HAPPINESS AND HOMELESSNESS

Can the emerging science of wellbeing help us support people at the margins of society more effectively?

Dr Mark Williamson
Director, Action for Happiness

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About Action for Happiness

- A movement of people taking action to increase happiness and wellbeing across society
- Combined membership and online community of 200,000 people and a network of partner organisations
- Backed by leading experts from psychology, neuroscience, education, economics, social innovation and more
- Provides evidence-based ideas and materials to enable practical action to create happier homes, workplaces and communities

www.actionforhappiness.org
“Happiness is a deep sense of flourishing, not a mere pleasurable feeling or fleeting emotion but an optimal state of being”

Matthieu Ricard
Happiness is more than just a fleeting emotion

Subjective Wellbeing measures now used by ONS

**Emotional State**
Whether you are feeling good right now

**Life Satisfaction**
Whether you feel that life is going well overall

**Meaning & Purpose**
Whether you feel that what you do is worthwhile

Source: Office for National Statistics (2012)
Modern societies have been getting richer but no happier

Source: Layard, 2003 (based on US data)
The Happiness Advantage: benefits for individuals

People who have higher psychological wellbeing...

- Are healthier
- Live longer
- Form more close relationships
- Have a happier home life
- Have more career success

The Happiness Advantage: benefits for society

People who have higher psychological wellbeing...

- Are more likely to help others
- Are more productive at work
- Have fewer days off with illness
- Are more flexible and creative
- Engage in fewer risky activities

Mental illness is actually the UK’s biggest health issue

Source: Centre for Economic Performance, Mental Health Policy Group (2012)
What determines a successful life?

Source: Layard (2012), using British Cohort Study data
Wellbeing: functioning well and feeling good

- **Feeling Good**: Experiencing positive emotions, e.g. satisfaction, joy, contentment
- **Functioning Well**: E.g. to be autonomous, competent, safe & secure, connected to others
- **External Conditions**: E.g. Material conditions, work and productivity, income (levels of stability)
- **Personal Resources**: E.g. health, resilience, optimism, self-esteem

Source: nef (2011), based on evidence from UK Foresight Project on Mental Capital (2009)
Positive psychology – a fundamental shift in focus

Source: Nick Standlea Animation
Research is uncovering how we can increase our happiness.

Mapping emotional states to areas of brain activity.

Positive emotion

Negative emotion

ACTION FOR HAPPINESS
GREAT DREAM: Ten Keys to Happier Living

- **GIVING**: Do things for others
- **RELATING**: Connect with people
- **EXERCISING**: Take care of your body
- **APPRECIATING**: Notice the world around
- **TRYING OUT**: Keep learning new things
- **DIRECTION**: Have goals to look forward to
- **RESILIENCE**: Find ways to bounce back
- **EMOTION**: Take a positive approach
- **ACCEPTANCE**: Be comfortable with who you are
- **MEANING**: Be part of something bigger

Action: Three Good Things
People were asked to write down **three things that went well** every night for **one week**, including a causal explanation for each good thing.

In an randomised placebo-controlled study, this simple intervention was found to increase happiness and reduce depressive symptoms for **six months**.

**Source**: Seligman and Steen (2005)
Motivation and core psychological needs

**Extrinsic motivation**
- Doing something because of what it leads to (e.g. gaining a ‘reward’ or avoiding ‘punishment’)

**Intrinsic motivation**
- Doing something because it is inherently interesting, satisfying or meaningful

Source: Deci, & Ryan (2008)
Core Psychological Needs: 1. AUTONOMY

Sense of having some choice; not controlled or pressured; “I want to” vs. “I have to”
Core Psychological Needs: 2. RELATEDNESS

Feeling connected to others, being seen/considered; not feeling cut-off or cut-out
Core Psychological Needs: 3. COMPETENCE

Feeling efficient and effective, mastering things; not feeling incompetent or ineffective
Q: How can we help homeless people achieve their core needs?

- **Autonomy**: Sense of having some choice; not controlled or pressured: “I want to” vs. “I have to”

- **Relatedness**: Feeling connected to others, having supportive and satisfying relationships, being seen and considered; not feeling cut-off or cut-out

- **Competence**: Feeling efficient and effective, mastering things; not feeling incompetent or ineffective

Source: Deci, & Ryan (2008)
Practical Ideas for Happier Living – an exciting new course

- Brings groups of up to 20 people together to learn practical ways to improve mental wellbeing
- Developed by Action for Happiness in partnership with Kingston Public Health team
- Uses proven ideas based on latest scientific evidence
- Groups meet for 2 weekly sessions of 2 hours
The course covers six practical ideas to improve wellbeing

- **NOTICE THE GOOD THINGS**
- **LOOK AFTER YOUR RELATIONSHIPS**
- **ENJOY STAYING ACTIVE**
- **TAKE A MINUTE TO BREATHE**
- **CHECK YOUR THINKING**
- **USE YOUR STRENGTHS**
Initial analysis shows significant boost to wellbeing

**Life Satisfaction**: “Overall how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?” (Range: 0-10)

**SWEMWBS**: Short Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Survey (Range: 7-35)

Source: Questionnaire completed by all participants before and after the course
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