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Have a Flower. It's for the Children.

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Melanie Stevenson of Garden in Transit preparing some of the 80,000 flowers that will be distributed by schoolchildren throughout the city today. (Photo: Librado Romero/The New York Times)

Are those flower-power taxis an advertisement for a new Austin Powers movie or a protest against Iraq? Neither, no matter what stories city residents and taxi drivers are making up about it. As City Room reported in September, it's a children's art project, Garden in Transit.

Today, to counter misconceptions about the project, the group responsible, Portraits of Hope, is dispatching schoolchildren to hand out 80,000 "sustainable" flowers around the city — one for each flower painted on taxis as part of Garden in Transit. (The fresh flowers were donated by the Veriflora sustainability program.)

Thousands of children from 25 schools are participating in the giveaway in all five boroughs, not only in their neighborhoods but perhaps most noticeably in Manhattan along Broadway from Harlem to the Financial District.

The group said it wanted to raise awareness that the painted flowers on the taxis are actually a community art project done by volunteers and children, including sick and disabled children from hospitals.

According to the group, there are a lot of rumors circulating about the flowers, both among the public and the taxi drivers. They say that the top three people or groups that the public believes painted the flowers are:

- One artist, alone
- Kids in Africa (Most commonly Darfur)
- The Taxi and Limousine Commission

And the top 10-plus wrong reasons given for the flowers:

- Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg's birthday celebration
- An ad campaign for 1) the Whitney Museum exhibition 2) a new Austin Powers movie 3) a new investment fund aimed at baby boomers
- To identify cars with G.P.S.
- To protest G.P.S.
- For non-hybrid vehicles
- Raising money for something somehow related to the 1960s
- A protest against the war in Iraq
- A political campaign for 1) Hillary Rodham Clinton 2) Rudolph W. Giuliani 3) Michael R. Bloomberg
- A religious celebration that is 1) Jewish 2) Muslim or 3) Christian (in that order)
- Because Upper East Side residents wanted something new to see from their high-rise apartments (this has been hypothesized more than once, they promise)

City Room, rules-obsessed as always, asked what kind of permissions were needed for the flower giveaway that will turn the city into a living floral arrangement today.

It turns out no permit is required if the groups of children are limited to fewer than 50, the definition of a "parade" by police standards. Then again, busting schoolchildren for giving away free flowers would be a bit draconian.