

# Benefits of facilitated drumming circles

by Jean Brereton, Golden Lake

Drumming is one of our most ancient forms of connecting with ourselves and with each other. Participating in a drum circle draws the awareness of the earth into the body. This is one of the best ways to get connected with our roots. It moves us from our heads into our hearts. Rhythm is a universal language known to everyone, even the youngest child.

Drum circles help to balance our technological society and our experience of the reality of the earth that supports us. Whereas an emphasis on technology and consumerism in our current culture tends to deaden our hearts and minds, drumming together in a circle reconnects us to our physical senses and thus to nature and the world.

The natural world is filled with rhythm. Naturalists, such as bird-watchers, have developed keen listening skills in order to distinguish the calls of birds that are often deep in lush foliage and hidden from view. Thus birders have learned to recognize the tone and cadence of bird songs and calls unique to each species. While the world of computers and other technologies have helped with the development of quickened reflexes, we have become adapted to an onslaught of hyper-stimulation and have lost some of our capacity to be patient or still enough to tune into the more subtle aspects of nature and wildlife. A diminished sensory capacity to attentively tune into our environment reduces our appreciation of the natural world.

Group ‘in the moment’ drumming allows for creative improvisation in a stress free and joyful environment. Stress free because it is facilitated by a person trained in the art of building on each small success. Through the process of rhythm games participants lose self-consciousness and engage in what becomes a team building process. Each sound in a facilitated drum circle contributes to the overall song. As the multiple rhythms are layered on top of each other, the players are creatively enriched by the experience.

While playing together in a drum circle, the facilitator helps to move the group through natural transition points in the music they are creating. The quality of the music produced is not based on the rhythmical expertise of the players, but on the quality of their relationship with the other people in the circle. Out of this new rhythms are created and through the process, deeper relationships.

The group drumming experience provides an opportunity to listen attentively to what others are playing. Listening inspires new rhythm patterns to emerge in a co-creative process as everyone responds to the collective patterns. Research has shown that participation in this process reduces feelings of loneliness in older adults and also improves non-verbal communication skills.

The values that create a strong community are developed in a facilitated rhythm circle: good listening skills, respect, patience, cooperation. Each individual is equally valuable to the whole circle. Everyone has a part to play and no part is any more or any less important. In this way drum circle experiences support community within a spirit of equality. Group rhythm circle experiences support the health, well-being, and connectedness of individuals within our communities.

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