



The Power of Music

Minni funded Innovation Initiative Grants enable the staff and students of the University of Edinburgh to engage in a wide range of projects. Dr Tanya Ekanayaka's music-composition project, which has been working with war-affected and impoverished school children since 2012, relies entirely on external funding.

"The survival of this project pivots on funding being available for the annual music-composition workshops. My contribution and that of all those involved in my project is entirely voluntary. It was an Innovation Initiative Grant that covered the major expenses incurred in facilitating a series of workshops for the project in 2014, enabling me to work with around 800 war-affected and impoverished school children from across Sri Lanka. The workshops in 2014 would not have taken place had it not been for this grant, and I remain deeply grateful to the grant sponsors for their generosity."

For Dr Ekanayaka, music has always played an important role in her life, beginning with her introduction to the piano at the age of five. It is this passion for music, and knowledge of the power it possesses, that has been the driving force behind her work.

"I see music as one of the most powerful and wonderful modes of human communication and bonding." DR TANYA EKANAYAKA

"Exploring and expressing our inner feelings can be cathartic and facilitate healing. However, expressing our feelings through human language, which by nature demands clarity of expression, can be difficult and perhaps not always healthy, particularly when it comes to feelings that are traumatic. Poetry is perhaps the closest to conscious ambiguity that human language permits.

"As a linguist and performer-composer, I am acutely aware of the distinct differences and parallels between music and human language as modes of creative expression. Music is by nature



2014 workshops in Jaffna, Ratnewana Hambantota and Kiffimochchi

abstract in that it is not possible to express specific meanings through musical sound. This is the case with most artistic modes of expression, and I have found that it is this defining nature of the musical communicative mode that underlies the peculiar and special healing property of musical expression, especially when involving the composition and performance of one's own music."

Dr Ekanayaka has been deeply inspired by the unique abilities of music composition to not only help people express their inner feelings, but also to aid in the healing process.

"I know that music possesses a powerful ability to affect our emotions in positive ways. It is this awareness that inspired my work, coupled with my yearning to empower young people who are traumatised - be it as a result of war or poverty - in enabling them to be creative through musical composition.

"The children who participate in my project workshops compose and then perform their own music. They are encouraged to create new music of whatever form they wish using a variety of instruments, including their own indigenous instruments as well as voice. The combined process of creation and rendition is what is intended to heal and inspire them."

Standard workshops usually involve several hundred children from a range of schools, all of whom are given the

opportunity to work together and identify with one another over shared experiences.

"Knowing that they are not alone, but that they are with others who have endured similar hardships, can in my view give them confidence to explore and express such feelings because the experience is a shared one.

Dr Ekanayaka's work is nothing short of inspiring, and in many cases enlightening.

"Many children and adults alike are unaware of their innate musical sensibility and so sadly, many people live their entire lives never having discovered this dimension of their being. One of the major consequences of severe trauma is the loss of self-esteem. Discovering the creative abilities that they never knew they possessed, the process of creating and performing their own music helps rekindle the confidence of these young people, and is hopefully a step towards restoring their self-esteem."

Find out more about Dr Tanya Ekanayaka's work on her website: www.tanyaekanyaka.com