

Using Theater and Other Creative Methods to Educate on the Human Rights of Women and Girls

The Garden of Hope Foundation

THE GARDEN OF HOPE FOUNDATION is a non-governmental organization founded in Taiwan in 1988 with a mission to rehabilitate misfortunate children, youths, women and their families; and promote gender justice and advocate for social and educational reform. The Garden of Hope's vision is a world free of sexual violence, sexual exploitation and domestic violence.

The Garden of Hope Foundation started with one halfway home to rescue girls and young women who had been trafficked from rural areas into the red-light district of Taipei City. The first seed that became the Garden of Hope was planted in 1985 by a group of local Taiwanese Christian women led by US missionary Angie Golmon, who founded the "Rainbow Project" to rescue girls who had been sold into prostitution.

The mission of the first halfway home was to be a place for troubled girls to call home, where they could learn and learn to love other people, where they could forgive themselves and forgive their abusers, where they could improve themselves, where they could be like other normal teenagers, and a place that gave them hope, nourishment, encouragement, and inspiration.

The original founders wanted the halfway home to be a place of hope where the girls could grow and bloom like fragrant flowers – which is why they called it "The Garden of Hope" when they officially registered the organization in May 1988.

Angie Golmon did not speak Chinese or have counseling experience, but she was fortunate enough to have a talented group of people around her, who developed the organization into a much larger enterprise. Today the Garden of Hope runs shelters, service stations, call centers and employment programs for women and girls in Taiwan and the United States. It also counsels pregnant teenagers and vulnerable youths, and campaigns for the rights of women and girls all over Asia.

Last year the Garden of Hope helped over 15,000 people in more than 170,000 individual service actions in Taiwan alone. The Garden of Hope has

over 500 staff and some fifty service points throughout Taiwan, including counseling centers, legal advice centers, employment training centers, and twenty shelters, transitional houses, and independent dormitories for women, children and girls who are affected by domestic violence, sexual abuse and exploitation.

To meet the needs of its clients after they leave the safety of the shelter, in 2013 the Garden of Hope launched a new program to help its clients “go the second mile” by combining a package of employment and housing services to help women to be economically independent, able to escape abuse and to achieve their goals.

In addition to its direct services, the Garden of Hope has been a strong and effective advocate for the human rights of women and girls. One of the Garden of Hope’s earliest campaigns resulted in the enactment of the Child and Youth Sexual Transaction Prevention Act (recently renamed the Child and Youth Sexual Exploitation Act) in 1995.

Since then, the Garden of Hope has worked in close cooperation with the Taiwanese government, lobbied for progressive policies, reformed outdated laws and introduced new legislation such as the Domestic Violence Prevention Act and the Sexual Assault Prevention Act.

In partnership with other women’s groups, the Garden of Hope has successfully campaigned for the government to introduce internationally accepted practices and standards into Taiwanese society, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In 2008, the Garden of Hope and six other local NGOs formed the Taiwan NGO CEDAW Report Working Group to create the first NGO Report of Taiwan. Since then, the Garden of Hope has been involved in producing the CEDAW shadow reports on violence against women in 2011 and 2014.

In recognition of its work, over the years the Garden of Hope has picked up a number of awards at both home and abroad, including several prestigious international prizes: 2004 NGO of the Year, Asia-Pacific Region, Resource Alliance; 2005 Kellogg’s Child Development Award, World of Children Awards; and Changemakers Innovation Award, Ashoka Foundation.

In 2007, the Garden of Hope became the first Taiwanese social welfare organization to obtain the ISO-9001 standard. Among other international and national awards and recognitions, in 2015 the Garden of Hope was placed 16th in a list of the top 500 NGOs in the world by the Global _Geneva.

The Asian Girl Campaign

In 2003, the Garden of Hope launched the Formosan Day of the Daughter and the Formosan Daughters Awards to empower Taiwanese girls, help break down the stereotypes surrounding them, and encourage girls to achieve their full potential. In 2007 the Garden of Hope campaigned for the Taiwanese government to declare a “Daughters Day”, which at the time fell on deaf ears.

That campaign received new impetus in 2011 when the United Nations (UN) declared October 11 the International Day of the Girl Child, prompting the Garden of Hope to reissue the call to officially mark the “Day of the Girl”, which the Taiwanese government did in 2013.

The Garden of Hope decided to mark the occasion of the first International Day of the Girl Child in 2012 by launching an Asia-wide campaign to mobilize support for the Day of the Girl, and focus on the specific problems facing Asian girls.

The region-wide movement to promote the UN International Day of the Girl Child around Asia was founded on the view that if you empower girls you empower the world, and if you invest in girls you invest in the future. The Garden of Hope advocates for the Day of the Girl by calling on people all over Asia to get involved in the campaign and volunteer as partners, to empower and improve the status of Asian girls.

People can take a number of actions such as wearing a signature Asian-style Day of the Girl scarf, holding an event or putting up Day of the Girl posters in their school or community, writing letters to government leaders urging them to observe the Day of the Girl, organizing an online campaign, and running a program or holding a series of lectures to help empower girls in their community.

The Garden of Hope chose the “Taiwan Red” floral fabric for the Asian Girl Campaign scarves, and as the motif for its Day of the Girl celebrations, because the design represents the world of “exciting and endless possibilities” that girls can create.

Taiwan Red is a traditional pattern of the Hakka peoples, who can be found all over the Asian region. The so-called “fabric that ties us together” is a unified symbol to bring together girls (and boys) in different countries and regions, and from of all walks of life, in a common show of support for the Day of the Girl on October 11.



Taiwanese girls show off the “Girl Day” flags in the Taiwan red flora pattern.

In addition to the advocacy campaign, the Garden of Hope offers mini grants and other resources to its Asian partners to help them organize their own Girl Day events. The movement has inspired some 100,000 girls, and boys, to rise up in close to twenty Asian countries through letter-writing campaigns, street marches, concerts, sports events, and media campaigns.

Since the Day of the Girl is one day after the “10-10” or “double ten” National Day in Taiwan on October 10, the Garden of Hope combined the two concepts by organizing a flag-raising ceremony for a girl-friendly nation, and produced flags in the pattern as the floral scarves. The concept of raising a flag for girls has caught

the imagination of the Taiwanese public and helped promote the goals of the campaign in Taiwan.

Other Projects to Promote the Human Rights of Girls

The Garden of Hope has been running other successful projects in Taiwan for the last decade to celebrate the Formosan Day of the Daughter, and now the Taiwan Day of the Girl.

Work Day: This work experience program is designed to encourage girls to develop their talents and achieve their full potential. By shadowing a professional career woman for a day, like a judge, a doctor, or an entrepreneur, girls are able to see themselves in those successful roles, raise the level of their aspirations, and learn about leadership, communication and decision-making.

Power Camp: Led by a facilitator, girls learn about media literacy skills, how to advocate for themselves, and how to resist the pervasive mass media message that appearance is all that counts. Power Camps not only help develop the potential of girls, but also encourage adults, parents, and teachers to revise their views about girls.

Rite of Initiation: A Rite of Initiation is an event to celebrate coming of age. The ceremony is a real boost for girls' self-esteem, and helps open their eyes to their true potential and the options available to them. The Garden of Hope's experience has shown us that girls can become leaders of the future if you encourage them to dream, discover and grow.

Daughter Awards: Every year, the Garden of Hope hands out Formosa Daughter Awards to girls who have made outstanding achievements in the categories of Math and Science, Courage, Community Service, Creativity, and Physical Capability. The awards are designed to serve as a catalyst to develop talented girls and raise public awareness about the potentials and the needs of girls.

Study Tour: Every year, the Garden of Hope takes the winners of the Formosa Daughter Awards on a trip to somewhere new, home or abroad, where they get involved in the local community by working with organizations, businesses or the media. The Garden of Hope also encourages the girls to learn a skill while they are on their journey.

“Across Borders” Cooperative Girl Empowerment Theater Project

As part of the Day of the Girl events in Taiwan in 2014, the Garden of Hope invited the New York theater company Girl Be Heard to Taiwan to produce a play called “Across Borders” with the Garden of Hope's GIRLS Theater Group of teenage girls and survivors of domestic and sexual abuse under the care of the Garden of Hope's “Ruth” shelter in Kaohsiung.

Girl Be Heard is a not-for-profit theater collective formed to empower young women in disadvantaged areas of New York by providing a safe environment for girls to write, direct and perform their own productions under the guidance of professionals. Topics addressed include identity, body image, violence, and human rights. Girl Be Heard has performed at the White House, the United Nations, and on national and international tours.

With the assistance of the Garden of Hope, Girl Be Heard led three ensemble workshops with six girls who were staying at the Ruth Shelter. Through the Garden of Hope's GIRL Theater Program (GIRLS), the girls had previous experience of performing in front of an audience.

The Garden of Hope invited the GIRLS artist director to join the workshops to act as a translator, learn from the Girl Be Heard visitors and help the Taiwanese girls adjust to a new method of working. The ensemble work-

shops were also attended by two Garden of Hope social workers and the director of the Garden of Hope's international affairs department.

The Garden of Hope and Girl Be Heard were natural partners for this collaborative project, which was made possible with the support of the American Institute in Taipei (AIT). Following a visit by the Garden of Hope's CEO to Girl Be Heard's office in Manhattan in March 2014, the two organizations communicated via the internet and telephone to negotiate the terms and conditions of the partnership and draw up a contract.

The original plan was to bring girls from New York to Taiwan to produce a collaborative play together with Taiwanese girls, but due to budget constraints this idea was slimmed down to bring just the founder and CEO of Girl Be Heard and the artist director.

The pair arrived on 3 October 2014, and travelled directly to the Garden of Hope's office in Kaohsiung to guide a team of six Taiwanese junior secondary school girls through a series of ensemble workshops and rehearsals, before showing the results of their work at two shows in Kaohsiung and two shows in Taipei. The culminating performance was at the Garden of Hope's Annual Formosa and Asian Girl Award Ceremony in Taipei on October 11 on the International Day of the Girl.

The girls chose the subject of street sexual harassment as the theme for the performance. The original piece, written and performed by the girls, not only provided a platform for the girls to break through the barriers of trauma and oppression but also inspired audiences to challenge gender stereotypes.

The process of creating the play started with a briefing with the artistic teams from the two organizations. Then Girl Be Heard staff met with the Taiwanese girls and started with ice-breaking and warm-up exercises. The girls wrote down the issues that mattered to them on a large sheet of paper. The Girl Be Heard facilitators identified street sexual harassment as a culture-crossing theme, and encouraged the girls to say and then write down what they would like to say to a harasser if they were not held back by safety concerns, embarrassment, fears, gender roles, or cultural constraints.

On the morning of the second day, the Girl Be Heard team helped the Taiwanese girls develop the comments into a script, with dance moves and adapted songs from the Girl Be Heard repertoire, and facts and figures on the status of gender justice in Taiwan.

The final workshop on the afternoon of the second day was devoted to polishing the script and rehearsing the performance, before debriefing the girls.

As well as performing four shows in Taipei and Kaohsiung, *Girl Be Heard* and *GIRLS* took part in three forums and one press conference reaching a total of five hundred people in live performances and public forums. The events were also widely covered in local and national media.

While in Taiwan, *Girl Be Heard* staff also met with local social workers, teachers, politicians, students and leaders of Taiwan's feminist theater movement at workshops and public forums in Kaohsiung and Taipei to discuss issues of empowerment and investment in girls.

In Kaohsiung, the visitors from *Girl Be Heard* met with the city mayor and the director of the Social Welfare Bureau. The forum in Kaohsiung was attended by officials from the Social Welfare Bureau, staff from the Kaohsiung City Women's Center, and social workers and staff from the Garden of Hope and other organizations.

Speakers at the Taipei forum included the president of the Cai Ruiyue Cultural Foundation, the CEO of the Women's Rescue Foundation, the Secretary General of the Taiwan Youth Alliance, the Director of the AIT, and the CEO of the Garden of Hope Foundation.

The performances and forums in both Kaohsiung and Taipei were well received and provoked interesting discussions on the topics of the therapeutic value of theater for survivors of gender violence, the conflict between the need to protect the identities of survivors and the benefits of letting survivors tell their stories, and how to inspire young people to take an interest in wider social issues.

In addition to impacting the audiences who saw the live show, the project had a direct therapeutic and confidence-building effect on the girls themselves. Performer Yammy, age 15 said "Because of my past I did not have any confidence; taking part in the *Girl Be Heard* program gave me confidence. Social workers help to build our confidence to face the future, but *Girl Be Heard* is different. It gives me confidence to express my individuality and see the most beautiful side of my character." Xuanxuan, age 14 said "Perhaps when girls from other countries see our performance, it will give them confidence too."

The Director of the Garden of Hope's Kaohsiung branch office said, "The Garden of Hope has an established theater program for our girls called

the GIRLS theater group. Their performances usually portray personal and touching stories from their own lives. Girl Be Heard connected those stories to wider social issues, which was a very different and empowering experience for them.”

The two social workers who sat in on the ensemble workshops said they saw a different side to the girls during the intensive two-day process of writing and rehearsing the show. The social workers noted how the girls had grown in confidence, how hard they worked, and the creativity and natural talent they showed.

The shows were widely covered by the media and produced a very positive response from the audiences. At the group discussions following the shows to high school students in both Kaohsiung and Taipei, members of the audience were encouraged to speak up about incidents of abuse and harassment in their pasts. A visiting Asian girl ambassador from Cambodia was so inspired by the show in Kaohsiung that she joined the final performance in Taipei.

The following year, the Garden of Hope brought the four members of the GIRLS group to New York on the occasion of the 59th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in March 2015 to put on a collaborative show with Girl Be Heard girls. The joint performances took place at the Church Center of the United Nations and at the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office (TECO) in New York.



The GIRLS/Girl Be Heard team perform at the Rose Historical Site in Taipei.

“Across Borders” script (English translation)

(The girls enter singing a song): Taiwan, Taiwan. I am a girl. I am a Taiwanese girl. I am a Taiwanese girl. Taiwan.

Meimei: Passed in 1998, the Domestic Violence Prevention Act in Taiwan was the first of its kind in Asia to prevent domestic violence.

All: Yes!

Hongyu: This important law broke the myth that the state should stay out of marital affairs that prevailed in traditional societies.

All: Yes!

Yammy: The percentage of women in parliament increased from 19.1% in 1998 to 33.6% in 2012.

All: Yes!

Zhihui: Female executives as well as managers climbed from 14.8% in 2001 to 23.2% in 2012.

All: Yes!

Xuanxuan: Although Taiwan performs well in gender equality compared to other Asian countries, including China, Japan and Korea, when it comes to street sexual harassment we still have a long way to go.

(The girls introduce themselves): My name is Meimei. I'm 13 years old. I'm not an object, I'm a living person. (Xuanxuan, 14. Zhihui, 14. Hongyu, 13. Yammy, 15).

All: We are girls. Our voices must be heard. We're not objects, we're persons.

(All chant): Don't touch, touch, touch. Don't touch me, bye-bye! Don't touch, touch, touch. Don't touch me, bye-bye! Hey girls, stand up bravely for yourself, stand up. Say what's on your mind, Proudly say we are girls! Don't touch, touch, touch. Don't touch me, bye-bye! Bye-bye, bye-bye, bye-bye!

Meimei: Yesterday I was waiting for the bus, two guys stared at me and the driver waved at us. It made our skin crawl. I'm 14, you look 40. I could be your daughter.

All: I could be your daughter. I could be your daughter. I could be your daughter. I could be your daughter. We could all be your daughters. Would you treat your daughter like that?

Hongyu: If I get sexually harassed, I get nervous, I'd feel uneasy, and want to escape.

Xuanxuan: If I get sexually harassed, I feel scared, very scared, and want to bury myself so no one can see me or find me. And I feel awful and want to throw up. If I could answer back, I would say, keep looking and I'm going to take you to the police station. See if you dare keep looking.

Zhihui: Don't harass me. I feel scared, want to run away, please don't look at me, I tell my friend can't they stop looking.

Yammy: If I get sexually harassed, I want to get away, afraid, nervous, heart beats faster, want to run away, tell myself this isn't real. If I could say something I would say: Your parents didn't give you eyes to stare at girls!

(Other girls play harassers): You're a pretty girl. Wanna date? Wanna come home with me? Why don't you say something? Do you want to go home with me? Do you want to go home with me?

Yammy: Stop! No matter where, wherever girls are, sexual harassment happens. Even waiting at the bus stop we're scared strangers will come by and say: You're pretty, want to date? Want to come home with me? In school and department store women's toilets hidden cameras have been found. These are all examples of sexual harassment. We hope society can respect women and give us a space. We need to be brave so when harassment happens we can bravely say NO!

(Song "This Is My Body")

Yammy: This this is my body, My sacred temple. This this is my body, My sacred temple.

All: This this is my body, My sacred temple. This this is my body, My sacred temple. This this is my body, My sacred temple.

Xuanxuan: This this is my body, so don't touch me.

Meimei: This this is my body, not for you to stare at.

Hongyu: This this is my body, so don't harass me.

Zhihui: This this is my body, please respect me.

Yammy: This this is my body, not to satisfy you.

All: This this is my body, My sacred temple. This this is my body, I want to be respected. This this is my body, I don't want to live in fear again. This this is my body, so take your dirty mind somewhere else.

The Vagina Monologues and "Shidi"

The Garden of Hope's commitment to theater started in 2005 with a staging of the Vagina Monologues. This would be the first of a series of annual shows of Eve Ensler's play, and marked the start of a long relationship between the Garden of Hope and V-Day, which included launching a V-Men movement and the One Billion Rising campaign in Taiwan.



The visitors from Girl Be Heard enjoy the show with the VIP audience at the Formosan & Asian Girl Awards.

In 2015, the Garden of Hope produced the first fully Taiwanese version of the “Vagina Monologues” with stories of Taiwanese women called: “Shidi: Episode I”. The series of monologues tell the history of gender empowerment in Taiwan, starting with three stories in “Episode I” on the topics of sexual abuse, child prostitution and bar girls.

The title of the Taiwanese home-grown Vagina Monologues can be interpreted in many different ways. “Shi” means “to pick up” and “di” means “empress”; but the two Chinese characters can also be read to mean “ten clitorises”. Together “shidi” refers to the ten monologues in the series, and also symbolizes recovering (or picking up) the hidden stories of Taiwanese women and empowering women to rule their realm.

In June 2016 the Garden of Hope released “Shidi: Episode II,” which centered on intimate partner violence. The show focused on the trauma of children witnessing domestic violence (CWDV), with three monologues on date violence, cohabiting and marital violence, and the physical and psychological trauma of CWDV.

The play, which attracted an audience of over four hundred, highlighted not only the physical and verbal aspects of intimate partner violence, which are most visible to outside observers, but also the underlying psychological trauma and financial abuse that can leave the deepest scars.



“Shidi: Episode II” vividly depicts the physical and psychological trauma of domestic violence on the children.

The Garden of Hope’s productions of the Vagina Monologues and later Shidi were mainly performed by the Barefoot Alice theater group, who are a team of survivors of violence. After benefitting from the Garden of Hope’s services, including art and performance therapy, the women were empowered to form their own theater group, which they called Barefoot Alice.

At the end of each “Shidi: Episode II” performance, Barefoot Alice held a “Domestic Violence Impromptu Show”. The show employed the “playback theater” technique to interact and connect with the audience, get them involved in a self-reflection process, deepen their awareness of the social issue brought up in the monologues, and spread the message of gender equality.

The playback theater method involves inviting the audience to tell their stories to the actors, who then reenact them on stage through improvisation. Also called the “one person, one story” method, the playback theater technique takes individual acting skill and unspoken understanding between the team members to retell stories while also raising gender issues.

At a show in Hsinchu on International Women’s Day in 2016, Barefoot Alice invited the city mayor to share his thoughts on the most important women in his life. He said, “My mother and my wife are the most important women in my life!” The mayor went on to explain how his mother made sure

he gained back the 11 kilos he lost during the elections, and how his wife supports him with love and compassion while he devotes himself to civic affairs.

Through the “one person, one story” method, Barefoot Alice improvised the mayor’s story. One of the theater group members sang, while other members moved expressively in time with the music. The performance deeply touched the audience, moving many to tears.

Afterwards, Barefoot Alice held a workshop called “Darling, I would like to say...” at the Hsinchu Women’s Center. The actors used audience members’ names, clothing, and personality traits as materials for their show. Through the performance, each member of the audience had the chance to ponder whether their individual traits were the products of nature or nurture.

For example, during the workshop an audience member categorized “assertiveness” as a male trait, but another considered it more of a female trait. Barefoot Alice took advantage of the opportunity to convey the message that every individual can seek their own destiny, rather than being confined by their gender.

Concluding Remarks

The Garden of Hope’s experience from the Asian Girl Campaign, the Vagina Monologues, to the “Shidi” monologues, has shown that creativity and art can be combined with activism to raise awareness of issues, and have an impact on social reform. Theater in particular is a powerful tool to educate actors and audiences alike on human rights issues. The “playback theater” method has the capacity to help audiences see themselves, recognize their strengths, point out their shortcomings, and spark controversies and create conversations that can inspire and evoke change.