

# The Impact of Holyoake's DRUMBEAT Program on Prisoner Wellbeing in Western Australian Prisons

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## BACKGROUND

**DRUMBEAT** (Discovering Relationships Using Music - Beliefs, Emotions, Attitudes, and Thoughts) is an evidence-based intervention developed by **Holyoake Institute** which aims to improve mental, social and emotional wellbeing within high risk populations. The program incorporates both **experiential and cognitive based therapies** addressing factors influencing **mental health**, including **emotional regulation, communication skills, self-esteem, resilience and social relationships**. The DRUMBEAT program began as a youth and schools based intervention but has since been run in a variety of community settings and population groups around Australia.

As part of the "Closing the Gap" initiative, Holyoake received funding from The Mental Health Commission (WA) and The Federal Department of Health to deliver the DRUMBEAT program in WA prisons, with a particular focus on imprisoned Aboriginal people. Overall, prisoners have **complex health needs** and **poorer mental health** compared with the general Australian population. In particular, there is a **higher prevalence** of mental health problems amongst **imprisoned Aboriginal people**<sup>1</sup>. For **Aboriginal people** "the process of incarceration may only **compound the experiences of trauma, grief and loss** that are associated with mental health problems"<sup>2</sup>.



## EVALUATION SCOPE

Researchers from the School of Population Health at The University of Western Australia were commissioned to independently evaluate the impact of the DRUMBEAT programs delivered within seven prisons during 2012-2013.

## EVALUATION AIMS

- **Primary aim:** To investigate the effectiveness of the DRUMBEAT program in assisting prisoners to improve their mental wellbeing and resilience, as well as more broadly looking at the impact of the program on participants in relation to interpersonal relationships, self-esteem, and interpersonal skills .
- **Secondary aim:** To examine how well the combination of questionnaires and specific research measures worked in evaluating an **intervention in a prison setting**, and the appropriateness of these for **Aboriginal populations**.



## WHAT HAPPENS IN THE DRUMBEAT PROGRAM?

Building on the therapeutic value of music, the program incorporates themes, discussion and drumming analogies to self expression, communication, emotions and feelings, self-worth problem solving, confidence and teamwork. The facilitator encourages participants to explore a range of issues through drawing analogies from what is happening in the drum circle.

The series of DRUMBEAT programs were run in participating prisons as either as a ten week program (one session per week) or a five week program (two sessions per week). Each DRUMBEAT program was facilitated by two trained Holyoake DRUMBEAT facilitators. Each facilitator had prior training in mental health and drug and alcohol co-morbidities (co-existing medical conditions).



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Those on the research team acknowledge the traditional Aboriginal owners of country throughout Western Australia and pay their respects to them, their culture and Elders past and present.

## METHODS

This **mixed methods evaluation** comprised qualitative and quantitative data collection including; semi-structured **interviews with prisoners, prison staff and program facilitators** and structured **prisoner surveys** (pre, post and 3 month follow up where possible). The survey included a number of validated scales: *Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS)*, *Kessler Psychological Distress (K5)*, *The Resilience Scale*, and *General Health Scale*. Additional questions asked participants about what they had got out of the program. This was explored in more detail in the interviews undertaken with a subset of prisoners participating in the programs.

## RESULTS

### Participation statistics

A total of **21 DRUMBEAT programs** were completed and **evaluated** across seven WA prisons over a nine month period (between November 2012 and July 2013). Of the **114 participants** who completed **both a pre- and post-program survey, 46.5% (n=53) were Aboriginal**. The average age of those who completed both the pre- and post-program surveys was 34.3 years (sd 9.5) and the average sentence length was 2.9 years (sd 2.5). An average of 90.2% (sd 9.1)% of sessions were attended by those completing the pre- and post surveys.

## RESEARCH PHASES

### Pre-program protocols

- Ethics Committee approval
- Mental Health agreement and Risk Management plan for each prison
- Participants written Informed Consent

### Administer Pre-program evaluation

Prison participants pre-program surveys

### Program Delivery

2 hour sessions (2/week x 5 weeks or 1/week x 10 weeks)  
Group size approx. 10  
Two DRUMBEAT facilitators per group

### Administer Post-program evaluation

- |                                    |                    |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Questionnaires :</b>            | <b>Interviews:</b> |
| ▪ Participants post-program survey | ▪ Participants     |
| ▪ Prison staff                     | ▪ Prison staff     |
|                                    | ▪ Facilitators     |

### Administer Follow-Up Surveys

Three month follow-up prison participants surveys

## MENTAL HEALTH AND RESILIENCE MEASURES

**WEMWBS** (a measure of **positive mental wellbeing**) scores were **significantly higher** ( $p < .001$ ) at post-program than at the program start and maintained **at three months follow-up**. This infers **improved mental wellbeing** was experienced immediately after, and three months following, the completion of the program.

**KESSLER-5** (a measure of **psychological distress**) scores were **significantly lower** ( $p = 0.001$ ) at post-program than at the program start. Although not significant, scores at three months follow-up were lower than at the program start. This infers **reduced psychological distress** was experienced following completion of the DRUMBEAT program.

**RESILIENCE** scores were **significantly higher** ( $p = < 0.001$ ) post-program than at the program start. This infers that **higher resilience was experienced following completion** of the DRUMBEAT program. Resilience measures were not available for the three months follow-up surveys.

**TABLE 1. DRUMBEAT program and evaluation participation numbers and proportions**

PRISON	DRUMBEAT PROGRAM					EVALUATION COMPONENT		
	N programs completed	N prisoners started (A)	N prisoners completed	N prisoners completed pre	N prisoners completed post	N prisoners completed pre & post (B)	% prisoners completed pre & post (B/A)	N prisoners completed 3 month
Acacia	2	14	11	11	4	4	29	0
Bandyup	2	19	7	12	4	4	21	1
Boronia	1	8	4	7	4	4	50	0
Bunbury	2	20	15	13	14	10	50	0
Casuarina	6	59	39	53	37	35	59	3
Karnet	4	36	24	24	22	21	58	9
Wooroloo	5	54	46	44	44	40	74	7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>20</b>



*"On drums I sometimes play my feelings. Like if I'm feeling down or sorry... disappointed... stressed... inside me. It's good to control myself... control conflict before I explode. Wait for it to go away with drumming." (Prisoner; male)*

*"It has shown me it is not hard at all to be harmonious. You know it is now in my subconscious. I feel peaceful. The facilitators have a lot to do with that, they seem to be settled and calm. They tell us how they deal with issues and it is not how we would have, their way is better. It gives another perspective" (Prisoner; male)*

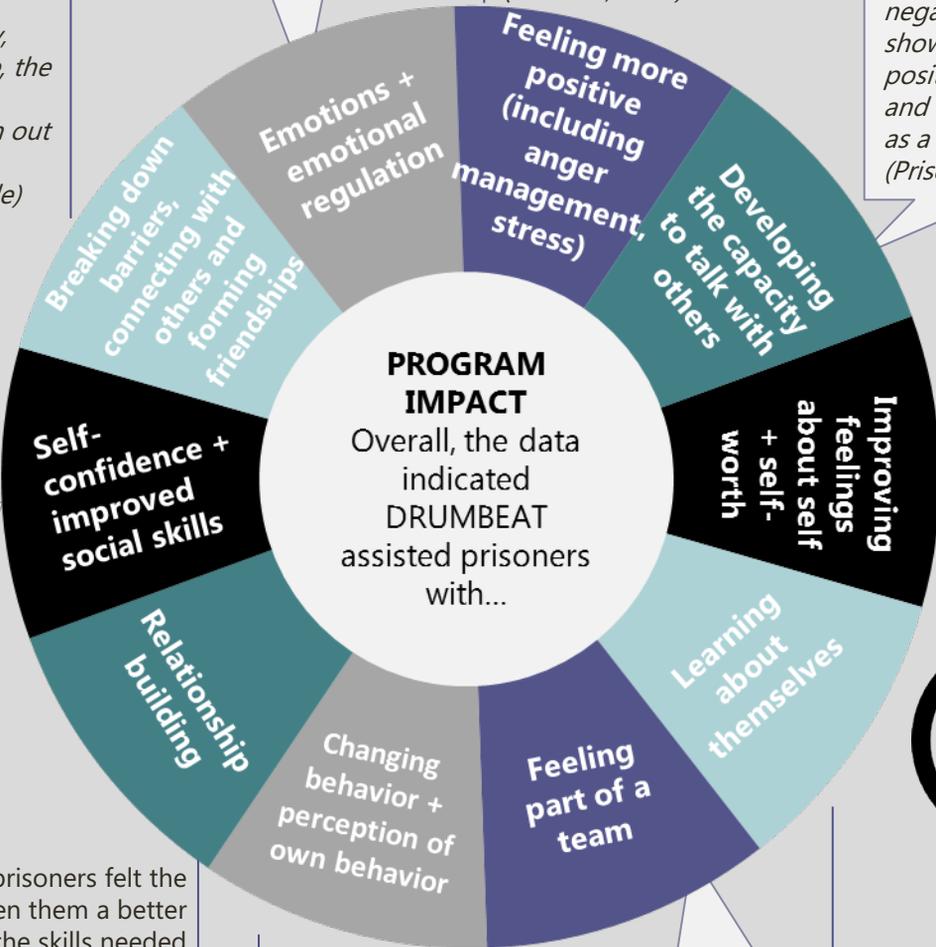


*"If I had a problem I didn't know who to talk to or was too proud to speak to a professional about it. Alcohol was an escape and I kept bad company that was negative. DRUMBEAT showed me how to be positive as a person and how to open up as a person." (Prisoner; male)*

*"Saw changes in some of the blokes, happy, more positive, the shy blokes it brought them out of their shell" (Prisoner; male)*



*"I am starting to open up a lot more. I feel more organised. I have more self-control and self-belief. I am a lot calmer." (Prisoner; male)*



Overall, 90% of prisoners felt the program had given them a better understanding of the skills needed for good relationships with others. *"Learnt that there is more than one type of relationship - like not just with your partner or family, but also relationships at work, friends, in here, all sorts of relationships.... You gotta get your relationships right, What we talked about relates to relationships with all types of people." (Prisoner; male)*



Nearly all participants (98.2%) commented on the way DRUMBEAT helped them feel that they were part of a team, working towards a common goal (the performance) and working together to achieve a great outcome.

*"With the other programs you don't come away feeling good, not like DRUMBEAT, where you do feel good. We know all these things we have done wrong, we don't have to be told- we need to know how to change these things- DRUMBEAT helps with that- it like makes you feel better about yourself. With DRUMBEAT, instead of the bad stuff being drummed into you, it is being drummed out." (Prisoner; male)*

*"Learnt about relationships with other people, emotions. Impact drugs and alcohol can have on your life - you can end up in here, you could hurt someone." (Prisoner; male)*  
*"The most important change I have noticed is my ability to listen better and see a situation from another perspective." (Prisoner; male)*

*"I need to stop using my mum as an excuse to make people feel sorry for me. I feel ashamed for that now. I want to have more control, determined, employment, a stronger person. I will find it hard but I realise I have to do the hard yards." (Prisoner; male)*

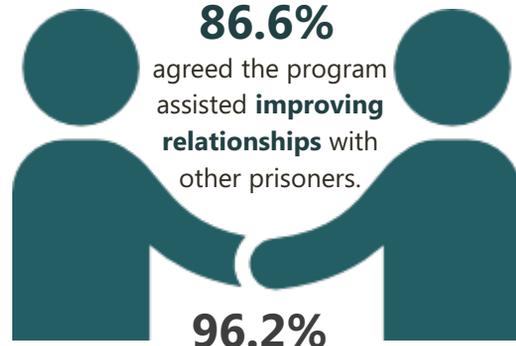
## PROGRAM IMPACT AND FEEDBACK



**92%** of participants agreed their **input was encouraged** in sessions.



**98.2%** said they felt part of a **team**.

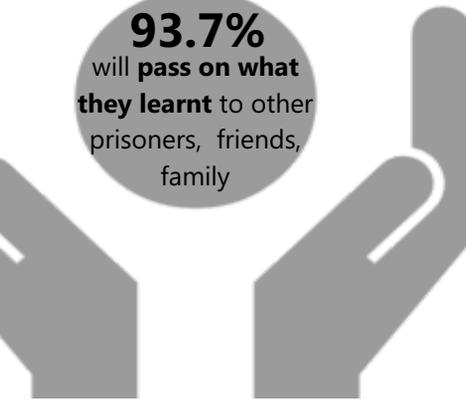


**86.6%** agreed the program assisted **improving relationships** with other prisoners.

**96.2%** agreed it **helped** them work through their **problems** more easily.



**90.1%** agreed they gained a **better understanding** of skills needed for good relationships with others.



**93.7%** will **pass on what they learnt** to other prisoners, friends, family

**97.3%** would **recommend DRUMBEAT** to others.

**93.5%** agreed **drumming skills** helped them **feel good** about themselves.

**PHILOSOPHY:** prisoners felt **valued**, listened to and **respected** in a non-judgmental, non-threatening way.  
**OUTCOMES:** strong feelings of trust, **connectedness and friendship** developed between the members of the group and the facilitators.



## CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

### Evidence from the qualitative and quantitative research indicates that DRUMBEAT facilitated...

- Improvements in **mental wellbeing** in both the immediate and long term time frames
- **Increased resilience** in the short term
- **Decreased psychological** distress in the short term

Both quantitative and qualitative results indicated DRUMBEAT was **well received and considered worthwhile** for prisoners, not only for program participants but also through **flow on effects** to other prisoners, and benefits observed by prison staff .

### DRUMBEAT SUCCESS FACTORS

- Program structure and accessibility
- Group connectedness and trust
- Uniqueness and enjoyment
- Prison staff offer strong support
- Flexibility and appropriateness of DRUMBEAT facilitators
- Program consistency & stability
- Relaxed program style; non-competitive and non-academic
- Hands on learning and self-reflection

For the full evaluation report see: Martin, K., Wood, L., Tasker, J. and Coletsis, C. 2014. *The Impact of Holyoake's DRUMBEAT Program on Prisoner Wellbeing in Western Australian Prisons*, The University of Western Australia , CRAWLEY, Western Australia. **Contact:** karen.martin@uwa.edu.au

#### REFERENCES

1. ABS (2012). *Prisoners in Australia*. Cat 4517.0. Canberra, Australian Bureau of Statistics.
2. Heffernan, E., et al. (2009). "The insidious problem inside: mental health problems of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in custody." *Australasian Psychiatry* 17(1): S41-S46.

The evaluation project was approved by the Holyoake Research Committee, the University of Western Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee and the Department of Corrective Services (DCS) Research and Evaluation Committee. The project was partly funded by Holyoake.