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## Making voices heard: What Elena Baturina would do if she were London mayor for a day

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Elena Baturina is a Russian businesswoman and philanthropist

Elena Baturina has played an active role in charitable causes for many years, through her Be Open Foundation, supporting international projects in the field of arts, culture, design, education and sport.

The Be Open Foundation currently supports the Mayor's Fund for London's City Pitch programme and London Children's Festival, themed 'Mayor for the Day'.

### How did you get started in business?

My career began during a very complicated yet interesting period in the history of Russia – it was the end of the Soviet era and the launch of the free trade market.

This was a time when new opportunities had to be explored.

There were so many first-time entrepreneurs; we all competed, collaborated, learnt from each other and tried to work out the rules of the game – rules that were not only new to us but for the country as a whole.

We began in 1989 as a tiny supplier of computer hard and software. Having accumulated enough business experience and capital, we moved into plastics production, then entered the world of construction, and the rest is history.

### Were there any barriers to your success, if so, how did you overcome them?

When we were starting out, the business landscape in Russia was completely unpredictable, and in certain ways it still is, to be honest.

I have never feared those barriers though, rather the contrary: I have always considered barriers to be part of the journey, and overcome them – they're an inseparable part of the joy of moving forward, and reaching the goal.

The more serious the barriers, the more exciting the journey.

### Why are you supporting the Mayor's Fund for London City Pitch programme?

One of Be Open's main goals is about helping and nurturing young people to grow into leaders of the future, so that they're able to adapt and find creative solutions to challenges that arise in this rapidly changing and ever developing contemporary world.

We believe in the new generation of creatively gifted people, that can design solutions in any walk of life – be it business, politics, social relations, healthcare or education.

What I like about City Pitch is that it teaches children and young people to identify a problem in their community, talk to friends and neighbours, work out a solution, and most importantly, bring those ideas to life.

I like that all of the above is not just taught in class, but draws on everyday challenges in their communities.

It is extremely important that at the end of the programme, they see a tangible result, an improvement made by themselves.

This is an incredibly rewarding and inspiring experience. And we are there to help.

### What advice would you give to children and young people who want to make a difference?

I will say nothing new, I'm afraid: you have to start with yourself. We can improve anything around us only if it goes hand-in-hand with our own development, both professionally and personally.

Study hard, set ambitious goals, work hard to reach them and keep an open mind.

Secondly, never be afraid to speak out and act – this will make the problem visible, find support and allow you to work out a solution together.

### What would you do if you were 'Mayor of London for the Day'?

A day is far too little time to solve a problem, so I would probably do exactly what City Pitch is about – give people the opportunity to speak about what they think must be improved, and make sure their voices are heard and taken into consideration.

Children are much more adventurous in their thinking though, so I'm looking forward to seeing what mayoral ideas they come up with as part of the London Children's Festival today!

### So, what's next for you in for business and philanthropy?

Within our humanitarian activities, we strive to promote the best practices and know-how, developed within our own projects and collaborations.

We are convinced that most of those solutions are universal and applicable to make a difference all over the world, so we will work on promoting those internationally.

As for new business projects, my team are always open to interesting opportunities.