implementing a drum circle program at camdenforward school

ABSTRACT

Children growing up in low-income households in crime-stricken cities are more likely to encounter stress and trauma in their lives (Attar, Guerra, Tolan 1994). Several interventions have been developed to combat the long-term effects that these stressors can have on these children. This project utilized group drumming as a form of music therapy at CamdenForward School (CFS), a school located just outside of one of the nation’s most dangerous and impoverished cities, Camden, NJ. The project consisted of weekly drum circles for first through eighth grade students who were identified as having classroom behavior issues. At the conclusion of the project, the participant’s teachers completed a survey, which revealed that some students had better behavior after attending Drum Circle and that all students had benefited from their participation. However, due to limitations in this study, more research needs to be done to assess the long-term benefits of weekly Drum Circles.

BACKGROUND

• UrbanPromise (UP) is a non-profit organization that focuses on educating the youth of the city of Camden, NJ, a city struggling with high rates of poverty and violence. The organization was founded in 1988 to help meet the need to provide an escape for the children of Camden, a need which continues to exist today in a city where more than 40% of its citizens over the age of 25 have an education level of high school or below (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). UP has been working to meet this goal. It is also important to reassess the participants at a later date.

• Discussion with the Wellness Center Director, Rebecca Bryan, and CFS students noted that their students had a favorable attitude towards participating in Drum Circles (16). Although many teachers declined to answer the question about their students’ behavior when they returned to class, the responses that were received revealed that some were more calm when returning to class (2), some had greater focus (2), were less disruptive in class (1), realized no change (1), or acted even more disruptively (1).

• 13 responses stated that the students seemed to benefit from attending drum circles, while three responses mentioned that they needed more time to determine whether the Drum Circles were beneficial to their students.

• All teachers agreed that their students had a favorable attitude towards participating in Drum Circles (16).

METHODS

The goal of this project was partially met. According to their teachers, some students had better behaviors in the classroom setting after attending Drum Circle but not enough teachers provided a response to this question. However, teachers noted that all students were excited and looked forward to attending Drum Circles every week, which implies that Drum Circles provided a positive outlet for them. The survey results indicate movement toward better classroom behavior, but that more interventions are required in order to fully meet this goal. It is also important to reassess the participants at a later date to determine if weekly Drum Circles result in long-term benefits.

CONCLUSION

It was an honor to work with and to have an impact on the lives of these children. I hope for further interventions for students like these so that all children can have a chance to develop healthy coping mechanisms to be able to manage their stress well, thereby increasing the chance of a happy, successful life. I commend UrbanPromise and the faculty and staff of CamdenForward School for working to fulfill their mission in Camden, NJ. Specifically, I would like to thank Rebecca Bryan, Denise Baker, and Sharice Hendricks for all their assistance with Drum Circles. Lastly, I would like to thank National Medical Fellowships and the United Health Foundation for providing me with the opportunity to improve the health of an underserved population of this city.

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REFERENCES


Bureau, U.S. Census (2015). What can be done to help the children of Camden, a need which continues to exist today in a city where more than 40% of its citizens over the age of 25 have an education level of high school or below (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). UP has been working to meet this goal. It is also important to reassess the participants at a later date.


