



Common Sounds was established to offer a way forward in our conflicted and divided communities.

Related Theories and Practices

Transforming Conflict with Music

The idea of using music to promote change is not new. Musicians have historically used songs to influence and spread news of injustices in the world and to make an issue come to life. Music has been used to spread the intention of war, as well as ring bells for peace. It is commonly referred to as a *universal language* but perhaps the gift of music is not just in our ability to sing the same notes, rather it is our ability to hear each other's songs – songs that may have *different* notes.

There is power in using music in service of finding better ways for us to communicate and experience a shared sense of humanity. Music can be used to bring people together through drumming, singing, themed concerts, engaged listening to music, and instrumental ensembles.

Common Sounds is joining with others around the world in exploring the varied uses of music to build bridges and to transform conflict.

Conflict Transformation is a theoretical orientation that seeks to address the problem at hand *and* related issues and relationships connected to the conflict. It is a broader approach that seeks to reach beyond simply *resolving conflict*, with hopes for a more lasting peace. Often it is in the scope of our troubled relationships that the pains of conflict are more deeply felt. With this in mind, Common Sounds specifically addresses relationships using music to assist in reaching across some of our divisiveness.

In his book, *The Moral Imagination* (2005), John Paul Lederach explores how our imagination can lead the way to creating change and transcend conflict. His chapter entitled, *On Pied Pipers*, explores how the arts “help us return to our humanity, a transcendent journey that, like the moral imagination, can build a sense that we are, after all, a human community.”

Music Therapy

The profession of music therapy in the U.S. dates back to the early 1920s with the use of music to help patients in hospitals. Today music therapy can be found in medical settings, schools, prisons, with families in their homes, community clinics, private practices, as well as other settings. Basically stated, music therapy is the use

of music to enhance a sense of wellbeing. For one person, it might entail actively playing musical instruments to explore and express feelings, for another it might be listening to recorded music in an intentional way to transcend physical pain. There are numerous universities or colleges throughout the world that offer academic programs in music therapy.

We have more than 50 years of collected research studies that demonstrate the efficacy of music therapy. We know that music can change heart rate, stress hormone levels, our experience of emotional and physical pain, in addition to a wide variety of other areas of healing.

Common Sounds founders have more than 40 years of combined experience using music therapy to help people. This knowledge and tools from music therapy offer an invaluable component to the work we do.

Facilitated Conversations encourage respectful listening and honest reflections. A frequent comment about conflicts is a deep desire to simply be heard. Conversations that are facilitated can acknowledge our differences as well as offer a way to come together and *hear* one another. One of the key concepts in facilitating a conversation is establishing Ground Rules for how we engage with one another (i.e.: no personal put downs, no shouting). This helps to create a safe space for people to more fully express themselves. Another important component is creating a structure that encourages deep listening of what the other person is saying.

Counseling tools used by Common Sounds include enhanced listening and communication skills, such as active listening and Non-Violent Communication. The counseling tools can also include self-awareness of our internal self-talk and use of self-regulation tools, such as breathing and physical relaxation techniques and mindfulness-based approaches. Our work is also influenced by the impact *shame* can have on our actions and beliefs. Efforts are made to build shame-awareness and shame-resilience to help us open and move beyond fixed and stuck views of human existence and interactions.

While our work may not directly bring these counseling tools into Common Sounds events, they are the underpinnings of our understanding of how we can better get along with each other in this world.