

# “HealthRHYTHMS Group Empowerment Drumming Protocol”

## Guest Speaker: Rufus Glassco

The Restorative Justice Section of the ADR Institute of Ontario (“ADRIO”) presented a live program and webinar about the HealthRHYTHMS Group Empowerment Drumming Protocol that was delivered by Mr. Rufus Glassco on Monday, April 14, 2014 at the ADRIO office in Toronto.

By Mary Korika



Rufus Glassco has been facilitating drum circles and teaching hand drumming in schools and business environments since 2003. He is also a trained HealthRHYTHMS facilitator and a documentary filmmaker.  
[www.rhythmkingdom.com](http://www.rhythmkingdom.com),  
[www.kashaka.com](http://www.kashaka.com) and  
[www.revolutiontelevision.ca](http://www.revolutiontelevision.ca).

Mr. Glassco began this participatory workshop by playing an icebreaker game that involved passing shaker eggs around in a circle, which got participants laughing and helped them to relax. After distributing West African djembé drums, which have a wooden hour-glass shaped base, and are covered with goat skins, he taught participants how to hold and how to play them. He then guided the circle of attendees through some simple African rhythms, while encouraging people to breathe deeply and smile, all of which contribute to wellbeing and generated a relaxed atmosphere in the room. The group readily followed along with Mr. Glassco through a series of traditional drumming games from around the world as he interjected historical and social information on the activities and on their healing effects.

Mr. Glassco talked about the successful use of this evidence-based drumming protocol for health, wellness and conflict resolution work across a spectrum of contexts. These include troubled youth in inner city schools, who often have a lot of anger and lack avenues to express it. He also mentioned the use of drumming in peacebuilding efforts in the Yukon and in corporate environments, where HealthRHYTHMS has also been proven to lessen employee stress and burnout, and improve reten-

tion of experienced workers.

Mr. Glassco explained that the strong beat created by a group of drummers promotes entrainment, a spontaneous synchronization of participants’ drumming, which helps them feel successful, and also aligned with each other. He then demonstrated this in a particularly powerful way though teaching everyone the “mother rhythm”, which mimics the human heartbeat. He explained how drums, which are universal to all cultures, and this rhythm in particular, when played for about fifteen minutes, can get everyone’s hearts to entrain to the beat of the drums, and beat as one. Mr. Glassco continued with an empathy-building exercise, asking individuals to improvise their own drumming to express themselves emotionally while he and the other attendees maintained a stable underlying beat. The participants then offered their interpretation of each improvisation, securing first the permission of the person who generated it, and doing so in dialogue with them and deference to them. Mr. Glassco emphasized the need to end these exchanges on a positive note.

Mr. Glassco used this activity to facilitate an exchange about emotion, how it is experienced, communicated and understood by others. He made a link with verbal expressions of emotion and the physicality of the emotional experience, reminding the group

of our reliance on phrases like "losing" one's "groove" or "rhythm", and "getting back into the swing of things". He also noted that good emotions are more difficult to express than bad ones, making bad behavior more visible. He asked the attendees to express through drumming their emotional experience as alternative dispute resolution practitioners at moments of impasse during mediations, and at periods of conflict resolution. Attendees responded energetically to Mr. Glassco's request, and they were able to intuit what others were feeling with notable accuracy, just by listening to how they expressed their emotions on the drum. The segment ended with the individual participants drumming on neighbours' drums, which was clearly a playful moment of mutual acknowledgement.

Mr. Glassco then led the group through a guided imagery meditation, where the participants closed their eyes as he provided a calming narrative, rich with imagery, accompanied by soothing background music. With a new

note of serenity in the room, he closed the session by emphasizing that the remarkable beneficial effect of the protocol is not derived from the drumming alone, but rather the full series of activities delivered in a specific sequence. The cumulative effect is to help participants relax and feel connected, as well as potentially understood and not judged, which are often uncommon experiences in people's lives. Participants

were also able to express their creativity and emotions in a safe and supportive environment, and have fun at the same time.

Mr. Glassco and the group spoke about the clear utility of the HealthRHYTHMS Group Empowerment Drumming Protocol. Mr. Glassco noted that sometimes in conflict situations it is not as impor-

ated depression and anxiety that often accompany it. He explained that while medication and one-on-one visits with mental health professionals can have significant benefit, HealthRHYTHMS can offer a pow-

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erful alternative, because people who have experienced trauma have a tendency to self-isolate. HealthRHYTHMS not only allows people who train and work in a community to heal

within a community, it also encourages participants to share strategies and experiences, it creates bonds of empathy, and it empowers people to help each other to heal, which can be very healing in itself. The group considered how the protocol might be introduced even in resistant environments, like corporate settings, and whether its effectiveness requires including an entire hierarchy that is involved in conflict, as well as how the timing of the protocol's introduction could be important. He encouraged those interested in the protocol to consider taking the HealthRHYTHMS weekend training to learn to conduct it themselves.

On this workday evening, dressed largely in business attire, the attendees clearly enjoyed the physicality of drumming and the palpable benefits of the HealthRHYTHMS Group Empowerment Drumming Protocol workshop. At its close, the workshop had not only demonstrated the protocol, but also generated a notable increase in levity, calmness and well-feeling in the room. ♣

**ADRIO wishes to thank our writers for their contributions to our Newsletter.**



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