

# *Houston Music and Wellness Center*

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## **Beating Out Alzheimer's Disease at the Walk to End Alzheimer's!**

**By Cindy St. Cyr  
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I have been singing for the senior community since 1987. I had long been looking for another type of music program I could offer my senior clients. My sister had become a HealthRHYTHMS facilitator and she suggested that I go to the training. She thought this would be a great addition to what I do. In 2010, I became a HealthRHYTHMS trained facilitator. Then in 2011, I finally was able to get my drum kit together and I added HealthRHYTHMS to my list of offerings. Not only has this turned my business around, but it has been an absolute joy to work with seniors in this way!

I have enjoyed watching them explore new experiences in music, grow in creative self-expression, and develop self-confidence as they engage in music making.

HealthRHYTHMS offers senior communities a unique benefit to their residents that sets them apart from other communities who do not offer these music and wellness services.

I recently had the opportunity to provide HealthRHYTHMS Group Empowerment Drumming to the Alzheimer's Association during six of their Walk to End Alzheimer's fundraisers. This was an exciting experience! I was delighted that the Alzheimer's Assoc. was open to allowing me to provide these services for them at the walks in September-November, 2015. When we had our first meeting together to discuss the possibility, it was as if we clicked and were a perfect match. I loved that.



At the Walk to End Alzheimer's, people of all ages came to participate in the drum circle, (kids, teenagers, young adults, adults, those with Alzheimer's, as well as their loving family members). Leaders in the HealthCare Communities were there as well. Even the Cows from Chick File had a great time drumming with us.

There was a lot going on at each event, so it was different than a typical drum circle in that you don't have them for an hour to be focused with an outcome. People come and go constantly and there were a lot of other things going on outside of the circle, so it was challenging to create a lasting experience with the short time I had with them. However, people were still able to experience some of the benefits that drumming has to offer. Each event was unique in itself taking on their own special sound, creativity, and enjoyment.

The kids that drummed expressed that it made them feel happy. The happiness on their faces said it all. Their enthusiasm was contagious. The parents seemed to enjoy drumming with their kids as well.

Some of the teenagers and young adults expressed that it was an exciting experience, their mood had changed, they loved adding different rhythms, and being able to get lost in the music. One teen said that the drumming gave her a sense of control over her life and she felt empowered by the experience. One teen got out his feelings on the drum, then felt a sense of peace and connection with the group. It was also special for them to see the seniors drumming; it made them happy to see smiles on the faces of those with Alzheimer's drumming.

Some of the adults that participated said they enjoyed a sense of community and connection. They made new friends through the experience and it was fun. They



especially felt good inside playing drums with the seniors. They felt energized and enjoyed the freedom of expression to improvise on their drum. One lady said, “I was feeling down today, but the drumming made me smile and feel happy.”



The most delightful part of the drum circles was drumming with the seniors. They had the best time drumming, singing, and even getting up and dancing in the circle. This was my favorite part of the entire experience, making a difference in their lives with music. They expressed that the drum circle made them feel happy, joyful, lifted up, accomplished, relaxed, fun, and even Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious!

Not only did those with Alzheimer’s come to drum with me, but their family members were exposed to this great music making activity with them. They were amazed while watching their loved one keep the beat and express creativity on the drum, bringing tears to many of their eyes. It was delightful to see the smiles on the family’s faces as they watched their loved one make music on drums. One family member stated, “It was great to my sister, who is losing her faculties, playing the drums. The one thing that remains for her is that she can still feel the rhythms!” She herself felt a sense of stress relief and a good sense of wellbeing.

I loved receiving testimonies from the participants and especially the Community Leaders in the Senior Homes. One administrator said, “This (HealthRHYTHMS Drumming) is the best thing we’ve ever had at the Walk to End Alzheimer’s! It just made the whole event!” Another said, “It was great to see all of the residents be able to pick up the beat. It was enjoyable, engaging, and something everyone could be successful in.” Another



community director said, that the drums made such a difference for her, she felt a calmness in her heart. Others said, “It was great to see the participants getting a lot out of it. The music was powerful and engaging for them.” “It was a spirited and awesome experience; it was nice to see others around me happy.”

All in all, this was an amazing experience! I look forward to participating in more of these events in the future! It was a blessing to my life!



I have to give a big thanks to my friend, Leslie Ward, for helping with all of these events. I would not have been able to control the crowds, keep an eye on my drums, or have all of the pictures and videos we managed to get! I also want to thank REMO for the opportunity and suggestion to do this event. It was an incredible experience. And of course I must thank my business and drumming for health coach, Christine Stevens, for all of your advice and training. You all have added a whole new dimension to my life and career.

Keep drumming and make people happy! That's what I plan to do!