What is a drum circle?

A drum circle is a group of people come together in the physical form of a circle for the purpose of drumming. A wide range of drums ranging from hand drums (namely: the Conga, Djembe, Bongos etc) to frame drums and stick drums are used. A facilitator in the centre of the circle usually is the one who draws the invisible energy graph for the circle; complete from a calm, trance inducing level to a loud cathartic high. A facilitator is not a conductor; he is only a catalyst in the group activity of drumming.

Group drumming is a powerful music-making experience that is used as a therapeutic intervention for achieving health-oriented and group-oriented, non-musical goals.

In a drum circle, participants experience both the creation of group rhythms and a sense of community.

Since time immemorial, drumming or the ‘Shaman Horse’ has been used extensively for the purpose of healing (through rituals other metaphoric tools). However, it is only more recently that the therapeutic elements of group-drumming have been explored, with recent research studies beginning to provide an evidence base for considering drumming as a therapeutic intervention in its own right or as a part of other programmes (Bittman et al., 2001a, 2003; Friedman, 1997; Stevens & Burt, 1997). Based on current findings a new trend in corporate America is the employment of musical management consultants who build team spirit through drum workshops (Apple, Motorola and AT&T have reportedly tried it).

Some salient features of the drum circle based on research by Bittman et al., 2001a, 2003; Camilleri, 2002; Clair, Bertsein, Johnson, & Hoover, 1993; Claire, Alicia, Berstein, & Johnson, 1995; Crowe, Reuer, & Berstein, 1999; Maxfield, 1990, 1997; Strong, 1997, 2000 are:

- Rhythm is natural to human function
- Drumming enhances communication
- Drumming can be experienced as transcendent, spiritual or as altering perception and consciousness
- Drumming is creative
• Drumming is cognitive with implications for focusing the mind in the present and aiding memory, concentration and other mental processes

• Drumming is accessible to all people

• Drumming has physical benefits such as aerobic exercise, psychomotor coordination and positive immune system responses

• Drumming is social, creating group cohesion

• Drumming fosters emotional processing

• Drumming produces physiological, psychological, and social stimulation that enhances recovery processes.

• Drumming induces relaxation and produces natural pleasurable experiences, enhanced awareness of preconscious dynamics, a release of emotional trauma, and reintegration of self.

• Drumming addresses self-centeredness, isolation and alienation, creating a sense of connectedness with self and others.

• Drumming provides a secular approach to accessing a higher power and applying spiritual perspectives to the psychological and emotional dynamics of addiction

• Drumming circles have important roles as complementary addiction therapy, particularly for repeated relapse and when other counseling modalities have failed.

In addition to the above listed psychological features of drum circles, certain Physiological effects of drumming can be observed:

• Drumming enhances hypnotic susceptibility

• increases relaxation, and induces shamanic experiences

• The enhanced θ- and α-wave entrainment produced by drumming typifies general physiological effects of altered states of consciousness similar to the state of relaxation.

• Altered states of consciousness aid in physiological well-being through physiological relaxation; facilitating self-regulation of physiological processes; reducing tension, anxiety, and phobic reactions; manipulating psychosomatic effects; accessing unconscious information in visual symbolism and analogical representations; inducing inter-hemispheric fusion and synchronization; and
Drumming, apart from being a community building activity for every one of us to connect with one another and feel like being a part of a larger social group, has also been used in the following fields:

- Mentally and physically handicapped adults.
- Autistic children.
- Drug and Alcohol addicts. (Substance abusers)
- Patients of Dyslexia and other developmental and learning disorders. (Broca’s Aphasia etc)
- Syndromes such as Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s and also Dementia.
- Victims of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Uses in the corporate sector:
- Team building, group-cohesiveness building.
- Ice-breaking.
- Stress-buster.
- Communication building.
- Training or corporate coaching.
- Group dynamics training. (Leading v/s following)

**The Therapeutic Power of Drumming:**

Therapeutic Element Mechanism for Change

Drumming is accessible.

Drumming provides successful and inclusive experiences.

Drumming is aesthetic.

Drumming involves the interactive creation of beauty.
Drumming is expressive. Drumming is a nonverbal mechanism for affective modulation.

Drumming is physical. Drumming requires psychomotor coordination.

Drumming is powerful. Drumming connects us to primal archetypes.

Drumming is communicative.

Drumming allows for the purposeful transfer of ideas.

Drumming is meta-social. Drumming creates social unity.

Drumming is cognitive. Drumming requires perception, attention, and memory.


(Taken from http://www.ubdrumcircles.com/article_therapeutic.html)

**DRUMMING AND STRESS:**

Day by day, stress based disorders are creeping into the realm of our everyday lives and we are victims of various psychological and physiological ailments. We now know that stress either causes or exacerbates 98% of all disease. Not only heart attacks, strokes, immune system breakdowns, but every disease known - with the exception of two viruses - have now been linked to stress. Thus reducing stress in everyday life can not only increase psychological wellbeing, but also enhance one’s health and reduce the risk for the so called burnout syndrome, which is linked to prolonged stress at work. As lasting stressors according to the list of stressful life events, arise in both private and work life and as both areas in modern life seem to become even more demanding, it is nowadays more important than ever to find an effective tool that helps people reduce stress and gives them the opportunity to lead less tense and more balanced lives. Interestingly the indigenous world has inherited us one of the most effective and cost-effective tools to deal with and reduce stress in our lives, the drum. This instrument has for that purpose only been rediscovered lately and in the past ten years a respective body of research has evolved indicating/proving the following benefits of participating in a drum workshop, regarding stress reduction:

- Alpha brainwaves are the major components of a wave pattern which is known to be responsible for a mental relaxation state. This state of relaxation can, due to everyday stressors such as daily routines, traffic chaos, office stress, vocational stress and so on, hardly is found in a majority of the modern
population. During a single 30-minute session of slow, gentle drumming using a one-sided hand-drum and a beater, patients have nearly doubled their Alpha brainwaves.

- Drumming exercises greatly reduce stress among Vietnam veterans and other victims of trauma, apparently by altering their brain-wave patterns (www.awarenessmag.com).

- Drumming aids in the reduction of stress based symptoms such as tension, anxiety, phobias. Physiological symptoms such as blood pressure, heart rate (breathing) are reduced greatly to a state of relaxation especially with the shamanic calming drum circles (Winkelman M., 2000).

- Participants of a shamanic counselling approach report that drumming calms them down and helps them to deal with their high stress lives (Eshowsky, E. 1999).

- According to Barry Quinn, a clinical psychologist specializing in neurofeedback for stress management, drumming is highly effective even for clients, that suffer from high stress, hyper-vigilance and chronic sleep problems (www.awarenessmag.com).

- Psychologist Charles Kaplan, who offers drum based workshops for corporate and educational clients, sees stress relief as one application of his programs (www.drumcafetexas.com).

- A study about recreational music making, conducted by Bittman and colleagues, using a sample of health care professional showed significant effects after a six session drumming program in the following dimensions:
  - A decrease in Emotional Exhaustion, Depression and Dejection, Anger and Hostility, Fatigue and Inertia and a 46\% decrease in total mood disturbances.
  - An increase in Personal Accomplishment and Vigour and Activity.
  - In a follow-up test these effects showed to be continuing even after the treatment was stopped (Bittman et al., 2003).

- Detailed self-report protocols of participants of a seven-session group drumming showed high agreement on the statement “Drumming reduces stress and tension” (Blackett, P. & Payne, L., 2005).

“Experiential learning has proven to be a very effective way in bringing about change in any kind of behaviour. Drumming is one of those experiential methods that focus change in its deepest form.”
DRUMMING AND GROUP DYNAMICS

Drumming itself is a group activity by nature. From the very beginning, when drumming was used in ancient tribe cultures, to its modern time applicability, people have come together and enjoyed the music in a community atmosphere. Seldom can the sound of a single drum be found, but new rhythms are experimented in a group with each individual playing an important role in the unity of sound. Thus a new space for shared creativity through non-verbal communication is created, offering an ideal place for the experience and possible alteration of group dynamics. This aspect has been discovered by several companies lately that are now applying drum circles to build team spirit and enhance communication between co-workers. These companies see drum workshops as a cost-effective way to increase the efficacy of work teams by increasing group cohesiveness, group connectivity and identity, as well as reducing tension caused through mis-communication. Several aspects of drum circles are working in favour for these goals:

• Mark Seaman, who offers drumming as a recreational activity finds that drumming pulls a group together, giving a sense of community and connectedness and thus is particularly needed when group dynamics are stressed because of a conflict within the group or when the group’s sense of unity and purpose is disrupted (Winkelman, M.).

• Music therapist Ed Mikenas states that drumming gives an opportunity to learn leadership and realize the own potential (Mikenas E., 2000).

• He also observes that group drumming naturally assigns different roles to the participants and thus forces them to coordinate their parts and focus on themselves as well as the others. This offers an experience of working together in a structured manner (Mikenas, E., 2000).

• Charles Kaplan, who uses drumming in corporate settings for the purpose of team building and ice-breaking reports positive effects in 90% of his clients (www.drumcafetexas.com).

• As a major advantage he sees that the drums are equally accessible for all participants, non-musicians as well as musicians, which helps them overcome initial performance anxiety within the first sessions. They discover that they are not going to embarrass themselves and are contributing as a meaningful part to the group sound (www.drumcafetexas.com).

• Gender makes no difference in drumming (Longhofer J. & Floersch J.).

• Christine Stevens, who works with drums as a therapeutic tool finds that drum circles enable participants to experience both the creation of a group rhythm and a sense of community (www.ubdrumcircles.com).
• Several studies have proven that drumming enhances communication and is a social activity that creates group cohesion.

• Another advantage is that group drumming cuts across cultures as top-level executives can join in that group activity together with blue collar workers (www.drumcafetexas.com).

• A drum circle creates a relaxed atmosphere that fosters communication, ability to empathize and reduces competition and hostility.

• The additional element of a final group performance brings about a further commitment to the group and can result in an increase in pride and a feeling of self-efficacy.