

Music & Wellness + The One = Inclusion

by Rod Goelz

In my teachings, I often talk about being *on the one*. *The One* is the musical center, the groove and vibe we all create around. It's about being on time, giving, and being *in the moment*. Playing what is needed for the whole, setting the ego aside. I'm an author, an educator, a musician, a composer and an arranger. I've been working with people and personalities for 30 years. My programs utilize contemporary music of all kinds to achieve bigger goals in various aspects of mental health and overall wellness.

Our aim for the music enrichment program, Music And Wellness, is to utilize music as a tool to achieve non-musical goals. Our classes are led by myself, Rod Goelz, with several mentors in training. The tools we use come from varied, colorful sources. *The One* is one such tool. I learned about the concept of *The One* from James Brown, Bootsy Collins, and George Clinton. It was their overriding musical construct that brought musicians together to create great music with a higher purpose--*unity!* "Funk" in itself, as a dance music, has healing properties that can take one "to church" without entering any building. *The One* emphasizes the idea that we are all connected, despite our various backgrounds and aptitudes. Our musical choices are felt, and inspired by, the whole of our surroundings. *The One* teaches many wide-reaching lessons and offers many extra soft-skill benefits to special needs communities.

Connection

From the earliest of times, humans communicated and connected through music. This connection is music's biggest gift. In short, connection is what makes us whole. Emma Seppala of Stanford University states, "People who feel more connected to others have lower levels of anxiety and depression. Moreover, studies show they also have higher self-esteem, greater empathy for others, are more trusting and cooperative and, as a consequence, others are more open to trusting and cooperating with them. In other words, social connectedness generates a positive feedback loop of social, emotional, and physical well-being."

Our special needs communities experience *The One* and human connection at work every time they participate in movement, collective drumming, group singing, or ensemble playing. The resultant energy shift is immediate--bodies loosen, smiles pop, fears subside, players share personal issues and learning in an organic way, in natural, uncoerced conversation.

Expression

*"If you can walk you can dance, if you can talk you can sing..."
Zimbabwean Proverb*

Music is about freedom of expression. Our classes have had great success in carving out a safe space for students to express themselves. We have helped transition clients who were quiet and uncommunicative into vibrant, singing, chatterboxes. We express ourselves in our talking, singing, instrument work--even the way we move. Each student plays a major role in breaking down barriers. *The One* is the perfect construct to channel musical expression, energy, and movement.

According to Abbie Sealover, a former Direct Support Professional for K, 31, Music and Wellness was a safe and unassuming space for her to work on how her behavior affects others. Group activities like drumming, dancing, and ensemble work provided opportunities for K to work on non-verbal communication. The open, fun, and playful environment allowed her to expand her rigid thinking and improve dramatically in the areas of adaptability, consideration for others, and working with a team. All which were at one time challenging for her, including her narrow view on what was considered good music. This has all led to K being able to connect the dots and apply the skills learned in Music and Wellness in everyday life situations. She often says, "Abbie would be so proud of me," which is her way of saying, "I'm proud of me."

*Another example: "T is a 62 year old man with an intellectual disability. One of his main challenges in day to day life is communication. It wasn't until I saw T with a guitar and singing that I realized his way of communicating to the world around him was through music. Finding Music and Wellness was a blessing that continues to blossom through all areas of his life. Music offers T a way to connect to his peers and the world around him, as well as gifting him a safe place to express himself in the language most familiar to him. A language so familiar to us all, the language of vibration. This once quiet man has since serenaded the librarian, initiates conversations, and has shown an overall boost in confidence. Music has not only helped T with his confidence, but allows his heart to shine on a daily basis improving his overall quality of life."
- Rosanna DiSebastiano - Community Development Instructor*

Music and Wellness offers "built-to-suit" programs for a variety of different demographics: Special needs individuals, preschoolers, teens, individuals in recovery, and elderly. Music and the discipline of learning a musical instrument along with the creative act of making music can improve life, learning, and mental health

Negotiation

The act of making music is a series of interactions and negotiations with other humans. In other words, music helps us recognize and respond to social cues. It is a discipline that requires mindfulness and compromise—listening to your fellow music-mates and being sensitive to the sounds, rhythms, and the space created by percussive attack, strum, or shake. The choices made while creating music can open dialogue about topics other than music in a natural way that often leads to personal discoveries. Such discussions can help students see new ways to achieve life goals.

It's important to understand that all people are capable of this type of interaction and discovery on some level. Certainly every person comes with a set of natural abilities and aptitudes. It is also true that each person brings with them personality traits, energy, and abilities that make them unique and vital to the whole ensemble.

Simple/Effective Tasks

The One is the realization that basic tasks done well are vital in the music-making experience. Inclusion in ensembles is a given. An ensemble succeeds through the combined efforts and varying abilities of the members of the ensemble. Since Music and Wellness began, we periodically play in “band” style. The most noticeable change I have seen is in the attitude and body language of our participants. Their energy and their smiles brighten. Learning takes place without the facilitator having to say a word. We learn to compromise, we learn listening, we learn motor skills, but most importantly we learn to adjust our actions to the needs of the people around us. The drummer doesn't need to be a prodigy to keep the steady beat the rest of the group relies on. Similarly, the skills learned in Music and Wellness help individuals with special needs increase their ability to enter the workforce. Throughout our learning sessions, we discover that inclusion is firmly within reach for those with special needs.

In Closing

I've been connected to many of these clients for over five years. Watching them blossom in their expression, experience, and actively take in new information has been wonderful to watch. I am very proud of them. My task is to find new ways to open up channels for their betterment.

Who would have expected that the lessons passed down from funk pioneers would have such a wide range of benefits for special needs communities? Music is healing, communication,

connection, expression, and negotiation. Music produces smiles and good energy, eases burdens, and provides a template that inspires and opens a space for inclusion. And it does so in the most non-obtrusive, painless way. For our special needs communities, James Brown's "Brand New Bag" is the magic formula for a better life.

Quotes:

1. <http://ccare.stanford.edu/uncategorized/connectedness-health-the-science-of-social-connection-infographic/>