

# Finding joy in school connections

When we were planning our book launch for Flora and Rainbow Hopping Bug, we wanted to find a way to use the event, and the space, to support student creativity. We invited the students at Lindfield Learning Village (LLV) school to design a window display and provide the artwork for our exhibition. The result not only exceeded our expectations, it blew our minds. Here are our key takeaways from this experience for any organisation looking to engage students in an authentic experience.

**Don't be afraid to collaborate:** The idea of taking part in our book launch was welcomed by LLV with open arms. They were keen, and incredibly enthusiastic, about working on the project with us. Hands down, I would involve the teachers, the student voice and examples of their work again.

**Creative freedom:** Once you have given the students and teachers the concept ideas or theme, let them run with it and take it where they want it to go. The direction they took the artwork for the book launch was a wonderful surprise and beautifully creative. It was exciting not knowing what they were going to come up with. Trust them and the results will amaze you.

**Empower the children:** Show them what is possible, recognise their achievements, verbalise how much their contribution meant and actively demonstrate how much their creativity and hard work was valued.

**Appreciate what it means to them:** When I went in to collect the artwork for the exhibition, a student approached me and wanted to entrust her entire portfolio to us for the launch, such was her passion to be involved. It really moved me. I was too scared to take the whole portfolio, so I took samples and throughout the day, I showcased her work to every single person who walked through that door. I wanted to be her ambassador because I had seen, first-hand, how much it had mattered to her. Everyone was stunned by the detail and composition of her work, as they were by every one of the pieces on display.

**Don't underestimate a child's contribution:** Asiyeh and I work with children and know what they are capable of, but even so, the level of creativity and sheer talent was mind-boggling. From the colourful, happy and joyous window display of our K-2 cohort, to the intensely detailed artwork from years 9-12, it was deeply inspiring and actually moved people to tears. Many, many times over, I heard the phrase "Wow! I had no idea they could do this" and the reaction fell into a familiar pattern – first shock and then awe.

Over the course of the day, a re-occurring question kept popping into my mind... how many of these students would continue to pursue their love of art and nurture their artistic talents beyond the school walls? It struck me that a large percentage probably wouldn't and, instead, would find themselves at the age of forty, questioning how fulfilled they were and then working hard to reconnect with their long-forgotten creative outlet.

Imagine a world where, instead of neglecting the very things which bring us mindfulness and happiness in the first place, we actively encourage our children to regularly keep returning to that which they love, and therefore reap the benefits of always knowing who they are at heart. I want to be part of creating that world.

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**We would like to thank the students and teachers at LLV for entrusting us with their beautiful artwork and for all of their hard work and creativity. They are quite simply an inspiration and their contribution made the day really special.**  
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