

Drumming program improves boys' mental health and delinquent behaviour

November 3 2017, by David Stacey



An innovative, ten-week program that combines hand drumming and therapeutic talking has been found to significantly assist disadvantaged boys' mental health and antisocial behaviour.

Dr Karen Martin, an Assistant Professor from The University of Western Australia's School of Population and Global Health, led a one year evaluation of the Holyoake [DRUMBEAT program](#) in three Western Australian secondary schools.

DRUMBEAT (an acronym for Discovering Relationships Using Music – Beliefs, Emotions, Attitudes and Thoughts) sessions are led by a trained facilitator who teaches hand drumming and generates discussions about

self-expression, communication, emotional regulation, self-worth, problem solving, confidence and teamwork.

DRUMBEAT started as a pilot program for young Aboriginal men in the Western Australian Wheatbelt region and quickly expanded across the state, nation and around the world.

The study, recently published in Children Australia, found that boys who participated in the program reported significantly better [mental health](#) and lower post-traumatic stress symptoms after they completed the ten-session program.

Notably, [antisocial behaviour](#) of the boys also significantly dropped, by an average of 25 percent, once they had been in the program.

Teachers noted that the students who participated in DRUMBEAT were more respectful, calm and considered towards their peers and teachers after being in the program.

Some boys reported the program to be life changing and that the activities helped them learn how to better connect with other people, control their anger and improve their communication and relationships with peers, teachers and their families.

Dr Martin said that with mental health and suicide being such a catastrophic issue for our [young people](#), we need to implement programmes that are appropriately tested.

"Our research suggests that DRUMBEAT is an effective, targeted strategy which significantly improves the mental [health](#) and behaviour of disadvantaged adolescent boys," she said.

"Ongoing difficult and delinquent behaviour of young people is almost

always a result of great childhood adversity or trauma we need programs that assist these adolescents to heal and supportive strategies to teach them how to regulate their [behaviour](#)."

Dr Martin also found that, while the program does not provide trauma therapy, post-traumatic [stress symptoms](#) decreased for the boys participating in DRUMBEAT.

"Schools are in such a unique position to assist troubled youth, and when they combine programs such as DRUMBEAT with a supportive and trauma-informed culture, the future of these children can be shifted completely."

"It is so heartening to see so many teachers and [school](#) leaders who are prepared to explore strategies to assist today's youth. Putting supportive programs into place in schools takes time, it is clear these educators really care."

Provided by University of Western Australia

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