

# DRUMBEAT

A Therapeutic, Musical,  
Social Development Program



In Practice in West Australian  
Intensive English Centre's  
2006-2008



## **Introduction**

The DRUMBEAT program is a music therapy intervention developed by Holyoake for alienated youth. The program has been successfully used to engage young people who find themselves socially isolated within the school system and the general community. The program teaches a range of social skills that enable a participant to develop healthier relationships with others and increase their feelings of self worth. Developed in conjunction with the Aboriginal Education Unit of the Midlands Education District the DRUMBEAT program was specifically designed for use with young people for whom traditional cognitive based interventions were inappropriate; in particular indigenous boys.

The DRUMBEAT program builds on the therapeutic value of musical expression by integrating themes and discussions into the program structure that raise awareness of the social factors that are critical in developing healthy relationships with others. These themes are drawn from analogies drawn between the drumming experience and everyday life and include communication, problem solving, dealing with peer pressure, individuality and self-expression, emotions and feelings, and teamwork.

Two formal evaluations of the program have been conducted using 100 students in both high school and primary school settings. All students had a history of alienation and half completed the program whilst the other half formed a comparison group. Results from the study indicated that young people participating in the DRUMBEAT program increased their score over a range of social indicators that act to increase connection with the school community. The program engaged young people quickly and in a fun and energetic way. The program is non-competitive and non-threatening and allows for individual expression and creativity whilst at the same time promoting co-operation and collaboration.

In June 2005 the deputy principal of Koondoola Intensive English Centre (IEC) approached Holyoake to see whether the program could be of use to the students there. These students were predominantly African and had recently arrived from war zones where many had experienced high levels of trauma. Their integration into school life was complicated by a range of

factors including, cultural differences, low levels of literacy, language barriers, and an unfamiliarity with study disciplines. For many their entry into the IEC was their first schooling experience.

*"I first saw the Drumbeat program highlighted at the Behaviour Management and Discipline Conference in 2005 and intuitively felt it was perfect for our newly arrived culturally and linguistic diverse families who are predominantly from Sudan. The love of the Arts, both dance and drumming, is very much part of the African culture and as we have approximately 140 African students this is a large group for which to try and meet their diverse needs."* Janet Anthony

The difficulties these children face in adapting to a foreign education system leads to similar outcomes to those faced by indigenous children and others who find themselves socially isolated by a demanding and competitive system. Failure impacts directly upon self-esteem and the ego's attempts to sustain itself in the face of such an overwhelming struggle provide it with few options, other than withdrawal or defiance. For many of the children enrolled in the IEC schools their familiarity with violence and aggression adds to the explosive potential of this type of alienation and the impetus for schools to find new ways to assist their integration.

### **Programs at Koondoola IEC**

Holyoake ran programs at Koondoola IEC in terms three and four of 2005 as well as at Parkwood IEC. Holyoake was also invited to deliver two one hour introductions to the program for students at Balga Senior High School IEC. A total of 47 students completed the DRUMBEAT program and another 27 enjoyed an introductory DRUMBEAT experience. Students were from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Columbia, Iraq, Iran, Cambodia and Vietnam.

The first group at Koondoola was made up of 12 boys from phase 2 students with an average age of 12.5 years. Phase two refers to the time students have been at the IEC and the progress they have made, with these boys averaging approximately 12 months each at the school. This group consisted of several boys with quite severe behavioural problems typified by aggressive outbursts towards each other. Their ability to work together

was almost non-existent and they were continually provoking each other despite instructions to the contrary from their teachers.



*"The group of boys included in these sessions are all challenging, [recognized] and struggling with many of the traditional learning activities. The drumming sessions contributed to their increasing self-confidence and improvement in self-esteem, especially as a result of their performance at the Multi-Cultural Day Assembly.*

*Many of them struggled with self - discipline throughout the drumming sessions but by the end, each one began to [recogni that with co-operation and application they could succeed".*

Feedback from A. Kenny teacher - Class B4

In term 4 a smaller group of eight phase 1 students were chosen to participate in the DRUMBEAT program, it having been [recognized that the earlier group of 12 was too large (The recommended group size for the program is 8 - 10). This group had been at the school an average of six months and had less developed language skills. This group also included two girls and had an average age of 12 years.



The reduced group size made an immediate difference in terms of ease of facilitation and the ability to transfer learning. The group responded positively and demonstrated improved skills in the key learning areas. They mastered much more complex rhythms and were invited to perform at an arts festival in the city which was very well received. For many of them it was their first trip into the heart of Perth. They also performed at the multi-cultural Xmas function at the school to wide praise.



*"..... was put into the DRUMBEAT program this term as I was quite concerned about his withdrawn behaviour and inappropriate reactions to different situations at school..... I feel sure that his participation as part of the DRUMBEAT program has been an important factor in him relating to me and his peers in a more positive and outgoing manner. Taking part in the DRUMBEAT performance was a very positive experience for him. He now smiles more readily and is beginning to participate more in class activities".*

*Helen Porter - Class teacher*

## Programs at Parkwood IEC

Two groups were run at Parkwood IEC in term 4 of 2005. Parkwood has a more diverse range of young people in terms of their cultural background than Koondoola and African students were not a majority in these groups which included many children from Arabic and Asian nations.

The first group of children were phase 2 with an average age of 12 years. This group consisted of 15 young children, well beyond the recommended size of groups for the program. However the children participated well and learned how to work effectively together, culminating in a fine performance in front of the whole school "*which brought the house down*". Several of the more challenging members of the group were able to be involved and have their behaviours moderated by being allocated roles of increased responsibility to which they responded admirably.

*"..... really enjoyed the sessions and looked forward to the weekly lesson. She was proud to be one of two girls involved in drumbeat. I could see definite growth in .....s confidence since participating in DRUMBEAT. In class she appears to be less upset with herself over errors and mistakes. She is more confident to take risks in her work. She seems to be more centred in herself".*

*"... looked forward to the lessons and shared what he had learned with the class. In class he is much more settled in himself. ... has increased his ability to bounce back from disappointments and I believe DRUMBEAT has assisted with this growth".*

*"..... is very new to the centre and I believe drumbeat has helped him to settle into his school. He felt proud to be included and he became more confident in his class work during the ten weeks of DRUMBEAT. In class his ability to take correction without getting upset improved hand in hand with DRUMBEAT. He learnt from DRUMBEAT the need for co-operation and perseverance, as he was not a natural at drumming".*

**Phillipa Webb Class teacher of three DRUMBEAT students.**

The second group at Parkwood IEC was made up of phase 1 students, average age 12 yrs, several of whom had only just arrived at the school or who came part way through the program. Their English language skills were generally very few and several had obvious learning difficulties. Despite this these students enjoyed the program and participated willingly, learning the group co-operation skills necessary to be able to perform at the end of year concert which they did to a fantastic reception. At Parkwood IEC the school employed a part-time African dance instructor and they combined the dance students with the DRUMBEAT students in the final presentation.

*" There was a noticeable change in two or three of the most behaviourally challenged participants, who when they first arrived needed almost constant care and supervision, but by the end of the program were participating equally co-operatively with the other students and in one particular case leading by example". Daniel Kidd - Counsellor*



## **DRUMBEAT with Secondary IEC' classes and Mainstream ESL students**

Since 2006 DRUMBEAT has been incorporated into several IEC campuses in Western Australia, New South Wales & Victoria as well as being utilized with adult migrant and refugee groups through state based refugee trauma associations. For many older students, entering the Australian education system and Australian society generally can be more difficult than for younger people because the cultural differences have been further ingrained and change and adaptation becomes harder. Additionally opportunities for education are reduced as their age precludes them from longer term schooling.

In 2008 students from Melville Senior High School Intensive English Centre and Mainstream ESL (English as a Second Language), participated in a evaluation study that looked at self-esteem, levels of social understanding and included both quantitative and qualitative feedback from teachers interacting with participants during the term of the program. The IEC students were aged between 13 & 14 years and were 50% male and 50% female, while the ESL mainstream participants were aged between 15 and 17 years old and except for one female group member were all young men.

Issues facing group members who were specifically chosen for the program because of a range of recognized risk factors included:

- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Witness to violence
- Deceased parent
- Isolation/Alienation

A pre & post Rosenberg Self Esteem questionnaire was given out with the following results:

IEC Group average - Pre DRUMBEAT - 13.4 (low self - esteem)

Post DRUMBEAT - 16 (average self-esteem)

ESL Group average - Pre DRUMBEAT - 18.2 (average self-esteem)

Post DRUMBEAT - 23.2 (high-average self-esteem)



In the survey given out to participants at the end of the program, The following results were derived from answers to the questions below:

*Have you increased your understanding of how people get on with each other?/ Do you feel you understand more about what makes relationships work?*

IEC Group - 80% Positive  
ESL Group - 100% Positive

*Have you enjoyed being part of the program?/ Would you recommend DRUMBEAT to others*

IEC Group - 100% Positive  
ESL Group - 100% Positive

*Do you feel you were part of the DRUMBEAT Team?/ Did you enjoy being part of a group?*

IEC Group - 100% Positive  
ESL Group - 100% Positive

## **Training**

Holyoake have developed an accredited three day training program for teachers, school psychologists, social workers and youth workers interested in facilitating the DRUMBEAT program. This training does not require a musical background and includes a full day of skill development in working with defiant youth and two days of the theory and practice behind the DRUMBEAT intervention itself. Training is available at locations across Australia - for training dates and further information visit [www.holyoake.org.au](http://www.holyoake.org.au)

## Conclusions

The DRUMBEAT program has proven to be a useful addition to the Intensive English Centre's resources for supporting the needs of newly arrived immigrant youth who face a range of barriers to integrating smoothly into the Australian education system. The use of the drum as a tool of engagement and learning is particularly resonant to those children from the African continent where the drum is known as a healing instrument and part of their traditional culture. However for all children the drum seems to have a magnetic attraction, and its simplicity makes it all the more accessible and useful. Engagement is central to any learning activity as co-operation is central to any healthy relationship. The DRUMBEAT program provides a simple route to the learning outcomes that foster inclusiveness and reduce social isolation.

*"It has helped various cultural groups in the school as well as individual children who are at risk both socially and emotionally make important links to their overall wellbeing as well as giving them an avenue to display an area of their own culture. I am sure their assimilation into the Australian culture has also been enhanced by this program. We have been delighted with the students progress both academically and socially after completing this program. Also their self esteem has improved dramatically"* Janet Anthony  
Deputy Principal, Koondoola IEC.

