

When I compiled and issued "What it Meant to Me 2010" earlier this year, Acumen's Martin Denman contacted me and asked if he could use some of the members words to create an article for Acumen's Spring 2011 Newsletter. I just received this yesterday in the post and it looks magnificent and I hope it inspires some of Acumen's readership.

Tom May 22nd 2011

The Buddy Beat: in their own words

'The Buddy Beat' is a community drumming group which meets weekly in Paisley Arts Centre. The group evolved as part of a social inclusion project within the mental health Occupational Therapy Service in Renfrewshire. Its leader is community musician Dr. Jane Bentley and she describes the technique formally as 'integrative musical interaction'.

The community drum circle movement has emerged from the USA over the past 15 years, and this method of working with a group provides a successful music making experience right from the outset, regardless of ability.

Members are encouraged to support each other through playing in time, and by creating their own rhythm patterns. There is space for everyone within the music, whether they are a beginner, or more experienced. Playing in a group offers relative anonymity - a group member can experiment without fear of exposure, or being seen to 'get it wrong', because they are covered by the sound of the rest of the group. There are no 'wrong notes'.

Over the last four years or so, Buddy Beat has grown in stature and confidence such that they are invited to perform at many events associated with mental health issues and give workshops. There is also an opportunity to see and hear them on the first Monday of each month at the WRVS Cafe, in Causeyside Street, Paisley between 7 and 9pm.

They are soon to feature in a DVD entitled "Keep the Beat - Our Journey in Rhythm"

One of their long term members Tom Chalmers has collated the thoughts of some of the current Buddy Beat members as to what being part of the drumming circle means to them:-

"Being part of The Buddy Beat has given me extra self esteem and improved my confidence" says Angie. While Anne said, "Simply put, when I beat away on the drums my troubles fly away."

Christine, who is on the committee that steers the group, says, "Everyone is happy to take on responsibility for various things, ensuring that no-one gets overloaded."

Connor, a 'newbie' reports that, "the group have been very welcoming to me." Eileen said, "I think that the support which we receive from one another is a very special thing. It's okay to be unwell and people accept that, which is why the group is so important to me." As for Graeme, he says, "I soon connected with the drums and now I love making music."



Recalling some of the highlights along the way, Hazel said that "drumming wise it would most likely be the Renfrewshire Mental Health Arts & Film Festival. It was great to play at the Festival Launch and the 'Frog Chorus' filling the Arts Centre auditorium was something I'll always remember."

Positive thoughts come from Ian who feels that "Buddy Beat has helped me in all parts of my life" and Jackie finds that, "I am a chattier person nowmore able to cope with things."

Meanwhile, Dr Jane Bentley comments on the video production that was completed at the close of 2010.

"It's made me really proud of everyone - (well, more proud than I am already). Especially because, when we got turned down for funding, that might have been the end of it - but instead, we did our sponsored drum, and raised our own money. The responses I've had from people who've seen it so far is that everyone seems to be so open, caring, and honest about where they're at - which I think is a great example to others."

Another important person in the development of the group is Lead Occupational Therapist, Jeanette Allan. She had this to say. "That Buddy Beat members continue to engage, support and involve new members, sometimes when people are still in hospital and not so well, deserves acknowledgement. The friendship, generosity and care is tangible and inclusive."

Let's leave the last word to Tom.... "From a personal point of view, being part of The Buddy Beat continues to help my well being and I have found that although some of the faces have changed, the ethos of the group remains the same and we are all a great support for one another."

Martin Denman