

DRUMBEAT[®] - The HOW! and the WHY?

The Holyoake DRUMBEAT[®] program arose out of the failure of traditional, talk based, interventions to engage many young people facing social challenges that put them at risk of harm. These young people are often socially isolated and their behaviour's often reinforce that isolation. Holyoake was looking for a way to engage young people, lift their self-confidence and teach them a range of life-skills that would enable them to reintegrate themselves with the community around them in a healthy way.

Although developed originally for young Aboriginal men, the Holyoake DRUMBEAT[®] program now is being used with a wide range of population groups including adults. The program is an exploration of relationships central to healthy social function and is thus relevant to a wide range of people who find themselves socially isolated or alienated from their community. Organisations utilising DRUMBEAT[®] include schools, (elementary & secondary), prisons, mental health facilities, trauma centres, refugee services, drug and alcohol rehabilitation centres, children's hospitals, youth services and child protection centres.

The drum is a perfect medium to engage young people – it's exciting (cool), it's easy to play (reduces fear of failure), it's powerful (demands attention), and playing it is physical (releases tension). The drum is an instrument many people feel comfortable with, and playing it with others is a very safe way of communicating. The drum often becomes an object of security and comfort and provides an outlet for emotional expression and creativity.

Music has been linked to increased academic performance, (Hallam, 2009), yet in many schools music lessons have become a luxury and many students have very little opportunity to play music. Music provides emotional support for many people – we use it to relax, to energise, to connect to others and as reinforcement for our thoughts and values. The DRUMBEAT program furthers this existing relationship people have with music and opens up a new recreational avenue for expression and fun that is pro-social. It is known that poor use of recreational time is a risk factor for many health and social problems and having music as a recreational pastime allows the benefits of the program to continue once it has finished.

There have been multiple studies done of participants and outcomes from attendance at DRUMBEAT[®] programs with three published studies in peer reviewed journals. DRUMBEAT develops persistence, patience and commitment. Evaluations of the program have shown that young people are more willing and able to engage in mainstream group activities upon completing DRUMBEAT[®]; they have improved emotional regulation, feel more confident, less anxious and have a greater sense of belonging (UWA, 2009). These changes have been maintained for participants 12 months after completing the program.

DRUMBEAT[®] does include a discussion element that requires participants to reflect on their lives, and their relationships; in particular their feelings and behaviours. These conversations are drawn from analogies taken from the group drumming experience. With the safety of the drum as a communication medium, participants, who may otherwise be reluctant to join in, quickly develop the confidence to participate. The learning from these conversations is physically demonstrated towards the end of the program in the advances participants make in learning to play music together. The quality of the music is a direct reflection of their social skills.

The program is generally taught to groups of 8 – 10 participants across ten, one hour sessions over the period of ten weeks and finishes with a performance. However there is considerable flexibility in the program, allowing the facilitator to modify content and its application in line with the needs of their clients. DRUMBEAT[®] is a relationship program and for most people relationships are central to their life's meaning and happiness. The drum circle reflects a community, whether it is the family, the school or the work place – it provides a safe place to

explore human relationships and practice the skills that enable healthy social interaction and connection. Sessions are structured and have specific themes that explore issues such as Peer Pressure, Dealing with Emotions, Bullying, Identity, Social Responsibility & Teamwork.

The six session themes are used to draw attention to the experience of the drummers in the group and how those experiences relate to the way they interact with others more generally. The facilitator introduces the theme of the week and then draws analogies from the group interaction to everyday life. Questions that are attached to the syllabus draw out these themes in further detail.

For example in week one participants are asked to think about a rhythmic world (What rhythms do you see around you or have within you?), and to question what rhythms can tell us about each other (Can you think of a time when your rhythm has been out of time with those around you? What happened? How did that feel?), and to explore how rhythms offer us clues about the world around us (What happens when rhythms change suddenly or become unstable? What happens when people are unreliable or can't be trusted?).

The DRUMBEAT® program is however primarily an experiential process that does not rely heavily on conversation, (Ratio 70/30 experiential- cognitive behavioural). It is flexible enough that, if necessary, the main learning outcomes can be achieved through participating in the group process and music-making alone. In the music group, participants learn how to co-operate, collaborate and communicate without the threat of misunderstanding and judgment that dialogue can bring, and that has often contributed to their isolation in the first place.

These qualities make the DRUMBEAT® program a useful one when working with people from other cultures whose communication skills are under- developed and have the potential to isolate them socially. Other groups utilising DRUMBEAT® include people with low levels of literacy or high levels of anxiety around social interaction.

In Australia the DRUMBEAT® program is taught in schools not only as a behavioural change intervention or prevention initiative but as a recognised curriculum unit in 'personal development'. DRUMBEAT Facilitation is also taught as an optional unit to 4th year undergraduate teachers, psychologists, youth workers and occupational therapists at Edith Cowan University.

For professionals wanting to utilise the Holyoake DRUMBEAT® program in their work, Holyoake deliver a three day training program, accredited under the National Training Authority that comprises one day of group facilitation skills and how to work with challenging behaviours, as well as two days of theory and practice in the DRUMBEAT® program itself. For information on the training program and upcoming dates in your area email drumbeat@holyoake.org.au or visit www.holyoake.org.au/drumbeat

Alternatively professionals can study to become a DRUMBEAT® facilitator online and in their own time from September 2012 – again visit www.holyoake.org.au/drumbeat for further information.



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