

fly me up to where you are

tiffany singh project for auckland arts festival 2013

What are your hopes and dreams for yourself, your future, your family, your community and the world?

These were big questions to ask little people. Questions, I wasn't sure I'd ever sat down and asked myself. You'd think as voting, educated, thoughtful adults we have an idea of what these questions meant but if you sat down and asked them of yourself, you begin to realise the magnitude of such a thought process.

Day one, session one: eight to ten year old tamariki filled the hall of their school looking timid and unsure as they tried to fill out their Hopes & Dreams Mind Maps. As requests for mums and dads to be more present in their lives, communities to be cleaner, friendlier, whanau to be healthy, and lotto to be won began to fill the pages we all felt a little heavy hearted. So much weighed on our tamariki's shoulders – do we underestimate their perception of the world around them? Of their adult-like concerns?

From this mind map the children began to transfer these ideas into symbols which were, for the most part, recognisable, representing the heart of the matter – love, peace, symbols of religion and culture, rainbows, smiles. The beauty they want to see in the world.

One by one as flags were being brought up to dry you could see the commonalities and recurring themes. Glenys (Tiffany's mum) and I sat with the kids that waited for their class-mates to finish. An outgoing group of young Maori and

Pacific Island girls began to ask me questions: What nationality are you? What do you do? Are you an artist? Telling them I was Maori, Samoan and Tokelauan made them perk right up, "Yeaah! Cool! Me too!" proudly exclaiming their nationalities they told me they wanted to be singers, teachers, and go to university to get an education, be like me, be an artist like Tiffany, make movies like Rob! More questions, more answers. They had a voice. The voices got louder, stronger as they became more confident.

Quietly a young boy from Iraq came and sat next to me, I asked him what his hopes and dreams were. Simply and solemnly: "I want to go home. I miss my family in Iraq. I know we came here for a better life but I miss my family." I listened and talked to this young man, worlds away from his home and much like the already outgoing girls, he became more confident, more sure as he spoke.

As his class were about to leave he surprised me with a rush hug. Followed by the hysterics and hugs of a mob of girls and a heartfelt:

"THANKS MISS! Come back!"

Day one and I felt completely changed by this project.

Every single school we visited proved to be just as interesting, challenging, insightful and beautiful. Smiling young artists with big imaginations and honest truths of the reality of their lives filled every single class room.

I want to be a good man. Be a billionaire! Work

at the SPCA, become a vet, have a cat, dog, horse and bird. Cure for cancer. My dream for the future is to stop gangs and gun shooting and to keep our street safe. To keep safe and healthy, to have a roof over their heads. To plant more trees so we can make oxagen [sic]. First family on mars. More liyberies [sic] and places where you can get egicated [sic].

What left a sense of hope were thoughts of that first day and how it echoed throughout the workshops. There was strength in numbers that came as the process was worked through, from mind map to painting flags. There was a reoccurrence of positive messages on the flags which children knew would be shared as their dreams for the community and world.

Mostly though, there has been an immeasurable and unknowable hope that taking the time to listen to these concerns might have been a turning point, maybe just for one child, to feel heard and empowered.

There's a sense of unity, a depth and a breadth, a character to this project and once it was fully united in the square it was unmistakeable. It flutters, almost silently, in Aotea Square, though you realise that the longer you sit there, the louder the voices become.

'Each child is an adventure into a better life - an opportunity to change the old pattern and make it new.' - Hubert H. Humphrey

Elisapeta Heta



Fly Me Up To Where You Are installation in Aotea Square for the Auckland Arts Festival 2013. (Photo courtesy: Elisapeta Heta)