

Drumming to spread joy

Massage and music therapist **HEATHER SEYHUN** is combining her passions to improve the wellbeing of aged care residents, writes **SANDY CHEU**.

Every Tuesday Heather Seyhun holds a music therapy class at ACH Group's West Park Residential Care Home in Goolwa, south of Adelaide. Some residents play rhythms on drums that originate from Africa and Brazil including the djembe and conga drum. Other residents play percussion instruments, such as sticks and rattles.

The class is open to residents of all physical and cognitive abilities and typically involves up to 12 members, says Seyhun.

"The wellbeing program allows residents to try something completely new, different and even a little bit out of their normal comfort zone," Seyhun tells *Australian Ageing Agenda*. "Most people from that generation have not even held a drum let alone played one," she says.

Seyhun started at the facility eight years ago massaging one resident. Keen on making the therapy available to others to treat depression among residents, she began contracting at the facility as a massage therapist.

Seyhun is also a musician, who sings, writes songs and plays the acoustic guitar, and a yoga instructor with mainly older clients. Her passions for healing and music led her to completing a three-year music therapy course last year to become a qualified TaKeTiNa practitioner. TaKeTiNa is a musical meditative group process involving a drum beat.

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Seyhun's goal was to combine healing, her love for music and the skills she learnt from her course to help aged care residents.

Seyhun says music has helped her throughout her life and she has always believed that it is a form of therapy for self-healing. Residents in the drum group, which commenced in November last year, are happier and more social and confident since they started drumming, she says.

"There are a couple of residents who didn't join any activities that were offered before and somehow they were interested in drumming. The repercussions from that is they have started doing other activities, which is absolutely fantastic.

"They have interactions with some of the other group members and they've forged little friendships that weren't necessarily there before, which has been an unexpected outcome," she says.

The drum group starts each class by playing simple rhythms such as a heartbeat and progresses with speed and volume, she says. "We don't work on any traditional rhythms, but we do play whatever comes out that particular week. Some of them we've made up and we just play."



Resident Paul Ricketts and Heather Seyhun



L to R: West Park residents John Nuske, Graham Wade, Daphne De Caux and Gwen Barwick-Fagan

There was a lot of interest from the residents since the drum group was introduced at the pilot session, Seyhun says. "It has exceeded all of my expectations as far as getting numbers as it is sometimes difficult to get residents involved with things. But we've had this really good response since the beginning."

She says a personal challenge has been the need to be flexible.

"It's been a very interesting journey allowing the group to evolve organically. To have an idea of what you might want to do with the residents but then have to let that go because it's not going to happen and just allowing what is to be," Seyhun says. "We don't just randomly whack the drums for an hour, but sometimes we have moments where that is happening."

Seyhun also runs a program every Thursday at the facility in her massage therapist role where she massages residents, focusing on their feet, shoulders and necks. She also massages staff at the facility fortnightly. Seyhun says she is motivated to work in the aged care sector because she enjoys sharing her passions with residents.

"I love massage therapy a lot and I love my music. I'm the type of person who needs to be doing more than the same thing nine to five every day. Working in aged care has really evolved because of the demographics of where I live. There are a lot of elderly people," she says.

The best part of working with the drum group is seeing the residents grow, says Seyhun.

"The biggest joy is to see this group evolving organically. It is a really interesting experience to work non-verbally with a group and everyone is just feeling the rhythm. It is awesome." ■