

## **DRUMBEAT review – Research Report – Required for Senior Facilitator Accreditation**

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(STTARS)**

### **Summary of Results**

This report looks at a weekly DRUMBEAT program run by Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service (STTARS) at a Private boy's school in South Australia in term 3 of 2011. The report will address findings that support the participant's increase in self esteem, and observed increase in social skills, pride, confidence and team work. Additionally the feedback from participants in regard to the fun they had, skills they learnt and feelings of teamwork they developed was overwhelmingly positive, which were noted to have had positive effects in the classroom and schoolyard behaviours.

### **Issues which the Program is directing at addressing.**

STTARS is a non government, not for profit organisation that assists people from a refugee and migrant background who have experienced torture or been traumatised as a result of persecution, violence, war or unlawful imprisonment prior to arrival in Australia. However more specifically I work within STTARS's Child and Youth Program. Within our team we offer individual and group work to assist young people in relation to their on going symptoms of traumatic stress such as; hyper arousal, sleep difficulties, exaggerated startle response, intrusive memories, unable to concentrate, unable to achieve a state of calm, disassociation, anxiety, fear and difficulty with trust.

A young person whom is experiencing the aforementioned symptoms can often find their environment threatening and difficult to negotiate. Hence in the STTARS Child and Youth Program we work closely with schools and agencies, educating them in this area so as to identify young people from a refugee background who could benefit from contact with our agency. Often the school will make an individual referral or a request for a group based intervention.

Our work is underpinned by a creative, respectful and holistic approach of trauma recovery principles, drawing from theories (Herman, Perry, Rothschild, Malchiodi, to name a few) that work with the client's psychological, social and physical well being. The combined use of art, music and cognitive interventions are all used.

Additionally as we work with clients in both a group and individual context we often will discover the on going difficulties many of our clients have in relation to family violence, relationship difficulties, loss of hope, depression symptoms, social isolation, learning/concentration difficulties, drug and alcohol abuse, racism, settlement difficulties and others.

Hence the DRUMBEAT program is seen as a relevant intervention for our program to use and draw from, as it can be used to address the above mentioned difficulties our clients often face, as well as offering a repetitive activity that can be used as a form of regulation of hyper arousal.

## **Nature of DRUMBEAT program**

The STTARS Child and Youth program has been using drumming as a form of intervention for over four years. As mentioned above this has been a response to adopting a trauma recovery model which offers activities which help young people experience calm. The DRUMBEAT program has given our practice a framework to learn from, critique and practice. Hence in this DRUMBEAT program our goal was to explore relationships and emotions, while building collaboration, self esteem and a skill and interest in music (DRUMBEAT objectives), but also to explore how rhythm can be engaging for young people whom are witnessed in the classroom and at home to be hyper aroused as per symptoms consistent with traumatic stress. Therefore the goals and objects are shared between the traditional objectives of the DRUMBEAT modality and also that of trauma recovery. However all the quantitative data was collected only to evaluate the objects of traditional DRUMBEAT objectives. However positive observations were made which contrast the feedback from classroom teachers regarding the participant's engagement in the activity of rhythm.

Throughout the program each week was followed as per the DRUMBEAT facilitator manual, with many of the activities becoming favourites that were requested to be revisited in the following weeks; Drum as I Dance, Rumble If, Rhythm Detective, Peer Pressure game and Bass is the Community. The program was run as a weekly group on the school campus on Wednesday mornings, finishing in the final week of term with a performance to the youngest class within the school, 4-5 year olds, followed by a party and certificate giving in the school Counsellor's office.

## **Participants**

The group that is being reported on in this document was a request from an all boy's school here in Adelaide. They had 8 participants from two different year levels, year 8 and 9. They were all identified by the school counsellor and multicultural liaison worker as being students whom had substantial difficulties in the classroom, with peers, in their home life, had experienced forced separation from their family and/or had disclosed psychological distress in relation to past memories. The participants were from a Liberian, Sudanese, Afghani and Congolese background, all having arrived on humanitarian visas. More specific issues facing the members of the group ranged from; being unaccompanied minors, awaiting visa approval of their sponsored family's resettlement in Australia, family break down, recent grief and loss, recent school suspensions regarding theft and violence, on going social isolation, difficulty with learning English, distress regarding reports of violence in country of origin, night mares and on going family violence.

All participants attended until the final session and joined in a final session party/performance to the youngest children in the school. However often we didn't have the full number of participants each week due to the participants not attending school regularly, the weekly average being 6-7 participants.

## **Facilitation Staff**

I (David Wild) conducted the DRUMBEAT program. I have a Social Work degree, have worked with children and youth for approximately 8 years. Since my time at STTARS I have attended numerous professional development trainings regarding working with children and youth, trauma and trauma recovery. The program was co facilitated with a colleague (also with a Social Work degree) whom sadly left employment at STTARS two weeks from the end of the program. Having him leave was not ideal, however it did pose an opportunity to discuss topics such as departures, how to support those departing and those whom are staying. Often when the STTARS Child and Youth Team run groups in schools a school teacher or counsellor also attends the group, however this was not the case with this group.

## **Evaluation**

Throughout the whole program an evaluation was conducted. The participants were given a pre and post evaluation using Rosenberg's self esteem scale. The participants were also given DRUMBEAT's session 5 and session 10 'Participant Feedback Sheet' and key quotes from the participants were noted for inclusion in this report.

Additionally the school's counsellor was interviewed before starting the program, throughout the program and upon completion; her key quotes were noted and included in this report. The school counsellor maintained contact with the participant's class room teachers and families, feeding relevant information back to me, so as to better understand some of the substantial difficulties some of the participants were currently dealing with.

## **Results**

Rosenberg: Upon review of the pre and post evaluation using the Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale the average score had changed for the better. The average score before the first session was 16.8 and after the final session was 21.2. This result was also supported by comments from the school counsellor stating the participants were noted as speaking with an increased sense of pride about their skills and involvement in the DRUMBEAT program. The findings from this research were however not easy to compile due to the limited english the participants had. The participants all had good enough english to study full time in a private secondary college (where the program was held), however many of the participants stated the difficulty of filling out the Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale due to the occasional use of double negatives to answer in the positive, for example; no, I don't think I'm no good at all. Therefore see below for observations and interviews with the school counsellor which are also important to take into account.

Facilitator observations: Throughout the duration of the term long program, many participants were noted to be participating positively, with more energy and collaborating with the rest of the group better as time went on. The earlier weeks had been difficult with fighting amongst the boys, name calling and bullying, negative comments about why using drums and why they had to do it at this particular lesson time. Participants also were noted to have said they'd like to leave and do their

homework, or study for a test which was in the next lesson. However after a few weeks, the participants would meet me out the front of the school and help me unload the drums from my car, eager to assist with the room set up and eager to get stuck into the drumming as soon as they could. They also began to cooperate much more together, looking for participants that had forgotten and gone to class, helping each other with drumming and validating each others differing responses to questions within the group. One particular achievement was one week when two of the boys had had a conflict in the school yard prior to the group beginning, we were able to address it quickly as a group and then leave it so that the issue would not negatively impact the whole group's experience of DRUMBEAT for that morning.

Feedback forms: Upon review of the session 5 Participant Feedback Sheet the overwhelming feedback was positive, however a few participants responded by stating they felt the group was only 'sort of' working well together. However the cohesiveness of the group soon developed and in their responses to the Session 10 Questionnaire all participants responded stating they enjoyed being a part of the DRUMBEAT team. The majority also responded saying they had increased their awareness of relationships, had their input encouraged, had learned new skills and felt like they knew people more and were getting a long with them better.

Interviews: Upon further discussions with the school counsellor she stated that all participants' classroom teachers had noted that they were arriving to class after the DRUMBEAT program in a positive and engaging mood. She stated that this type of program is exactly what a few of the boys need. She said that sometimes the needs of the boys that were selected to participate in this program can sometimes go unattended in a class of 20-30 due to the limited time and expertise of the teachers. She stated that relationships, community, collaboration, listening, learning, team work, feelings, individuality and self belief are all fantastic to experience and talk about, but very difficult to do so in a larger group, hence the smaller group along with the engagement and natural attraction of big loud Djembes is a great opportunity for the boys to learn and develop. After the final session, she stated that she felt the program had been very successful and all the participants had learned skills helping them to connect with others and find their place.

Observations of refugee experience: The group was also used by the participants to share and explore their experiences of refugee re settlement, with the majority of the boys revealing and being able to discuss the loss of loved ones and what it's like to live with a relative or non-family care giver. All participants stated it was good to discuss such things and be able to relate to others in a similar situation. I as the facilitator, noted great strength come from their commonality of their shared experience, however at the same time also a better understanding of each other's diversity and individuality.

Towards trauma recovery: Both the school counsellor and I also noted drumming as an activity that was very much so engaging for the participants. Teacher's had stated that throughout the year some participant's hyper arousal in class would not enable them to participate in programs for more than half an hour, however in the DRUMBEAT program I witnessed the participants be involved for a full hour, not getting worked up, with minimal signs of hyper arousal and noted to have been in a state of calm. With no way of monitoring their rates of arousal within this program we were limited to only observations and feedback, both of which support the calming nature of participating in

rhythm. The participants stated “I feel tired”, and another “I could do this for ever”, and finally “doing this beat for a long time is relaxing”.

Conclusion: From this program it is clear that there were many positive outcomes. I think the positive feedback and observations lead to supporting the following quote; “DRUMBEAT is designed to give young people the skills to reconnect and find their place, and celebrate the richness of diversity while understanding our obligation to each other in community” (Faulkner, 2011). This describes the DRUMBEAT program as liberating. I believe the above feedback and observations outlined in this report support the notation that the participants in this program felt liberated to be themselves, explore themselves and confidently participate and find their place in community.

Recommendations:

I only have a few recommendations that have come from running this program. Firstly, that the Rosenberg Self Esteem scale is not ideal for people with English as their second language.

Another idea that I have thought of is that facilitators around Australia and the world could post online additional questions relating to the particular setting they work (i.e. refugee, disability, prisons, etc.), similar to the inclusion of the additional adult questions within the facilitator manual.

Other than that I have found this modality to be extremely successful, fun and rewarding. Cheers.

**Appendices (photos)**

Sadly I did not receive permission from the school for this particular group to release photos for research and promotional materials. Sorry.