

## Drumming and Respect for Cultural Practices Within the Rhythm2Recovery Model

Within the Rhythm2Recovery model, rhythmic music is employed using hand drums and percussion. Hand drumming is common to many Indigenous cultures around the world, each with their own protocols and practices for engagement with the instrument. During colonisation, and continuing into the present time, many Indigenous peoples have seen the sensitive and sacred practices of their cultures disrespected, desecrated, and sometimes appropriated by other peoples, especially those from the dominant culture. Cultural appropriation occurs when cultural elements from one culture are copied, used inappropriately outside their original context, exploited for commercial gain or unacknowledged by members of another culture. **In working with hand drums, practitioners must be conscious not to replicate these exploitative practices.**

The musical focus within the Rhythm2Recovery model is on improvisation, and not on teaching specific patterns/rhythms. When delivered in Aboriginal and other 1<sup>st</sup> Nations communities where there is a cultural tradition of drumming, permission from elders must be obtained before proceeding with the clear clarification that the program does not utilise or teach cultural rhythms. At the same time, many rhythmic cultures are happy to share their cultural practices and where authority is given, these may be incorporated into a program by a facilitator or participant who carries that permission. Working collaboratively and openly with local elders or community leaders will ensure you do not trespass on traditional practices and boundaries.

### The Drum & Cultural Safety

The drum is a sacred instrument and highly revered in many Indigenous societies, and should always be treated respectfully. In introducing a therapeutic drumming program like Rhythm2Recovery it is important to differentiate between culturally specific drumming practices which often have strict protocols around them and contemporary hand drumming with its focus on improvisation. Drumming and other forms of rhythmic music are found in Indigenous cultures around the world and even for non-indigenous people there is often a strong drumming culture to be found in the lives of their ancestors.

So, although we must respect different drumming traditions, drumming itself is not something that originated or belongs to any one source. It can be useful in the introductory sessions of a therapeutic drumming program to discuss drums, their variety and uses across the world, and to encourage people to respect the instrument – avoid putting your feet on it, using it as a table and playing it with anything but your hands (avoid sticks).

Certain drum types are often closely associated with cultural practices, like the sacred Pow Wow drum of the Native American peoples. The most commonly used hand drum is the African Djembe, originating across the Mandinke tribe of western Africa. The Djembe is an integral part of ritualistic life many west African countries but has become a mainstream instrument across the world. Similar to how the guitar, originating in Spain has popularised string instruments across the world, the Djembe has had a similar popularising impact for hand drumming internationally. Using cultural instruments like the Djembe in contemporary drumming practices without acknowledging their origin and significance is another form of disrespect.

When working in Indigenous communities with a tradition of drumming it is imperative to seek guidance on the appropriate use of the drum and permission for bringing this contemporary form into the community. As mentioned, there are often strict protocols around drumming, who can drum, where, and how the drum is treated. My experience has been that when consulted, and the intent of the program clarified, even the strictest adherents to cultural drumming

protocols will often make an exception for this type of therapeutic program, if they feel they can trust the facilitators – thus working with a local co-facilitator can make a big difference.

Some of the key issues you may find relate to gender – in some 1<sup>st</sup> nations communities only the men drum. In some Aboriginal communities' boys and girls cannot drum together once they reach adolescence. Again, with consultation, I have often found exceptions are willing to be made for a therapeutic program. Other cultural issues can relate to the type of drum used and the skin of the drum. Avoiding using culturally specific drums can help reduce confusion between the different purposes of each approach, and artificial skins, rather than animal skins are often preferred as it is believed the natural skin carries the spirit of the animal within it, and a range of protocols need to be performed prior to its use, that can be avoided by using artificial skins.

Article 31 1 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states:

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies, and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions