



## Music and Art Therapy Report - 2006

### The Heal Program at Milpera State High School, Parker St Chelmer, Brisbane, Queensland

The HEAL program (Home of Expressive Arts in Learning) is a creative arts program that currently includes **music therapy** and **creative arts therapy**, where students engage in a variety of arts, to aid their settlement and ultimately improve learning outcomes.

This is the **first program** of its type in Australia, possibly the world, where creative arts and music therapists are working cooperatively and specifically with **newly arrived adolescent refugee and migrant students** in a school setting, to aid their settlement and ultimately improve learning outcomes.

#### History of the HEAL Program and Context

Art Therapy commenced at Milpera in 2004, taking place in various rooms in the school. A major achievement for the HEAL program was the development of a **partnership with private enterprise** to secure the **purpose-built home** for the HEAL program on the school grounds. Currently there is **1 part-time position in art therapy for two days/week**. In 2006 an art therapy master's students worked in the program from February to July two days/week.

The **Music therapy (MT) program** at Milpera started in 2003 as a placement for MT students at UQ, until a part-time position was established in 2005. This was a result of a research project conducted by UQ at Milpera examining the effects of MT on adolescent refugees. Currently two registered music therapists (RMT) share the position working three days a week. From July to October '06 there was also a music therapy student on site, supervised by one of the RMT's, who covered 2 full days.

There are many **innovative steps** that have been taken as HEAL has developed, including:

- Employment of 2 Registered Music Therapists, Getano Bann and Tania Balil.
- Employment of a qualified Creative Arts Therapist -who is also an ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher, Jane Griffin.
- Employment of an Art Teacher using art as relaxation.
- Establishment of Milpera as a regular location of practicum experiences for Music Therapy and Art Therapy Graduate Diploma and Masters students from The University of Queensland.
- Ongoing partnerships with community arts organizations
- Securing a grant from the Queensland Gambling Community Benefit Fund to conduct a research project to investigate the benefits of short-term music therapy on the classroom behaviours of refugee students

#### **Funding**

The school receives no funding for the HEAL program. A submission was successfully made to the Community Gambling Fund in 2003, which paid for the year of the Music Therapy Project. The HEAL Program was entered in the Education QLD Showcase Competition in 2005, and we won, receiving \$20,000 for the school to be applied to salaries in HEAL. However, **HEAL requires funding**, for equipment such as paper, art materials, musical instruments, and equipment, as well as ongoing pay for staff. Therefore we are asking for sponsorship of our HEAL program, so we can continue to help our newly arrived students reach their potential, to become valuable members of society.

## Student Population and the need for HEAL

Milpera State High School is an intensive English language reception center and settlement service for newly arrived immigrant and refugee students, preparing for transition to mainstream high schools. The school population includes a majority of refugee students, mostly from Africa and Afghanistan. Presently there are many students who have one or both parents missing or deceased due to war. The children's need for psychological support has increased along with the complexity of their circumstances. The well being of adolescent refugees is impacted by traumatic experiences in their home countries, the refugee journey itself and adjustment to life in Australia. While young refugees are highly resilient and are often high-functioning within a short period after resettlement, there is ongoing concern about adjustment difficulties, conflict within the family, development of identity, isolation, effective schooling and possible long-term mental health problems (Bevan, 2000).

The young people involved in the music and art therapy programs at the school are all experiencing distressing circumstance. While the migration experience in itself is stressful, refugees have fled their home country to escape persecution, having witnessed or experienced brutality and the deprivation of basic human rights (Bashir, 2000). In addition, refugees often flee their homelands in secrecy, having no opportunity to farewell loved ones; in treacherous conditions; and with no control over their destination and future (Bevan, 2000). Studies have shown these experiences to impact adversely upon young people's mental health and physical well-being, education, and the development of both cultural identity and sense of safety (Mollica et. al., cited in Bevan, 2000).

The acculturation process, the turbulence of adolescence and the pressure to quickly gain literacy skills, compounds difficulties experienced through living in refugee camps and losing family members due to war (Jones, Baker & Day, 2004). Students without age equivalent education are particularly at risk; they must adjust to the high school environment while quickly gaining English language skills sufficient to facilitate transition into a mainstream high school. Failure to progress through the school at the same pace as their peers can lead to feelings of hopelessness and low expectations for the future. It may also lead to feelings of having failed the family or to conflict in the home (Bevan, 2000). The processes of adjustment and normal adolescent development, along with the pressure to quickly gain literacy and numeracy skills, compounds difficulties caused by their experiences in refugee camps and losing friends and family (Jones, Baker, & Day, 2004). It places many of the students at Milpera at high risk of school dropout and long-term mental health difficulties.

There is a great deal of literature to support the use of creative arts therapies to assist adolescents, refugees and those who have suffered grief and loss.

### ***Music Therapy (MT)***

*Music therapy is the creative and planned use of music and musical experiences to attain and maintain health and wellbeing (Australian Music Therapy Association). It focuses on meeting therapeutic aims and may address physical, psychological, emotional, cognitive or social needs.*

### ***Arts Therapy (AT)***

*Arts Therapy is the focussed use of visual arts and play activities within the therapeutic relationship to meet developmental, emotional and psychological needs, and is based on the understanding that the creative process is healing and life enhancing. Students are timetabled for art as relaxation in class groups.*

## Implementing the Program

### Referrals

Students are referred to MT and AT by staff, self-referral, outside agencies, or identified at the Welfare Meeting.

A variety of reasons for referral include: withdrawn or angry behaviour, anxiety, emotional outbursts, difficulty in socialising with others and forming friendships, poor self-esteem, and learning difficulties.

### Goals

The music and art therapy programs are primarily focused upon supporting their coping skills and developmental needs, so that their capacity to learn is enhanced. Program goals are designed following **individual assessment** and communication with staff to determine how to best cater for the students' needs.

The GOALS most often addressed include:

- Building **confidence, self-esteem and resilience**
- Facilitating appropriate **self-expression**
- Acknowledging and addressing issues related to **grief and loss**
- Assisting in **literacy and oracy** acquisition
- Improving **social skills** and **peer relationships**
- Strengthening **self-identity** and sense of **agency and empowerment**
- Exploring **acculturation** and **adjustment** issues
- Developing **safe and ongoing relationships between the therapists and students**
- Offering opportunities for **closure** when exiting Milpera
- **MOST IMPORTANT** – time for **fun and relaxation**.

### Interventions

- **Sessions:** a variety of 1:1 and group sessions are provided, depending on the reason for referral and specific needs of each individual. Sessions usually take place 1/week for a period lasting 40-45 minutes
- **Length of program:** depends on individual needs as for the length of the program, some having been seen for a cycle of 5 weeks, some others for the whole duration of their stay at Milpera.
- **Music Therapy Techniques:**
  - Warm-up games
  - Lyric analysis,
  - Song-writing, song-parody
  - Instrumental improvisation (with percussive instruments, drums, keyboards, guitar, vocal sounds)
  - Recording songs onto a CD
  - Learning how to play guitar or keyboard
  - Listening to musical favourites
  - Sharing songs from their original culture or religious background
  - Dancing
  - Performance during exit-parades or other events
- **Art Therapy Techniques**
  - Drawing
  - Painting
  - Sand-play
  - Collage
  - Construction
  - Sculpture
  - Photography
  - Playing
  - Creating group murals
  - Story-telling, collaborative story-writing

## Outcomes

Music and arts therapy at Milpera form an integrated, supportive program that:

1. **Enhances students' learning outcomes by:**
  - Building confidence, self-esteem and assertiveness through gaining a sense of mastery and pride in a creative product or performance
  - Improving social skills & peer relationships across cultures by working creatively in groups
  - Reducing aggression, hyperactivity and anxiety (among others) by providing a vehicle for self-expression & creativity
  - Further building English language skills within and outside the classroom through song writing, song singing, story writing and public performances
  - Improving fine and gross motor skills while learning to hold pencils, paint brushes, sculpting, dancing, and playing instruments
  - Developing impulse control and improving attention through creative activities that are highly attractive to adolescents
  - Supporting them through transitions between rooms/teachers/cycles changes
  - Offering a safe and quiet space for self-reflection
  - Providing a recreational space during daily breaks
  - Assisting them in their process of individual and collective closure when leaving Milpera
  - Exploring issues of adjustment and loss, and building resilience as well as providing time for fun and relaxation
  
2. **Offers support to staff within the school by:**
  - Offering a safe place and relief for troubled students who need time out of class
  - Supplying the teachers with mental health resources and information as needed
  - Raising the awareness of the specific needs that can be effectively addressed through the music or art therapy
  - Providing feed-back concerning students' needs, issues and progress
  - Collaborating in their learning process as part of the school curriculum,
  - Assisting with the closure process as students prepare to leave Milpera

### Feed-back from staff:

- Administration has reported that there are fewer students attending the office for conflict resolution since the HEAL program has been established
- "The services that are provided by the art and music therapists are invaluable for the students in room 18. Room 18 students have been deprived of any previous education; most have also suffered trauma of war and family loss. Some are struggling to recover from a broken heart and are in desperate need of special help. The therapists help to bring joy and peace to those students", Bianca Brookes, classroom teacher.
- "Room 12 students (from a wide range of cultural and languages backgrounds) expressed a desire to perform as a class in a choral item at the exit parade (...) students worked productively and cooperatively with each other, deriving a great sense of satisfaction from the activity. The enthusiasm generated during Tania's weekly sessions with the students resulted in the production of two songs, which were performed at the exit parade with great success and enjoyment. Many thanks to Tania for her wonderful support", Fiona Gura, classroom teacher.

- "The Music and Art Therapy interventions have provided some positive behaviour modification for students who become lethargic, disinterested, easily distracted due to length class contact time (...) students come back happy, relaxed, more communicative, toward both peers and teachers. It has also helped reduce the students' anger and impulsive behaviour", Maria Filipp, classroom teacher.
- "At the end of the Burundian music/literacy program self-esteem and confidence of the students was markedly improved. Individual students participated more readily in activities. (...) Both the teacher and the Music Therapist found working together complemented individual skills and was a very valuable experience", Jenny Kendrick, classroom teacher.
- "Students who access Art Therapy find the opportunity to unburden themselves in a supportive environment, where their unique life experiences are celebrated, mourned and integrated" Susan Whiting, classroom teacher
- "Work done by the art therapists in the HEAL program aids in giving students a chance to express their grief and loss, and to understand their life transitions. This is important not only to their students, but to their lives and future. The HEAL building offers a safe place for distressed and traumatized students to go and just be, to take time out, in a safe and nurturing place in order to be able to continue with the day's learning. As Deputy Principal that is crucial in supporting students in working through conflict and behavioural difficulties when referred to me", Helen Byrne, Deputy Principal
- "The girls from room 4, although quiet, are responding well, it has been a boost to their confidence", Sue McDonald, classroom teacher.
- "The sense of achievement and the positive way in which the sessions have been run all contribute to raising the self-esteem of the boys and help to give them an insight into their own ability to accomplish something", Julie Peel, classroom teacher.

### **Feedback from students**

- "I used to be too scared to put my hand up to ask questions and I'm not anymore"- Gloria
- "I can do verbs now"- Edward
- "It was good fun"- Virginia
- "I was happy to have help with my problems which were big" - John

### **Arts Therapy Statistics for 2006**

60 Students seen, all of them 1:1.

- From 14 different countries:
  - 46 clients from 8 African countries, being- Sudan (16), Burundi (9), Somalia (7), Liberia (7), Congo (4), Ivory Coast (1), Tanzania (1), Uganda (1).
  - 12 clients from 4 Middle Eastern countries- Afghanistan (5), Iran (5), Lebanon (1), Israel (1)
  - 2 clients from 2 Asian countries- Philippines (1), Vietnam (1)
- Living arrangements:
  - 18 (30%) lived with both parents
  - 18 (30%) lived with a guardian (mostly family)
  - 22 (36.6%) lived with the mother alone
  - 2 (3.3%) lived with a father and stepmother

**Music Therapy statistics for 2006**

Tania: 80 students seen, of which 30 were seen 1:1 and 50 within group sessions

Statistics:

- From 24 different countries:
  - 55 from African countries: Sudan (20), Burundi (15), Somalia (7), Liberia (3), Rwanda (3), Ethiopia (2), Eritrea (2), Congo (2), Guinea (1)
  - 11 from Middle East: Afghanistan (5), Iran (4), Iraq (1), Israel (1)
  - 9 from Asian countries: Thailand (2), Laos (2), Taiwan (1), Vietnam (1), Hong Kong (1), Sri Lanka (1), India (1)
  - 1 from South America: Chile (1)
  - 1 Pacific Islander: Samoa (1)
  - 3 from European countries: Romania (1), Denmark (1), Russia (1)
- Living arrangements:
  - 34 (42.5%) lived with both parents
  - 17 (21.25%) lived with mother alone, father deceased or missing
  - 10 (12.5%) lived with 1 parent and a stepparent
  - 12 (15%) lived with a guardian (parents deceased or missing)
  - 3 (3.75%) lived alone
  - 1 (1.25%) lived with father alone (mother missing)

Getano: 81 students seen, of which 19 were seen 1:1 and 62 within group sessions

Statistics:

- From 18 different countries:
  - 56 from African countries: Sudan (27), Burundi (18), Somalia (3), Liberia (1), Uganda (1), Ethiopia (1), Eritrea (2), Congo (3)
  - 12 from Middle East: Afghanistan (10), Iran (2)
  - 12 from Asian countries: Burma (1), Sri Lanka (1), Taiwan (1), Vietnam (4), India (1), China (3), Korea (1)
  - 1 Pacific Islander: Samoa (1)
- Living arrangements:
  - 40 (32.4%) lived with both parents
  - 29(23.4%) lived with mother alone, father deceased or missing
  - 12 (15%) lived with a guardian (parents deceased or missing)

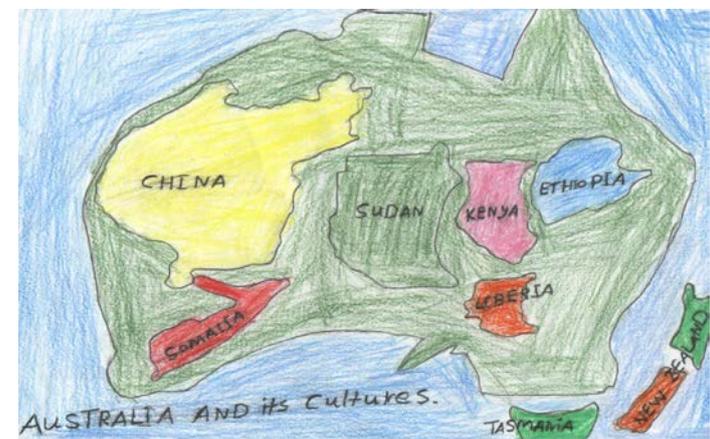




Chart by countries

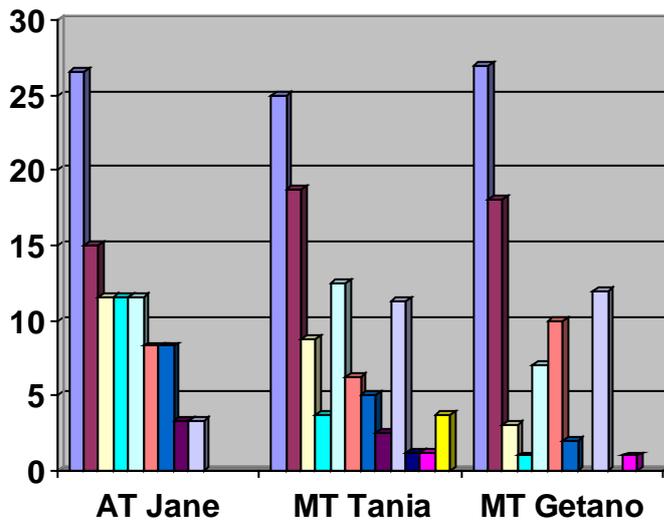
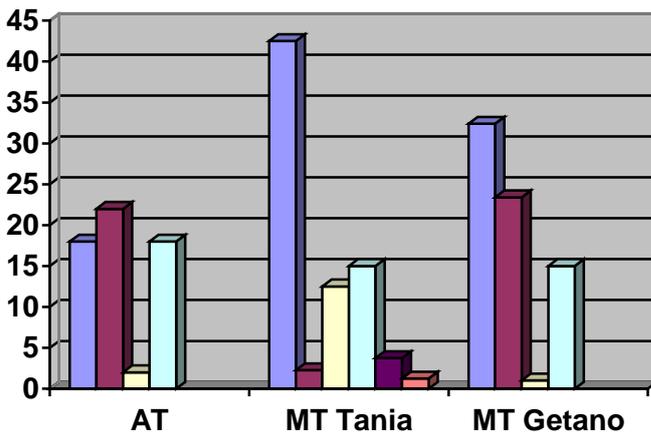
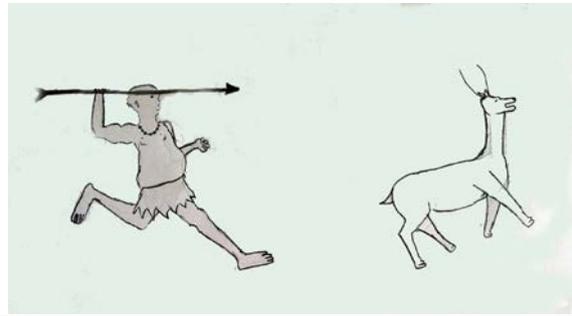


Chart by living arrangements



**Recommendations:**

- Service to be continued in the present format and further funds to be sought to ensure continuity of the program for 2008
- For future reference it has been noticed during the compiling of this report that there may be a correlation between the **reasons for referral and the family arrangements of the students** (e.g. living with both parents, single parents or no parents, and presenting with certain behaviours and personality traits), which suggests the need to **further research** and explore the impact of their environment in relation to the behaviours students present with and ways in which MT and AT can assist in anticipating and addressing their needs more efficiently.



**References**

- Bashir, M. (2000). Immigrant and Refugee Young People: Challenges in Mental Health. In M. Bashir (Ed.), *Deeper Dimensions - Culture, Youth and Mental Health*. (pp. 64-74). Sydney: NSW Transcultural Mental Health Centre
- Bevan, K. (2000). Young people, culture, migration and mental health: A review of the literature. In D. Bennett (Ed.), *Deeper dimensions - Culture, youth and mental health*. (pp. 1-63). Sydney: NSW Transcultural Mental Health Centre.
- Jones, C. L., Baker, F., & Day, T. (2004). From healing rituals to music therapy: bridging the cultural divide between therapist and young Sudanese refugees. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 31, 89-100

---

Compiled by Tania Balil, Getano Bann and Jane Griffin of HEAL, Milpera State High School