



## **DRUMBEAT - The HOW! and the WHY?**

The 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 program now is being used with a wide range of population groups including adults in prisons and mental health facilities.

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 has a magnetic attraction to all people, and playing it with others is a very safe way of communicating. For many of the people we work with the drum becomes an object of security and comfort.

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. The DRUMBEAT program brings music back into the lives of young people and opens up a new recreational avenue for expression and fun that is pro-social.

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 the program; 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.

Like many cognitive based programs DRUMBEAT does talk to participants about their lives, and their relationships. These conversations are drawn from analogies taken from the group drumming experience. With the safety of the drum as a communication medium, young people 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 music is a direct reflection of their social skills.

The program is taught to groups of 8 – 10 participants across ten, one hour sessions over the period of ten weeks and finishes with a performance. 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 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 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. The program has become popular in the Intensive English Centre's where large groups of African youth are arriving and the evaluations from those centre's have been highly positive. In remote Aboriginal communities similar barriers are preventing people from learning and here too the DRUMBEAT program has been welcomed.

DRUMBEAT has recently been endorsed as a unit in self development by the West Australian Curriculum Council. This means students in senior high school (years 10,11&12) can now study DRUMBEAT as a recognized unit towards their West Australian Certificate of Education. This format also fits the requirements of the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning and the South Australian Certificate of Education.

Training in the DRUMBEAT program is being conducted by Holyoake around Australia via co-operative arrangements with Holyoake's interstate affiliates and other health based organizations. The three day training is accredited under the National Training Authority and comprises one day of group facilitation skills and how to work with defiant youth, 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](mailto:drumbeat@holyoake.org.au) or visit [www.holyoake.org.au](http://www.holyoake.org.au)