



BEAT THE ODDS®: Social and Emotional Skill Building Delivered in a Framework of Drumming



An Evidence-Based Program

Beat the Odds® integrates activities from group drumming and group counseling to build core social-emotional strengths such as focus and listening (a constant theme throughout the program), team building, positive risk taking, self-esteem, awareness of others, leadership, expressing feelings, managing anger/stress, empathy and gratitude.

Beat the Odds® is an eight-session, trauma-informed program delivered weekly for 40 - 45 minutes. The program serves a whole classroom at a time and is sustainably designed for delivery by school personnel or individuals without musical experience. The curriculum is in the form of an easy-to-follow scripted manual.

UCLA researchers have shown that Beat the Odds® can significantly reduce a spectrum of behavior problems in children, such as behaviors related to inattention, withdrawn/depression, posttraumatic stress, anxiety, attention deficit/hyperactivity, oppositional defiance, and sluggish cognitive tempo. (Ho, Tsao, Bloch, & Zeltzer, 2011) New findings suggest that the program is highly effective for special education classrooms.

Beat the Odds® emphasizes process and not performance. It includes a therapeutic dimension involving such elements as positive affirmations, emotional coping strategies, and guided interaction with rhythmic activities serving as a metaphor for life, followed by reflection and dialogue—without the stigma of therapy.

Besides offering resilience and coping skills to all students, Beat the Odds® serves as a portal to mental health care in that it enables the facilitator to identify students that may be in need of additional support. The program can easily be adapted for other age groups and also serves as an effective tool for community building with staff and families.

Why drumming?

1. Drumming is a universal activity that is part of every culture. It is equally enjoyed by boys and girls. The National Education Association advocates the use of the arts as a "hook" for getting students interested in school. Drumming gets students interested in school. (Verdugo, 2006)
2. Drumming is an inclusive nonverbal activity that enables anyone to participate - even those who do not speak, do not speak the same language, or are wheelchair bound. No previous experience is required for participation.
3. Drumming, without expectations of perfection or mastery, reduces self-judgment and performance anxiety and encourages a growth mindset that is essential to learning and academic performance, and greater participation in classroom activities. (Gunderson et al., 2013; Moser, Schroder, Heeter, Moran, & Lee, 2011)
4. Creative expression that embraces mistakes as part of the learning process can bring the missing element of joy and laughter to the lives of traumatized children. The arts are uniquely capable of enhancing positive emotions, which in turn build resilience. (Frederickson, 2012; Tugade & Frederickson, 2004) Children are empowered by discovering that they don't need to be stuck in their feelings.
5. Active music making engages large areas of the brain, which quite literally crowds out stress, grief, and pain. It also keeps us in the present moment. (Tramo, 2001) In addition, repetitive rhythm promotes the relaxation response (Crowe, 2004) and can bring calm and centering through contained energy release. All of these aspects of drumming can calm stress reactivity in the brain after exposure to trauma and enable rational brain

functions of sequential thinking, decision-making, and social behavior that are inhibited by trauma. (van der Kolk, 2014)

6. Traumatic stress responses inhibit speech center activity in the brain, which interferes with our ability to articulate what we are thinking and feeling. On the other hand, when under stress, we are hardwired for activity in visual, movement, and sound centers of the brain for self-protection. Therefore, drumming offers a non-verbal means of self-expression and engagement that can be useful in addressing trauma. (van der Kolk, 2014)
7. Rhythmic synchrony (a form of empathy) stimulates a reward center of the brain and leads to positive behavior. (Kokal, Engle, Kirschner, & Keysers, 2011) Synchrony, or mirroring, is akin to having a voice and being heard. Trauma expert Bessel van der Kolk, in *The Body Keeps the Score*, notes that: "Trauma almost invariably involves not been seen, nor being mirrored, and not being taken into account...Children will go to almost any length to feel seen and connected." Beat the Odds® gives them this opportunity in a way that feels organic and safe. The experience of connection and safety provides an essential point of reference for resilience and, thus, is key to healing trauma.
8. With drumming, one can participate as much or as little as one likes, yet still be engaged and feel part of the group. Drumming is a contained activity, as everyone is seated, and participants feel safe behind their drum. Shared creative experiences offer organic opportunities for meaningful dialogue, development of empathy, and community building. (Freire, 1973) And they offer an opportunity for embodied social-emotional learning that is enduring.

"For example, when students that don't ordinarily get along are brought together for a positive shared experience, they form a group identity. One school counselor that we worked with noted that when she incorporated the use of a drum into her counseling groups, the students enjoyed sharing while drumming and stopped fighting with each other because, 'you don't beat up a member of your group.'" (Ho, Chinen, Streja, Kreitzer, & Sierpina, 2011)
9. Studies of group drumming with adults have shown measurable improvements in biological, psychological and social measures of stress, particularly when reflection and self-disclosure are incorporated. (Bittman et al., 2001; Fancourt, Perkins, Ascenso, Carvalho, Steptoe, & Williamon 2016) Research with other age groups also supports the benefits of this process. (Kirschner & Tomasello, 2009; Gerson, Schiavio, Timmers & Hunnius, 2015; Ho, Tsao, Bloch, & Zeltzer, 2011; Bittman, Dickson, & Coddington, 2009; Koyama et al, 2009)
10. Rhythmic strategies can be utilized easily in classrooms as a kinesthetic tool for facilitating learning, cooperative behavior, and a positive classroom environment.
11. Drumming offers an opportunity for students to shine, particularly those who struggle with academic subjects, and provides a positive activity alternative to unhealthy choices that might otherwise be made.

More Information

More information on Beat the Odds® can be found on the UCLArts and Healing website, which includes links to publications plus other articles, video clips (including ten-minute documentary film trailer), testimonials, and information about our training programs.

We have three publications, with a fourth in the works: the first is the original effectiveness study of Beat the Odds®, the second presents the findings of a one-year follow-up of Los Angeles Unified School District mental health professionals who we trained in the use of the program, and the third is a Harvard Kinder and Braver World Series publication that

features Beat the Odds® as a case study on how to maximize social-emotional benefits and youth access when developing arts programs.

For inquiries regarding the purchase of curriculum materials and/or training services, contact Ping Ho at pingho@ucla.edu or 310-452-1439.

Program Development Team

Ping Ho, MA, MPH is Founding Director of UCLArts and Healing, which transforms lives through creative expression for self-discovery, connection and empowerment. UCLArts and Healing is an organizational member of the UCLA Collaborative Centers for Integrative Medicine, of which Ping is a Steering Committee Member and was the founding administrator. She was also the founding administrator for the UCLA Cousins Center for Psychoneuroimmunology (PNI), which led to the privilege of writing for Norman Cousins and co-writing the professional autobiography of George F. Solomon, M.D., founder of the field of PNI. In addition, Ping has an extensive background as a health educator and performing artist. She has a BA in psychology with honors from Stanford University, an MA in counseling psychology with specialization in exercise physiology from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and an MPH in Community Health Sciences from UCLA School of Public Health. Ping is on the Council of Advisors for the Academic Collaborative for Integrative Health, a national network of educational organizations and agencies in complementary and alternative medicine, and the Steering Committee for the Association Leadership Council of the Academy of Integrative Health and Medicine. She has been a member of a subcommittee for professional learning for CREATE CA, a California Arts Council-initiated collaborative to educate administrators in education regarding the value of the arts for learning and behavior, what constitutes quality arts education, and models for successful implementation and outcomes. She is a co-developer of the program, Beat the Odds: Social and Emotional Skill Building Delivered in a Framework of Drumming, and was the principal investigator of its effectiveness study that was published in the journal, *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*. In addition, Ping developed the UCLArts and Healing Certificate Program in Social Emotional Arts to empower anyone in the design, delivery, and evaluation of effective arts-based programs that maximize social and emotional benefits.

Giselle Friedman, LCSW is a licensed clinical social worker, who is bicultural and bilingual in Spanish and in English. Giselle received her undergraduate degree from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and her master's degree from USC School of Social Work. As a psychotherapist, she has worked in school settings, agencies, hospitals and private practice, with a focus on children and families. Giselle spent four years as a treating and on-call therapist for Santa Monica-UCLA Medical Center's Rape Treatment Center, Stuart House, and SM-UCLA Psychotherapy Group. She has been working as a full-time psychiatric social worker for the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) since 2000. In this capacity, Giselle provides individual and group therapy to students and their families at several elementary schools. She also leads parenting classes and educates teachers and staff on topics such as children's responses to trauma, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, childhood depression and anxiety, classroom behavior management, and addressing bullying behavior. Giselle is a member of the school Student Success Teams and she participates in her local district's LAUSD Resource Coordinating Council and neighborhood community meetings.

Mike DeMenno came across a magazine article in 1993 featuring Mickey Hart and Arthur Hull where the mission was to use drumming for community building and personal well being. Within a year, Mike began facilitating drum circles for kids at risk throughout Los Angeles. In 2003, Mike became the Manager of the first recreational music center. Under the mentorship of Remo Belli, the REMO Recreational Music Center in North Hollywood, CA, has developed into an extraordinary place dedicated to bringing rhythm and music to people from all walks of life. Mike has not only worked closely with Mickey Hart on several projects over the years, but also has been under the mentorship of Arthur Hull for the past ten years. Mike considers drumming to be his life raft. He maintains his passion for the drum set as well as helping others to experience playing music for personal joy.

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