

Interview

Following the tracings of The Red Pencil

Amanda Levey interviews Laurence Vandenborre, founder of The Red Pencil Humanitarian Foundation (www.redpencil.org/about/), to explore how the art-therapy-focused foundation was established, and the factors that have contributed to its rapid growth.

Keywords

Art therapy, disaster relief, The Red Pencil, Singapore, Red Cross

Amanda Levey: *I'm very pleased to talk to you about The Red Pencil. It's a very innovative idea. I'd like you to talk about the history of the idea.*

Laurence Vandenborre: The very initial seed idea of the Red Pencil started in 2004, after the tsunami in South East Asia. At the time I was working at Raffles Hospital [in Singapore] and I worked with a couple of French-speaking children who had been in the tsunami and were repatriated to Singapore, whether those families were staying in Singapore or going back to Europe. Within a few sessions, the children could overcome some post traumatic stress disorder symptoms, and this was affirmed by the testimony of their mothers.

In March 2010, in Zurich, I met with Charlotte Leber who is the founder and President of the Swiss Art Therapy Foundation. Charlotte was intervening in five university hospitals all over Switzerland (today she intervenes in ten university hospitals). We decided to collaborate for the ultimate benefit of the art therapy profession and, by June of the same year, The Red Pencil was registered in Singapore.

AL: *What were the most important factors that contributed to the initial development of The Red Pencil?*

LV: What made us more public is our promotional video and our website. Those two things somehow brought us more in the public eye. We also asked for official charity status in Singapore. We started immediately to do work that was really well-received everywhere. One of the very first initiatives was to approach KK hospital, which is the largest hospital for children in Singapore, and they liked the idea.

We found a generous sponsor who accepted to do the sponsorship for that full-time art therapy service at KK Hospital. It is the Red Pencil that is officially the sponsor for those kinds of projects but in the background we have generous donors who believe in what we are doing.

AL: *Can you explain the charitable foundation system in Singapore?*

LV: After we received the initial charity status, we requested the second step of this process, which is the 'Institute of Public Character'. Any donation where the beneficiaries are in Singapore gets a 250 percent tax rebate. It is an interesting scheme, not only because people are more willing to donate, but also because it means that, being governed by the Singapore Ministry of Social and Family Development, all accounts are checked and audited. Which means that all your procedures are clean and every single cent that someone donates is really used for the benefit of the children and totally in line with the mission of The Red Pencil.

AL: *I'm interested in the relationship with the Red Cross. Could you talk about how you established that, and what it looks like now?*

LV: As part of our international development, I thought that it would be good to work closely with an organisation which is well-organised and acts fast in a situation of emergency, and that it really made sense to bring art therapy as part of their psychosocial support to families affected by natural disasters. So some people introduced us to each other and the relationship developed well and fast. So when there is an emergency, I am the one to go with the first assessment medical team, to see on the ground what can be done, if anything can be done,