphanages. The biggest single challenge I've faced here has been organising a Russian Ice Ball in 2004, which ended up raising £15,000 - the



exact amount needed to employ our programme manager in Russia. I'll never forget the yards of white muslin and sugar-frosted twigs needed to transform a function room at Twickenham rugby stadium into an ice palace.

My greatest hit

It has to be the moment at the Grosvenor House Hotel in London when several wealthy City bankers started an

impromptu bidding war to make the largest donation to Save the Children - I was running from table to table making notes on the back of an envelope, which was then worth more than £125,000. And, yes, they did honour their pledges. It was a fundraiser's dream.

My worst moment

Standing on London's newly opened Millennium Bridge at the start of the charity walk Strollerthon in 2000 watching in horror as the story changed from "what a fantastic charity event to open this wonderful architectural feature" to "is the bridge really wobbling that much?" Volunteers had to stop cheering people on to help them recover from motion sickness.

My top tip

Make sure that your fundraising is truly cost-effective both in terms of time and money. Early in my career I found myself involved in events or with donors that were obviously a bad fit for the charity and took huge amounts of staff time for little reward. An experienced fundraiser can usually smell the money.

Interview by Annie Kelly