



[News](#)

Music fights the ravages of civil war

IT was a conflict that spanned a quarter of a century and claimed the lives of more than 80,000 people.

By The Newsroom

Thursday, 6th September 2012, 1:08 pm



Now, an Edinburgh tutor has helped Sri Lankan children to cope with the aftermath of the island's civil war through a music workshop.

Dr Tanya Ekanayaka, who was born in Sri Lanka and lectures part-time in the music department at the Edinburgh College of Art, staged the event in the northern part of Sri Lanka, which bore the brunt of the 25-year-long conflict.

A noted pianist, Dr Ekanayaka is also a composer and linguistic expert. She believes that children in her homeland can benefit from music therapy to help overcome the effects of the civil war.

She said: "Children are among the most vulnerable and among those who suffer most in war. Music is recognised as a very powerful 'language' through which mutual healing can be facilitated, and I'm extremely thankful to have had the opportunity to spend time with children in Sri Lanka's war-ravaged northern region, listening to them perform, playing to them and most especially, helping them to share with one another their own narratives through the language of music."

She added: "These children are so traumatised. Some of them are orphans who live in the school hostels because they have nowhere to go."

Dr Ekanayaka's work forms part of the SJC 87 Initiative, which is a non-political humanitarian initiative in Sri Lanka. It strives to improve the lives of children in the aftermath of the civil war.

Since October 2009, the programme has helped more than 220 children attend school by providing scholarships. The programme has

also paid for new libraries, playgrounds and school equipment, as well as funding food aid programmes.

Dr Ekanayaka arrived in Sri Lanka at the end of July after being invited to play the piano at the Colombo Music Festival.

A story about the pianist in a local newspaper caught the attention of the people behind SJC 87, who asked if she would be interested in organising the workshop.

It took place at a school in Jaffna last week and involved more than 50 girls and boys, most of whom were aged between 11 and 16.

Dr Ekanayaka said: “It was a case of helping these children to compose pieces of music. It was great because they bonded with each other. It was very inspiring and a wonderful experience.”

Dr Ekanayaka, who was the first Sri Lankan pianist to be invited to perform in the Pianists of the World series at London’s St Martin-in-the-Fields, has lived in Edinburgh since 2006.

She hopes to organise future music workshops in Sri Lanka, help provide the students with musical instruments, and assist with the training of teachers.

laura.cummings@edinburghnews.com