

# RRA: Focus on Social Emotional Learning for Recidivism Reduction



Rock and Roll Academy (RRA) is a researched-based, social emotional music program designed to develop communication and relationship skills and to facilitate a community of cultural and social acceptance. Often afflicted with substance-use disorders, justice-involved youth benefit from music activities, which allow adolescents and young adults to develop a positive, healthy attitude toward themselves and their recovery process. Bolstering the intrapersonal acumen of incarcerated-youth results in improved employability skills upon reentry, thus decreasing the risk of recidivism.

Rock and Roll Academy has a sixteen-year track record of proven success working with at risk youth in educational settings. Recently, RRA has partnered with Windham School District to serve offenders in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. Initial results have yielded even more substantive results, working with incarcerated youth, as it has in educational settings. RRA's Rapid Success Model, focusing on small wins that happen almost immediately, show successes of an implementation in as little as a week.

## The Challenge

High recidivism rates in the United States remain a challenging and costly proposition for states. The average cost to house an inmate in Texas prisons is \$47.50 per day, according to Michelle Lyons, spokeswoman for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. The basic cost to house an inmate for a year is approximately \$17,340, with a 40-year incarceration period costing a staggering \$693,500, or \$81 billion as a national average. The National Institute of Justice also reports that within five years of release, about three-quarters of released prisoners were rearrested. Of those prisoners who were rearrested, more than half were arrested by the end of the first year.

## Focusing on Reentry Education

Rock and Roll Academy aligns to the Employability Skills Framework, particularly in the areas of interpersonal skills, personal qualities, critical thinking, communication skills, and resource management. These skills are not taught in isolation, but as part of a non-traditional music curriculum. RRA provides participants with access to high-quality musical instruments, and the ability to express themselves both independently, and in a group, in ways that they

have likely never had the ability to. This results in immediate buy-in with a tangible incentive to improve one's behavior.

RRA Facilitators create a Shared Learning Environment that empowers peer-to-peer learning. RRA delivers a hands-on, active, pro-social program where students develop musical and social emotional competencies, a sense of ownership, and self-regulating behaviors. The Shared Learning Environment allows offenders to share responsibility in co-creating a successful rehabilitative experience.

A Choices Within Boundaries Model is codified through working agreements, providing students a degree of control over their learning experience, building resiliency and a sense of agency. This model is key to their future reentry in being productive as employees and responsible citizens.

## Music as a Positive Outlet for Emotions

Aligned to recommended goals of the American Music Therapy Association for individuals in correctional and forensic settings, "Music is a form of sensory stimulation, which provokes responses due to the familiarity, predictability, and feelings of security associated with it" ("Music Therapy For Persons In Correctional and Forensic Settings", 2006). RRA creates a social-musical learning environment that provides a positive outlet for managing emotions, particularly with youth who have substance-use disorders. Music has a powerful influence on behavior, moods, and human emotions (Hallam & MacDonald, 2009). This medium provides effective and various means to "express and evoke emotions...reduce stress, and regulate one's mood and motivation..." (Karreman, Laceulle, Hanser, & Vingerhosts, 2017).

*"I think this program will help them to be better citizens, even after they get out."*

*-Officer Mahone, 30yr Corrections Officer, TDCJ*

## References

<https://cte.ed.gov/initiatives/employability-skills-framework>

[https://www.musictherapy.org/assets/1/7/MT\\_Forensics\\_2006.pdf](https://www.musictherapy.org/assets/1/7/MT_Forensics_2006.pdf)