

Healing wartime scars with art

DARREN LEVIN

IN 2004, while working with the Serious Crimes Unit in East Timor, PhD student Danielle Ujvari co-founded Ba Futuru (For the Future), a child rights organisation whose mission is to build a culture of peace and non-violence in the war-stricken South-east Asian nation.

Using creative expression (drawing, painting, role play and guided imagery) as a medium, Ba Futuru engages children and youth in peace-building, conflict resolution and human-rights activities; offers training for people working with children; and provides capacity development for government officials.

A collection of artworks submitted by East Timorese children to Ba Futuru will be exhibited as part of a fundraiser at Ishka World Crafts in South Yarra next week. The pieces include human-rights advertisements, as well as artistic depictions of the students' "dreams for the future and memories of the past".

"These pictures, photos and paintings are so much more than aesthetic pieces," says Ujvari, a PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne. "They represent the hope of East Timor's young people for a more peaceful and prosperous future."

A Sholem Aleichem College graduate, Ujvari says that her interest in social justice issues stems from the Holocaust – its impact on her family and the community at large.

"It [the Holocaust] has played a huge part in shaping my life path and my commitment to promoting human rights and post-conflict healing," she explains.



Danielle Ujvari (centre) with students in East Timor

While in Timor, she helped prepare indictments and extradition warrants against those responsible for the commission of crimes against humanity in the country's 1999 referendum.

She worked alongside two Jewish expats – an Australian doctor and a Brazilian administrator. "I have always felt very strongly about social justice issues, particularly situations in which entire peoples are living in a state of extreme human-rights deprivation," she says.

Ujvari hopes that the exhibition encourages Australians to support healing and peace-building in Timor through the arts.

"To actually see the lives of children and youth transform during their engagement



One of the artworks submitted to Ba Futuru.

with human rights, conflict transformation and creative expression is a beautiful thing."

The exhibition runs from November 1-18 at Ishka World Crafts, South Yarra. For more information email d.ujvari@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au.

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