



FLOWER POWER

FIRST THEY COVERED AN AIRLINER WITH FLOWERS. NOW IT'S THE TURN OF THE CONTROL TOWER.

You don't usually associate autumn with a sea of colourful flowers, but New York last fall was flooded with huge bouquets. The brightly coloured blooms could be spotted all over the city, because they were gracing its famous yellow cabs. In the dark months leading up to Christmas, the Big Apple managed to come close to looking like a cheerful Caribbean metropolis.

Thousands of taxis took part in Gardens in Transit, a public art project devised by the charity Portraits of Hope. Even more impressively, almost 30,000 children had worked on painting the flowers: New York schoolkids from all backgrounds, including many with serious illnesses or mental or physical disabilities.

Portraits of Hope was founded in 1995 by brothers Ed and Bernie Massey, originally as a therapy programme to help sick and traumatised children. The idea was that creative

activity would help them to forget their problems for a while, give them something to be proud of and brighten up their community. And because so many kids were involved in each project, able-bodied as well as sick or disabled, they would also create a sense of solidarity. To enable as many youngsters as possible to take part, special paintbrushes were developed. For those unable to use their hands, for example, there are versions they can attach to their shoes. If a child can only hold a brush in his or her mouth, the handle even has a special candy-flavoured coating.

Before Gardens in Transit, Portraits of Hope already had a host of flowery projects to its name. In the past, the children have decorated an aircraft, an airship and a patrol boat. This year, they will be brightening up the control tower at Long Beach Airport in California.

Why flowers? The answer is simple, says cofounder Bernie Massey. "Children all over the world draw flowers. They are a universal symbol of hope, beauty, life, joy and inspiration."

More information: www.Portraitsofhope.Org.

Peter (13) and his school took part in Gardens in Transit in New York. 'It was a great challenge. Thanks to Portraits of Hope, I now know that I can complete even the most difficult of tasks successfully, which is immensely satisfying. Looking back on the project, I found working as a team the best part. Through the experience I have gained self-confidence. My team mates were interested in what I had to say. This made me feel understood and appreciated. The greatest moment was seeing hundreds of flower taxis driving through the streets of New York. 'Our' taxis - this was our dream becoming a reality. We felt like we were ready to take on the world. We did it!'



BAKING FOR A BETTER WORLD

CHARITY BEGINS AT WORK



Once a year, something strange happens in Denmark. Students and schoolchildren appear everywhere, all dressed in black t-shirts with a white logo. Some picking up litter from the streets, others behind the till at the local baker or supermarket. Small groups performing their own plays for

kindergarten kids. Others selling tea, lemonade and biscuits. And all happy and excited. Not because the money is going into their own pockets, but because it is all in a good cause. Operation Dagsværk - a "day's work" - has become a regular event across Scandinavia, and now it's starting to conquer the world. The United States and Italy have already introduced a national fundraising day along the same lines, and the Netherlands is set to follow suit from next year. The initiative began in Sweden in 1964, as a tribute to the late Dag Hammarskjöld, former Secretary-General of the United Nations. He was renowned for his efforts to resolve international conflicts and resist oppression throughout the world. In his honour, a group of students launched Give a Day for Dag - the forerunner of Operation Dagsværk.

The thinking behind the initiative could hardly be simpler. The world is not as it should be, and everyone has a responsibility to do something about that. Many aid organisations share much the same philosophy, but what makes Operation Dagsværk different is that it's run exclusively by young people, for young people. The organisers are students aged 13-19, and all the proceeds from each year's work go to help children in developing countries or an underprivileged community. Recent beneficiaries have included projects in Cambodia, the Roma people in Macedonia and Bolivian children. Denmark is holding this year's Operation Dagsværk on 5 November, with the money going to Niger to build schools, train teachers and buy textbooks.

Operation Dagsværk sees itself as a solidarity programme, not a charity project. In the run-up to the event, the children study the problems facing the country they are going to support. And they learn that young people there are not so unlike themselves. Often, they share many of the same dreams and ambitions. But living in a poor country, they need a little help to build a better future for themselves. More information: www.od.dk.

Aya (17) has been a board member of Operation Dagsværk for a year now. 'I have always been interested in foreign countries. And ever since I was young, I have wanted to help others. Now I can combine these two passions. What is so special about Dagsværk is that it's not merely a fundraising event. We also learn a great deal about the country we are going to support. This year, Bolivia has been selected as the country of donation. I was shocked to find out that they still have slaves. I wasn't aware of this and it is a good thing I am now. I at least spend two weekends a month on Operation Dagsværk. The best part is getting to know everyone in the organisation, and above all, learning how to get things done. This project is run by young people, for young people. There are no adults involved. I think it is absolutely fantastic to be able to organise all this at my age.'