

## Plano drum circle can't be beat

Sunday drum sessions aim to socialize kids, teach values

08:55 AM CDT on Monday, August 18, 2003

By DAVID FLICK / The Dallas Morning News

PLANO – The 15 children filling Tiffany Berkovitz's living room are pounding on boxes with sticks, shaking tambourines, beating on bongos and in general making a deafening racket.

She can't think of a better way to spend a Sunday night.

"It has really been such a neat thing," she said. "You have this diverse group; it's a good way to meet some new people and talk about values, in a way that's not religious but universal, and it's just fun."

Every Sunday night, Mrs. Berkovitz invites friends and neighbors and their children to her large living room. Everyone participates in a drum circle, a get-together that is, in equal parts, about music, socializing and values training.

David Hale of Garland, a former engineer, leads the groups. He begins with a story, then leads the group in clapping and drumming and may conclude with games and a discussion on such topics as "patience" or "honesty."



Kim Ritzenthaler / DMN  
**Containers and plastic pipes were the instruments of choice for (from left) Sammy McConathy, 6, Reece Knox, 10, and Scott Howerton, 9.**

The drumming, he said, is more than a musical interlude between lessons – it is a vital part of the lessons.

"Drumming teaches teamwork," he said. "You have your own rhythm that you get from the environment, but you get it from other people as well, and you have to adapt it to what other people are doing."

Mrs. Berkovitz first contacted Mr. Hale about forming the drumming circle as a way to help her son Jacob, 7, who has Asperger syndrome, an autism-like disorder that makes

social interaction difficult.

"Jacob has trouble being in a group, and this is a way he can be around people in a not very structured way," she said.

But word of the circle spread to other parents in Mrs. Berkovitz's home-schooling network, her church, her neighborhood, even her taekwondo class.

"Now, I'll have people show up in my living room who I don't even know. They just hear about it from somebody else," she said.

After some storytelling, the circle of people claps to warm up for the drumming.

Everyone in the circle claps to a single beat, but then each person steps in the middle of the gray rug in the living room and claps to a varied rhythm.

"I like it, but it makes my hands hurt," Scott Howerton, 9, said afterward.

Although parents join in, it is clearly the kids who get most involved in the drumming.

On Sunday, Jacob's brother, Erich, 10, put on a pair of ankle bells and joined in. The drumming started slowly, then picked up in loudness and intensity. The children shook used Dasani bottles filled with pebbles, beat cymbals, rattled tambourines and pounded on boxes.

As the crescendo grew, Erich danced, played air guitar and briefly assumed the John Travolta pose from *Saturday Night Fever*.

When the drumming stopped, Erich took a breath.

"I like these ankle things, 'cause I get to dance," he said.

E-mail [dflick@dallasnews.com](mailto:dflick@dallasnews.com)