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Conference Abstract

Do-it-Yourself Happiness: integrating well-being into population health

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Abstract

Over the past few years, the concept of 'wellbeing' has gained considerable currency in economic, social and political circles with a recognition that well-being is vitally important for the healthy functioning of families, communities and society.

There is a large and compelling body of evidence, primarily from the field of positive psychology that is demonstrating that higher levels of positive emotions are correlated with a wide range of health and social outcomes. We know that certain actions, activities and practices can improve mood, reduce the risk of depression, strengthen relationships, keep us healthy and even add seven years to our lives. Yet health promotion tends to focus primarily on physical health rather than an integrated approach to mind and body.

DIY Happiness is a health promotion initiative that aims to improve people's understanding of mental health and wellbeing – in effect, social marketing the concept of mental health as a 'positive asset' that can be improved and enhanced by both individual and collective action

DIY Happiness has three key objectives:

- to improve participants' understanding of mental health and wellbeing;
- to boost participants' subjective wellbeing
- to encourage participants to increase their uptake of evidence-based activities that improve wellbeing

There are two stages to the programme. The first consists of eight weekly workshops based on six dimensions of well-being. These dimensions are graphically represented by a "wheel of well-being" and build on the Foresight report's '5 Ways to Wellbeing.' After an introductory workshop, participants explore one of the themes of the Wheel of Well-being, each week, in a positive and participative way. Workshop themes include BODY (health, fitness and being active); MIND (learning, skills, creativity and thinking); SPIRIT (meaning, giving, positive emotions and health); PEOPLE (connecting to others, friends and family); PLACE (taking notice, surroundings, neighbourhoods); and PLANET (caring for the environment, sustainable happiness). The final session brings the whole programme together and develops the second stage of the project: "Dare-to-Dream"

Dare-to-Dream, the second stage of the programme, encourages participants to use the knowledge they've acquired to design tailor-made 'happiness-boosting' initiatives for their family, friends and local neighbourhood.

Between 2009 and 2011, 350 women from across London took part in Well London's DIY Happiness project in 20 local neighbourhoods facing the highest levels of health inequity.

The project evaluation shows:

- improvements in well-being scores for all participants
- significant improvements in feelings of cheerfulness, usefulness and optimism about the future.

A training-the-trainers programme is currently running with community workers in London and to support sustainability a Wheel of Wellbeing website has been developed (www.wheelofwellbeing.org), offering a practical collection of free tips, tools, activities and ideas, all designed to inspire people to develop new ways to improve well-being, whether from an individual, group or strategic perspective.

The presentation will explore the evidence base, how to effectively engage communities in wellbeing, discuss the programme findings and look at key questions such as who decides on what's a good investment for wellbeing and how?

Keywords

wellbeing; mental health; population health; health promotion
