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- **THE 'OUT OF THE BUBBLE' EXPERIENCE**
- **WA EDUCATORS MAKING A DIFFERENCE - THE 'HELP TO HOPE' QUEST HAS BEGUN**
- **HOW ARE YOU LEARNING ABOUT TEACHING?**

Scotch College
The Service Learning Effect



All for the love of the Arts

Making 'Artistic Dreams' come true

Lillian Alonzo Marin, founder of Artistic Dreams International, is a Mexican Artist, Singer and non-profit consultant who recognised the fact that in both developing countries and the USA, many talented teens were missing out on an art-filled future. Artistic Dreams benefits young people in the USA and internationally, identifying present and future talent, enriching the lives of the many volunteer instructors that travel the world to welcome teens to a life of Art, Music and endless creativity. Lives are changed and futures are transformed – all for the love of the Arts!

Something I enjoy most in life, is breaking out into song at any moment of the day – I think of life as one big Broadway Musical or sometimes as a living painting – especially in moments of high stress and worry or, alternatively, when I am feeling great! When walking in the streets I often wonder what it would be like if, at this exact point in time, everyone stopped what they were doing and started to sing and dance in unison. To some this might seem silly, but to me it is one of my many dreams yet-to-be fulfilled.

Artistic Dreams International (ADI) was one such dream, I decided to make a reality: to be able to imagine the world as something you can create or recreate, that what you imagine can become real and the arts give you the perfect platform to explore this notion, is just one of the gifts I wanted to give ADI children.

At Artistic Dreams we encourage, develop, and nurture creativity and self-expression in children and teens through Arts Education. We also foster self-discovery, self-reliance, build confidence and instill leadership skills.

Life was not always easy where I grew up and I did not always walk around thinking dreams come true for everybody. When I was eight, my family moved from Mexico City to Dayton, Ohio in the U.S. I can still remember the culture shock of being the only Mexican family in town. I listened to all the culturally insensitive comments coming out of the small mouths of the children at school. Burdened with all the common stereotypes of what a "Mexican" is, they asked questions like, "Lilly, did you live in a shack back home? Did you ride a mule?



Did you have electricity in your home? Is this what your country looks like (pointing to a cactus and a donkey in the desert)?" These comments were not as hurtful as the way some people looked at my family as we were walking into a traditional American restaurant. I felt different, I felt like I didn't fit in and I know this had a negative impact on my self-esteem, yet, America gave me access to a world full of Art and entrepreneurial minds, not available in my home country.

This 'baptism of fire' into American life has gifted me with being able to understand the ADI kids in our New York programme, especially those coming from immigrant families who (the vast majority of) live in Harlem and Queens. These kids are now learning they're all equal, even if they come from diverse countries like India, Japan, Indonesia, Peru, Mexico, Dominican Republic or USA. This concept of equality naturally builds at ADI, as children of all backgrounds become fast friends while singing and making art together.

Our New York choruses directed by Sanna Valvanne, an internationally renowned children's choral director and ADI Music Director in Residence, build community, give kids access to more than 14 languages and inspire them to know they can! Their self-esteem grows every time they perform in front of an audience or exhibit their Art. Our kids use their natural talents; they have no barriers to

tear down like we (adults) do. Their talent is raw and creates "true" art faster. These children are already taking photographs that are gallery quality and they're only seven to fifteen years old!

For our Mexico City kids – living in a blighted neighborhood where nothing like ADI has ever existed – they don't know what's hit them! They're already singing beautifully and one day soon they'll see themselves performing at the Sala Netzahualcoyotl of the Mexico National Autonomous University (one of the two most prestigious music halls in Mexico City). Their phenomenal progress is due to their personal instructor, Ana Patricia Carbajal, Choral Coordinator for the university and Music Director of ADI Mexico. The kids will be blown away by performing exactly where they should perform. Just because any dream can come true!

Artistic Dreams also holds drawing, painting and contemporary installation workshops. Through the Visual Arts the





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children learn to open their minds and broaden their horizons in a way I did not experience until I arrived at Art School at the age of 32 when I finally realised I had to do what I love and believe in to lead a truly fulfilling life – in other words, be myself.

I had to work hard to arrive at that point. I explored art at night in my studio apartment while working a rigorous full-time job to save up money to "start something". I turned my living room into an art studio. In fact, my new living room is still my art studio.

It was during those long hours creating art at night the idea of ADI began forming in my mind. What if thousands of kids in developing countries and New York City's underprivileged neighborhoods had access to this kind of exploration, this kind of transformation, this empowered way of thinking – way before reaching College age?

Consequently, after finishing art school, I took a job I believed would afford me the flexibility to create my own art, and launch a smaller version of ADI in the form of an after-school programme. When I saw this was not the case, I chose to forgo the comfort and security of that job, and take a risk, and launch a full-scale version of ADI. Perhaps the lack of flexibility was a blessing in disguise. Sometimes it takes a kick in the butt from life for us to "wake up" – to realise that the perfect time to make our dreams come true is now!

As Artistic Dreams International grows, the children will perform and exhibit in world-renowned halls, galleries and museums in the U.S. and abroad and we will start selling our music and art online in order to sustain the organisation.

The next goal is to further expand into northern Mexico. Here children are targeted and recruited by drug cartels,

many dying before they reach the age of 20. Our dream is, instead of being involved in this deadly lifestyle, many kids will join our ranks: finish school; build a better future for themselves and their community; create peace; sow love and harvest a shining future. Longer-term goals are to expand to Asia, Africa and further into Latin America. To achieve these goals we need all the help we can get from the international community to assist with resources, volunteers and personal contacts. Together, we can change children's futures and live our Artistic Dreams!

To learn more about ADI or make a donation go to www.artisticdreams.org or contact Lillian directly: lillian@artisticdreams.org

LILLIAN ALONZO MARÍN

Photography: Sergio R. Reyes, Caridad Sola.