Youth violence

Serious youth violence is unfortunately a growing social crisis globally, increasing significantly in recent years. Offences committed by young people, such as gun violence and knife crime, account for a disproportionate percentage of all crime in many countries today. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that our governments are inadequately dealing with the actual causes of youth violence and thus are failing to rise to the full scale of the problem. This ‘hands-off’ approach is therefore having devastating affects on our communities, creating detachment among youth and greater social division. Consequently a new approach is needed to definitively mitigate youth involvement in crime.

Music therapy in educational settings

Currently, music therapists most often work with those who are identified as being ‘at-risk’ however, systematic reviews of primary violence prevention programs have shown that they can have significant uses more universally as well\(^3\), with mixed-groups of boys and girls may in fact be more powerful than only targeting those likely to be violent\(^4\). By breaking down these common stereotypes that categorise entire sections of society in harmful ways, introducing violence prevention measures to traditional school curricular exposes far more youth to the tools necessary to develop and restore, and in turn reduces the chances of some young people never gaining access to these tools.

Broadening the scope of preventative work within educational settings directly allows for early intervention in the lives of young people exhibiting unhealthy thoughts and behaviours, and thus more efficiently tackling the root causes of youth violence rather than simply just the unfortunate aftermath. Studies suggest that serious youth crime arises from a lack of opportunity and the belief that there are no other possible outcomes for them\(^5\). Principles of restorative justice remind us that youth deserve to be treated as having meaningful value worth repairing to ensure a sense of belonging and purpose within society\(^6\), instead of being vilified and outcast as threats.

Music as a restorative tool

Many studies have been conducted in order to analyse the effects of music therapy in different settings. These have reported its use in institutional settings such as in prisons\(^7\) and juvenile justice facilities\(^8\), educational settings and alternative school settings\(^9\), as well as part of

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specific programs for adolescents and adults with substance abuse and chemical dependency\textsuperscript{10}.

Therefore, by integrating music therapy into existing curricular and educational wellbeing programmes, the process of encouraging young students to actively make music allows them to utilise their experiences in a healthy manner hence, redirecting potentially negative expressions and converting them into positive ones. By facilitating opportunities to regain the sense of power to control their futures, music therapy can indeed benefit students in schools in ways that can have life-altering affects on their decisions later in life too.

Studies have shown that music therapy implemented in our early years in schools have served as a way of reducing isolation and bullying by promoting wellbeing and connectedness\textsuperscript{11} creating a more holistic education environment and school community. Also that, collaborating creatively on specific subjects stimulates reciprocal respect, acceptance of individual differences and social integration\textsuperscript{12}. As well as this, studies have identified that adolescents have had the opportunity to voice their dissatisfaction with oppressive systems\textsuperscript{13}, which is considered critical in any anti-oppressive, preventative approach\textsuperscript{14}.

**Final thoughts**

Moreover, studies have highlighted the overwhelming evidence of music therapy reducing student’s aggressive tension and stabilising their emotional state\textsuperscript{15}. Therefore, given its ability to not only aid young people through creative outlets while they are in educational settings, it instills in them essential lessons that they can take forward with them.

\textsuperscript{14} Sue Baines, “Music Therapy as an Anti-Oppressive Practice”, *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 40 (1), February 2013, pp. 1-5.