



The Buddy Beat

Rhythm *without* the Blues

April 2012



Who we are

The Buddy Beat was born from a musical social inclusion project based in Paisley's Dykebar Hospital, the inspiration coming from Renfrewshire Lead Occupational Therapist Jeanette Allan, Community Musician Dr Jane Bentley and Occupational Therapist Karen Auld.

A series of workshops using African djembe drums helped patients during their hospitalization, but a need arose for something in the local community for people to engage with once they had been discharged and were back in their own homes. So, in September 2007, The Buddy Beat started in Paisley Arts Centre and met weekly for two hours. Started with a six week trial period in mind, The Buddy Beat has gone from strength to strength and we are now in our fifth year.



We play together, create rhythm pieces and help and support one another on our mental health journeys. We firmly believe that anyone can make music and that no experience is necessary. The best way to experience the music is to be in it!

Using mainly djembe drums and a variety of percussion instruments, we play together for 2 hours on Thursdays. The group offers a safe haven, where you can leave your troubles

at the door and relax with people who are in the same boat, confident in the knowledge that no-one will be judged. The Buddy Beat gives people focus and group members will readily testify that it helps in concentration skills, and improves self-esteem and self-belief and boosts confidence. The biggest benefit by far is our sense of community, which has been a revelation. The members all look out for one another, offering a listening ear or shoulder to cry on when it is required. Real, lasting friendships have been created and all because of drumming. If only we could bottle that good feeling!

Some members have seen their confidence grow to a level where they have been able to enrich their lives further; some have taken up drama. Another member now broadcasts newspaper articles on the RNIB's Insight radio and yet another set up her own art class after funding was withdrawn from the class she was part of. Quite simply, once you begin to play the drums, your worries seep out the door and you lose yourself in the music.

After two years our NHS funding ran out, and after being newly constituted, the group themselves sought out funding from 'Awards for All' and also 'Renfrewshire Council' to keep The Buddy Beat going.

Buddy Beat in the Community

One thing never imagined at the outset was public performance. In those early months, The Buddy Beat were overhead by a chap who was putting together a cultural evening at Paisley Museum and he asked the group if he could book them. That was our first performance in December 2007 and this awakened something in our group. Performance was not compulsory, but many took up the challenge and as we became known in our community more bookings came in. We have performed at NHS conferences from as far as London to Leeds and Edinburgh; at local nursing homes and in Dykebar Hospital; local festivals and for many mental health support groups. The Buddy Beat has also been a major participant in the last four Renfrewshire Mental Health Arts & Film Festivals. We have also held an open night on the first Monday of every month for the last two years where anyone can come along and enjoy the drums. In October 2011 we achieved a milestone when we performed at our 100th event, a musical evening at Dykebar Hospital in Paisley for patients and staff, aptly back where it had all began. The outreach work

and performances help battle against the social stigma that is associated with mental health and is a vital part of the group members' recovery.



Further Success

In June 2010 Jeanette Allan met a film-maker, James Cairns of Draven Productions who has experience of mental health problems and he was keen to make a film about The Buddy Beat. One of the group's members is Tom Chalmers who writes up reports about Buddy Beat gigs and Jeanette Allan put Tom and James together. We had applied for funding to make our film and we were turned down- not to be deterred we then held our own sponsored drumming event and raised the funds ourselves. Over a five month period the film came together and in Tom's own words he says; "This was the most amazing experience of my life. I was interviewer, interviewee, location manager, script-writer, wardrobe, lighting, editor. I had never been part of the film making business before and I learned so much. It was the willingness of the group to be part of it that made it all so special. We decided to call our film 'Keep the Beat...Our Journey in Rhythm.' At the end of November the film was ready and we showed it to the group and there was hardly a dry eye in the house!"

In April 2011 The Buddy Beat held a special film premiere event at Paisley Arts Centre and invited 100 guests including local councillors, health care professionals, family and friends. That was a great success and a lasting memory for the group but the film went on from there- a short

version is on YouTube and has had more than 1300 views in its first year and then in January 2012 we were all delighted and thrilled when our film won a national voluntary arts award when it was crowned "Scottish Epic Award Winner 2011." See www.epicawards.co.uk

The Buddy Beat was also a finalist in the Renfrewshire Quality Awards and won a Renfrewshire Provost Award in the Arts & Culture category.

In making our film "Keep the Beat...Our Journey in Rhythm" we wanted to show how being part of The Buddy Beat has helped each and every one of us and also to hopefully inspire someone else to join a community group.

Please also check out the following for further information;

www.buddybeat.co.uk; www.art-beat.info; www.mhfestival.com; www.dravenproductions.co.uk

The running time for our film "Keep the Beat...Our Journey in Rhythm" is 27 minutes long with an added photo gallery. An abridged 13 minute version is currently able to be viewed on YouTube.

In late 2011, we moved from Paisley Arts centre to our new home in the Life Church, Stock Street Paisley, where we meet every Thursday.



Buddy Beat proudly showing off our Epic Award, Renfrewshire Quality Award Finalist Award and our Renfrewshire Provost Community Award Winner 2012



How does The Buddy Beat help its individual members?

Social inclusion

This has always been The Buddy Beat's main remit right from the start. To give recently discharged patients an avenue to get out of the house, meet new friends and feel part of their community.

Improved self-worth

By playing together and forming new friendships, members have seen their levels of self-worth begin to increase. Mental health problems can leave you feeling that your voice doesn't matter and that you are not important enough.

Improved confidence

Being a group, we all look out for one another and this helps improve confidence. We have seen very quiet people grow in confidence. It may start with getting a rhythm right, or leading a musical game or being part of the creative side that sees confidence surge. One such lady is now our Chair Woman and is happy to speak to anyone, whether it is in a large or small group setting.

Friendship & Community

Many solid friendships have been established in the group. Some members will meet others for lunch, or go to the cinema or theatre together or even visit in one another's homes. A few members have even been on holiday together.

The Buddy Beat is a safe haven for us all where we can feel comfortable to say that we are not feeling well, knowing that a/ no-one will judge us or b/ we will be offered help and support.

One member best described the group as "the only place where I can be myself."

Cognitive skills

As a group we have created five musical pieces to date that we perform either for ourselves or for the public. There is a real sense of pride when we see our pitched

ideas knit together to make a new tune. It takes weeks to put a new one together and requires concentration and memory skills. For most of us these skills had all but disappeared, but with patience and a modicum of determination we get there. You see a very real sense of achievement around the group when we finally compose and learn a new piece. The smiles say it all.

Performance

Performance has never been compulsory, but few members shy away from playing in the wider community. We passed the 100 event mark in October 2011 and most months we have one or two engagements as our name begins to spread. Most engagements involve travelling and this adds to the sense of adventure. When we get there most of us are naturally nervous but once we begin to play, the nerves drop away and we really get into it. This is a thrill for all of us and the feedback from the public is always very encouraging. Performance also empowers us and makes us feel better about ourselves.

Responsibility

The Buddy Beat was funded by the NHS for the first two years. When that source ended, the group constituted themselves and three members took over the responsibility of being Chair, Treasurer and Secretary. These three took on the challenge of seeking funding and did so thanks to Awards for All and Renfrewshire Council. All three roles can be challenging at times and we don't allow anyone to become overloaded and we help one another when required. No external source makes any group decisions- they are all made by the Committee, which is made up of ordinary members, all with mental health problems.

Hope

We have all had dark and trying times with our mental health issues, and being part of The Buddy Beat gives us hope that we have a future and can make a difference in our community.

All of the above helps give us better mental health and we take pride in taking Buddy Beat into the community, to help reduce the social stigma that surrounds mental ill-

health and also hopefully to inspire someone to get involved in a community group themselves.