

# Beat the Odds®: Social and Emotional Skill Building Delivered in a Framework of Drumming

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®

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Odds® can significantly reduce a spectrum of behavior problems in children, such as behaviors related to inattention, withdrawn/depression, posttraumatic stress, anxiety, attention deficit/hyperactivity, oppositional defiance, and sluggish cognitive tempo.** (Ho, Tsao, Bloch, & Zeltzer,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 engaging for boys and girls. The National Education Association advocates the use of the arts as a “hook” for getting students interested in school. (Verdugo 2006) Drumming gets students interested in school.
2. Drumming is an inclusive nonverbal activity that enables anyone to participate, regardless of backgrounds and abilities. No previous experience is required for

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participation.

3. Drumming, without expectations of perfection or mastery, reduces self-judgment and performance anxiety and, thus, encourages a growth mindset that is essential to learning, participation in the classroom, and academic performance. (Gunderson et al 2013; Moser, Schroder, Heeter, Moran, & Lee 2011)
4. The arts are uniquely capable of enhancing positive emotions which, in turn, builds agency and resilience. (Frederickson 2012; Tugade & Frederickson 2004) Children are empowered by discovering there is something they can do to feel better.
5. Active music making engages large areas of the brain, which quite literally crowds out stress (Tramo 2001) and keeps us in the present moment. This enables rational brain functions necessary for learning, such as sequential thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, focus, constructive social behavior, and speech. (van der Kolk 2014)
6. Drumming offers a non-verbal means of self-expression and engagement when verbal communication is limited by trauma, ability, language differences, or culture. It also offers an external pathway for mindfulness, which may be particularly helpful for those who have experienced trauma and for whom internal practices can be triggering (van der Kolk 2014)
7. 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.
8. Rhythmic synchrony stimulates a reward center of the brain and leads to positive behavior (Kokal, Engle, Kirschner, & Keysers 2011), compassion, and altruism (Valdesolo & DeSteno 2011).
9. With drumming, one can participate as much or as little as one likes, yet still be engaged and be part of the group. Drumming is a contained activity, as everyone is seated, and participants can feel safer behind their drum. Shared creative experiences offer organic opportunities for meaningful dialogue, development of

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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)

10. 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)
11. Rhythmic strategies can be utilized easily in classrooms as a kinesthetic tool for facilitating learning, attention, calmness, energy modulation, and positive behavior.
12. Rhythmic skill development can facilitate literacy. The ability to tap in sync with a metronome predicts the brain's ability to track syllables. (Carr, White-Schwoch, Tierney, Strait, & Kraus 2014)
13. 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 Arts & Healing Initiative website, which includes links to publications plus other articles, video clips (including ten-minute documentary film trailer), testimonials, and information about our training programs. Link to 2-minute video of children participating: <https://youtu.be/-EDBUSG3Gjs>. 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

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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.

## Program Development Team

**Ping Ho, MA, MPH** is Founder and Director of Arts & Healing Initiative, an organizational member of the [UCLA Integrative Health Collaborative](#), of which Ping is a steering committee member. She was founding administrator for the UCLA Cousins Center for Psychoneuroimmunology, 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. She has a BA in psychology with honors from Stanford—where she was appointed to establish the still-thriving Health Improvement Program for faculty and staff, 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 Fielding School of Public Health. Ping is associate editor for the Creative Arts Therapies section of the *Journal of Complementary and Alternative Medicine* and has been Co-Chair of the annual *Expressive Therapies Summit: Los Angeles*, which has offered 150+ workshops on creativity and the arts in healing. She developed the [Certificate Program in Social Emotional Arts \(SEA\)](#) and the [SEA on a Shoestring program](#) of supportive art, movement, music, and writing for individuals or groups in any setting. In addition, she co-developed and served as principal investigator for the evidence-based program, [Beat the Odds®: Social and Emotional Skill Building Delivered in a Framework of Drumming](#). She is co-author, with Erica Curtis, of the 2019 National Parenting Products Award-winning book, [The Innovative Parent: Raising Connected, Happy, Successful Kids through Art](#) (Ohio University/Swallow Press, March 2019).

**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

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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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