

Editorial

The issue of well-being, sometimes also referred to as happiness, is one that is becoming increasingly important in Britain. The previous British government, in a major policy document, *New Horizons* (DH, 2009), set out the direction of travel for mental health services. Well-being is a central part of that strategy. The current coalition government has continued this trend and, as predicted (Carson, 2010), has now added questions on well-being to the annual household survey, showing its concern not just for the country's Gross National Product, but also with its Gross National Happiness.

Given the increasing importance of well-being, I felt it was timely to consider the links between groupwork and well-being. Indeed this was the main theme of the 2010 European Groupwork Conference in York. The idea for a Special Issue of *Groupwork* on this topic, was originally conceived by Dr Ilona Boniwell and myself. Dr Boniwell is one of the leading positive psychology researchers in Europe (Boniwell, 2006), and helped establish the first ever masters degree programme in Britain in positive psychology, at the University of East London. She has co-authored two of the papers in this Special Issue and commissioned two additional papers from other colleagues at the University of East London.

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In the first paper, Miriam Akhtar and Dr Boniwell describe a group based intervention for alcohol misusing adolescents, that is based on positive psychology principles. The intervention comprised eight workshops that incorporated happiness, strengths, optimism and gratitude. The group receiving the intervention, showed significant increases in well-being. They also decreased their levels of alcohol consumption. These gains were maintained at three month follow-up. A comparison group showed no changes.

In the second paper, Kevin Sheridan, Faye Adams-Eaton, Alison Trimble, Adrian Renton and Marcello Bertotti, describe the use of the World Café approach as part of the Well London Project. They discuss

how best to engage with local communities, focussing on building collaborative partnerships, working with whole systems, privileging community knowledge and working with the deficit of experience. They used the World Café method, as a way of eliciting the views of local communities in London to the question, 'What do you understand as the health needs of your community?' Some 40 cafés were held, reaching almost 1400 residents. They found a lack of community spirit amongst the groups surveyed and particular concerns around antisocial behaviour in young people and a lack of purposeful activity.

Charlotte Style and Dr Boniwell looked at the effectiveness of Nina Grunfeld's Life Clubs in the third paper. They showed that a group who attended Life Club workshops over a six week period, showed improved happiness and well-being in comparison with another group, who spent an equivalent amount of time engaged in unstructured conversational sessions. The Life Clubs group showed significant improvements both at the end of the workshops, and again at follow-up. Given the brevity of the intervention, this is a very positive finding.

In the next paper, along with Margaret Muir, Sherry Clark, Elizabeth Wakely and Anant Chander, I describe a gratitude intervention that we piloted with nine people attending a community mental health teabase. The intervention comprised two short workshops, a month of daily gratitude monitoring, a meal and a £10 gift voucher. Participants improved significantly on 4/14 comparisons and reported feeling grateful for more things in their life after the monitoring period, than they had before. While there were changes in 'state' gratitude, 'trait' gratitude stayed the same.

In the fifth paper Nash Popovic describes the Personal Synthesis programme that he has developed over a number of years. He tells how he applied this comprehensive human development programme with groups of individuals who were HIV positive. The programme comprises weekly two hour sessions held over an entire academic year, and has been running for over six years. Nash describes the background to the programme and also presents some findings on its efficacy.

The final paper, offers a critique of the fields of recovery and positive psychology from Christopher Scanlan and John Adlam. Amongst other things they argue that

The recovery approach is in grave danger of becoming a professionally

governed fig-leaf to cover up ... our chronically under-funded mental health system.

They also point out the paradox of the much heralded Improving Access to Psychological Therapies initiative, that it excludes those, whose problems are too complex. They also provide a powerful critique of positive psychology.

I hope groupworkers will find much to interest them in this diverse collection of papers. Well-being in an idea whose time has come. However to come to full fruition, its proponents will need to harness the benefits of groupwork.

Jerome Carson
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References:

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Carson, J. (2010) Measuring wellbeing. *British Journal of Wellbeing*, 1, 8, 5
Department of Health (2009) *New Horizons: A shared vision for mental health*. London: Department of Health