

## Wellbeing and third sector leadership

### Summary and recommendations

Third sector leaders from diverse backgrounds, running hugely different organisations, share a common belief that the deeper wellbeing of service users, staff and volunteers is a key objective of their work. They unequivocally argue that a philosophy of personal development underlies and defines their activity, distinguishing it from services that tend to view service users as merely the objects of defined outputs.

Examples are provided by the CEOs of the following organisations: Riding for the Disabled Association, Shoreditch Trust, Friends of the Elderly, Association of Christian Counsellors, Grenfell Housing Association, Brent Mind, Cancer Care, Antidote, KidsOut, Taunton Deane Voluntary Action, THSA, London South Bank University, Age Concern Darlington, Cyclists Touring Company, Ecas, Association of Medical Research Charities, Association of Charitable Foundations, Reach, Oasis School of Human Relations, and the Church of England.

As this paper illustrates, conceptions of wellbeing and personal development may provide a new and significant way of characterising the intrinsic value of third sector activities. These projects and services tend to place the autonomy and wellbeing of citizens at their centre, exploring innovative ways of delivering services both within and outside the public policy mainstream.

Policymakers and commissioners should:

1. Recognise, champion and support third sector work to promote quality of life and general wellbeing,
2. Recognise the value of wellbeing-centred approaches to service delivery in driving innovation and achieving important outcomes,
3. Consult third sector leaders as expert catalysts and connectors, rather than legitimised representatives, for particular communities,
4. View sound mental health and positive wellbeing as a key outcome across the range of public services.

Third sector leaders should:

1. Consider whether ideas of wellbeing and personal development provide a helpful way of defining the intrinsic value of your work,
2. Through dialogue with policymakers and commissioners, seek to ensure that this value is recognised and supported by those purchasing services from the sector.
3. Those leading independent foundations should consider their role as a counterbalance to goals in society and government that may not contribute to happiness.

## The Pursuit of Happiness

230 years since the United States' declaration of independence, the pursuit of happiness is again entering mainstream political debate. The Conservative Leader, David Cameron, intends to promote "General Wellbeing", which "can't be measured by money or traded in markets. It's about the beauty of our surroundings, the quality of our culture, and above all the strength of our relationships."

Meanwhile, the Government has commissioned a Whitehall Wellbeing Working Group, a committee of civil servants, to examine proposals on how ministers can increase our collective happiness.

The Department of Health has recently published a "commissioning framework for health and wellbeing". Ruth Kelly and Patricia Hewitt, ministers for communities and health respectively, say the framework is "for everyone involved in commissioning local services - so they can work together to improve the health, wellbeing and independence of everyone living in their local area."

As the author Richard Reeves demonstrated at acevo's annual conference in December, wellbeing policies, dismissed by some critics as vacuous, have a solid philosophical and economic pedigree. They also provide an opportunity for the countless third sector organisations that foster quality of life to develop a better characterisation of their work, and advocate more effectively for its benefits.

Aristotle viewed *eudaimonia*, often translated as "happiness", or "flourishing", as the highest goal of human life. He regarded human happiness as unique, depending on our ability to live virtuously and in accordance with human nature. A deeper concept than transient "joy", this form of happiness refers to a more fulsome idea of wellbeing. It focuses on personal development and character, which enable people to live rich, rounded, and rewarding lives.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, social commentators readily discussed the importance of building "character" in securing happiness. According to John Stuart Mill, quality of life depends on quality of people. He argued that, "The worth of the state is the worth of the individuals comprising it." The state should prioritise the personal development of its citizens, since, "with small men no great thing can be accomplished."<sup>1</sup>

Last century, influential thinkers anticipated the growing importance of wellbeing issues. In 1930, John Maynard Keynes predicted that by now we would have "solved the economic problem," reaching a level of affluence that would make further GDP growth unnecessary. Instead, we would have to confront the "real, permanent problem... [of how] to live wisely and agreeably and well".

A tension arises between the respective responsibilities of the state and its citizens - could good government ever be enough to make us happy? Beveridge thought not. In 1948 he wrote that "The making of a good society depends not on the state but on the citizens... The happiness or unhappiness of the society in which we live depends upon ourselves as citizens, not on the instrument of political power which we call the state."

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<sup>1</sup> J.S. Mill (1869), *On Liberty*

In contrast, Anthony Giddens has argued more recently for a broader understanding of the welfare state. "Welfare shouldn't just mean having a certain amount of money. Welfare should mean the capability of leading a reasonably fulfilling life."<sup>2</sup> This argument places happiness and fulfilment firmly within the compass of a progressive state.

### The Joyful Science?

The new "scientists of happiness", such as Richard Layard, sometimes take a fairly shallow view of happiness: "By happiness I mean feeling good - enjoying life and feeling it is wonderful."<sup>3</sup> However, Paul Dolan, in a comprehensive research study for DEFRA, identifies five distinct approaches to defining wellbeing. "Different conceptions of wellbeing adopt different perspectives from which to judge the individual, which makes direct comparisons between accounts potentially meaningless."<sup>4</sup>

The approach of many third sector leaders lies closest to that of Mill and Aristotle: true and lasting happiness lies in assisted personal development, rather than efforts to prolong cheerfulness. Tom Adams, CEO of Children North East, reminds us that "When Freud suggested that psychoanalysis could only offer 'ordinary unhappiness' he meant helping to live within the full range of normal emotional experience, neither to stay crippled by a pathological depression, nor enter into a state of manic bliss. I think that such a state and way of living is what "wellbeing" is - a state of full and rounded humanness in which all emotional responses are available in appropriate proportion."

When scientists leave it to individuals to define their own happiness, data appear to fulfil Keynes' prediction that economic growth is no longer the priority. Countries with a per capita income over \$10,000 do not increase reported happiness by getting richer. Moreover, while income in European countries has doubled since 1960, the number of Europeans describing themselves as "very happy" has remained unchanged at 35%.

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<sup>2</sup> DNW 1999, interview with Anthony Giddens  
([http://www.vpro.nl/attachment.db/Interview\\_Giddens.html?17292650](http://www.vpro.nl/attachment.db/Interview_Giddens.html?17292650))

<sup>3</sup> Layard R., Lionel Robbins Memorial Lectures 2002/3

<sup>4</sup> Dolan, Peasgood and White (2006), Review of research on the influences on personal wellbeing and application to policy making



Kalenjins, a neighbouring tribe, attacked us. I witnessed some horrific things including killings.

“When I joined the Shoreditch Spa Refugee Project I met with other people from other countries that have gone through similar things to what I have gone through. I now realise I am not alone and that there are many people out there that too have experienced horrible things. At the Support group we have a chat about it and we socialise.

“We went on an outing to the British Museum. I was very happy because I have never been there and I have never seen so much splendid things. I saw some things from Africa and some things from my tribe. I enjoyed the day and the company so much; I will never forget that day it will remain in my head forever.

“I don’t know what the future brings but I am so thankful to have met so many nice people at Shoreditch Spa and their kindness will forever remain with me. When you have experienced so much pain and sadness sometimes you forget the existence of God but then you find these sorts of people helping you and your faith in human kindness and God returns.”

Through the Spa, MK is:

- Receiving one to one twelve week counselling at the Refugee Therapy Centre,
- Receiving assistance from Amnesty International,
- Getting to understand her way around London,
- Enrolled with the Shoreditch Spa Healthy Eating course,
- Enrolled in a Training for Life course on personal development and IT,
- Taking a weekend break with the Laburnum Boat Club to the River Stort Essex.

As Michael Pyner puts it,

“When MK is with other people, embarking on these activities, she feels relaxed and at peace. The physical aches and pains inflicted during torture and emotional anguish felt daily are temporary alleviated. MK is now feeling less alone.”

Placing central importance on service users’ relationships and connections helps to define the role of third sector leaders and social entrepreneurs. At local level, they are often judged on their ability to represent a community, and too frequently dismissed by local politicians for their failure to offer this kind of legitimacy. However, we should care about their effectiveness in connecting, rather than representing, their community. They quite properly act as catalysts and connectors in developing social capital, enabling people to speak for themselves, rather than acting as elected mouthpieces for any defined community. Government, central and local, should consult leaders as experts on the ground, not as representative spokespeople akin to politicians.

Some chief executives highlight the role of faith-based activities and support in promoting wellbeing through “spiritual” development:

William Fittall, Secretary General to the Archbishops' Council at the Church of England, says:

“A substantial part of the third sector is made up of churches and other faith based

organisations which are, by their very nature, committed to the notion that the promotion of human flourishing is about more than material prosperity. All faiths hold that happiness requires attending to the spiritual dimension of life and the establishing of some coherent view of the 'meaning of life'.

“Without the contribution that the churches and other faith organisations make to some of our tough neighbourhoods these communities would be in an even more challenging situation than they are.

“Government policies should support organisations that promote wellbeing. It is right, for example, that the promotion of religion should be regarded as a charitable activity that contributes to the public benefit. Support needs to encompass quite a wide range of possibilities (including the avoidance of undue regulatory burdens) and is more than simply providing funding streams.”

Richard Furze, Chief Executive of Friends of the Elderly says:

“Though we do not call ourselves a Christian charity, and support those with any faith or none, I think it is widely accepted that a holistic approach to people must include a spiritual emphasis. This is why we have chapels in all our homes and invite priests, ministers and rabbis to take part in the life of each place.”

Greta Randle, Chief Executive of the Association of Christian Counsellors (UK), says:

“As a counselling organisation we are committed to supporting people in finding a way to emotional and psychological well being. This is the heart of our work. As a faith based organisation we also believe that God can help us in our role.”

## Work, Wellness and Wellbeing

So should third sector organisations forget about fighting poverty, unemployment and poor health, and focus instead on developing people’s autonomy and good character?

The reality is far more complex: unhappiness cannot be so easily separated from poverty, worklessness, and poor health. Within a given country, people’s unhappiness correlates with their poverty relative to others of the same age.<sup>5</sup> So policies that reduce social inequality are likely to reduce unhappiness.

Professor Paul Dolan, Chair in Economics at the Tanaka Business School, points out that, “Subjective wellbeing (SWB) is strongly related to health, particularly psychological health, and unemployment is highly detrimental to SWB.”

According to Will Hutton:

“Every psychological test in many countries shows that unemployment is not only feared: it is a condition which induces depression and unhappiness and is a condition people try and avoid if at all possible. While for the rich, often working enormously long hours, once they have got used to their higher income, they regress to being just as happy, or as unhappy, as they were before, or even unhappier.”

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<sup>5</sup> c.f. Glenn Firebaugh and Laura Tach, "Relative Income and Happiness: Are Americans on a Hedonic Treadmill?," for the American Sociological Association Centennial Annual Meeting on August 14.

However, wellbeing policies do suggest a more relationship-centred approach to tackling these seemingly intractable issues. Catchphrases such as “social capital” and “network poverty” have been used by social researchers and policymakers to stress the importance of interpersonal relationships in increasing people’s chances of improving their own lives.

Social capital was defined ten years ago by Perri 6 as “the quality of contacts people have and networks they plug into, and the norms of trust, reciprocity and goodwill, sense of shared life across the classes, and capacities to organise that these ties afford”. He went on to remind us of the simple truth, still largely ignored by policymakers, that “Most people get jobs through the people they know”.<sup>6</sup>

The persistent difficulty for government lies in making the case for investment on long-term soft outcomes, in place of more visible and more visibly justifiable spending on acute services and major programmes, or more measurable changes to the tax and welfare systems.

Ed Bracher, Chief Executive of the Riding for the Disabled Association, says:

“Our organisation was set up with happiness and wellbeing at the core of what we achieve. Through our work, profoundly disabled people are able to get the thrill and experience of carriage driving: we have seen the benefits that this causes.

“The therapeutic value of what we achieve is often measured in terms of the physical benefit - e.g. helping people to regain mobility or muscle tone through riding. However, the mental benefits are massive and we would argue that every one of our 25,000 participants gains in this way.

“Contact with animals has a very positive effect on many people. In our context people have the added benefit of getting out and taking part in an activity. We are increasingly working with people who have learning difficulties or mental health problems, where we are seeing major impacts in terms of confidence, self-esteem, and quality of life.

“As well as our participants, we have almost 20,000 volunteers who gain enormously: I rarely meet a volunteer who is not happy and excited by what we do.”

## Mainstreaming Mental Health and Wellbeing

Spending on mental health services, particularly those that aim to develop skills and promote work opportunities would intuitively appear to offer the greatest benefits for a wellbeing agenda. A double-win for happiness comes from those helping people currently on incapacity benefit - often due to depression or stress - to find work.

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<sup>6</sup> P. (1997), “Social Exclusion: time to be optimistic”, in Demos (1997), *Network Poverty*

Poor mental health is becoming more widespread. In 2004/05, PCTs spent more on mental health programmes than any other type, at just over £7bn (11%).<sup>7</sup> As Keynes suggested, achieving wellbeing and happiness is not just an issue for the chronically depressed, but a problem facing all of us. It is third sector organisations that are preventing our mental health deteriorating ever more rapidly.

Melanie Brooks, Chief Executive of Brent Mind, says:

“Brent Mind is shifting its focus from dealing with poor mental health to a role in promoting ways of positively managing good mental health. We deliver a number of public sector contracts where we are adopting a recovery approach. Interestingly, our statutory commissioners find it difficult to engage with us on this agenda and this hinders our progress somewhat!

“We have just launched our Well Business service which works with employers to provide a unique bundle of services aimed at promoting good mental health at work and supporting employees to manage stress. We have first piloted the service internally, offering this as a wellbeing benefit. It is early days, but we are already seeing a marked change in happiness at work and reduced absences.”

These findings offer support for investment in preventative mental health services, targeted at the general population. They also suggest that health professionals should place an emphasis on overall patient wellbeing, as well as treatment for particular conditions. Again, third sector organisations have taken a leading role.

Chris Head, CEO of Penny Brohn Cancer Care, says:

“The promotion of health and wellbeing in the face of serious illness is exactly what we do for people with cancer and their supporters. We offer residential programmes in groups, individually-tailored programmes on a drop-in basis, a national helpline and training for health professionals. We deal with approximately 11,000 people a year, and have just moved to purpose-built new premises to double the number of people we can help.

“We use a "toolkit" comprising self-help techniques, good quality information, complementary therapies and advice on diet and lifestyle, delivered by specialist doctors, nurses and therapists. The feedback from thousands of people who have used the charity's services since it was founded in 1980 is extremely positive, and it is clear we have had a transformational effect on many people's lives.”

This type of holistic approach might improve the results of public service professionals in education, as well as health. Education Minister Andrew Adonis brought forward an amendment to last year's education bill, requiring schools to promote the wellbeing of students.

According to James Park, Director of Antidote, schools face a considerable challenge in delivering this objective:

“Between Year 5 and Year 10 there is a 25% drop in the degree to which students experience the school environment as one that enables them to feel capable

<sup>7</sup> King's Fund 2006, Local variations in NHS spending priorities

listened to accepted safe and included (CLASI). The level drops from a relatively rosy 82% in Year 5 to a worrying 58% in Year 10.

“This tells us that as students start work on their GCSEs over 40% experience a low level of wellbeing. Their experience of secondary school has not promoted in them the sort of emotional state that supports motivation to learn and to get on with each other. It may be the focus provided by exams is what leads to things picking up slightly in the subsequent year, but the consequence is that a lot of learning opportunity will have been wasted in the preceding period.”

It is a philosophical truism that happiness can only be sought indirectly. John Stuart Mill said that happiness comes 'by the way in the pursuit of some other worthy end' - it must be approached from the side, 'like a crab'. Fascinating counterparts can be found in the more innovative forms of basic public service delivery, which demonstrate that hard outcomes are sometimes best delivered as part of a softer package.

Many third sector leaders recognise the importance of wellbeing as an aid to learning. Reversing Mill's equation, they encourage people to develop skills through a “crablike” approach, focusing on enjoyable, stimulating and engaging activities.

Lola Barrett of the Grenfell Housing Association has recognised a lack of enthusiasm among many young people for the numeracy and literacy training her organisation is funded to offer. Many of them would prefer driving lessons instead. So her organisation delivers driving lessons, with a strong element of numeracy and literacy training built in. The young people get the hard skills they need through an activity they desire and enjoy.

Emma Sambrook, Chief Executive of KidsOut, says:

“We believe that if you engage children and young people by providing activities they enjoy they are much more likely to do them and so get all the additional benefits: team work, communication skills, and social skills.

“They are enjoying themselves and don't realise how much they are benefiting (as is the whole of society as then they're less likely to be engaging in antisocial behaviour).”

## Happiness and the Limits of the State

Little doubt exists that the state should aim to promote education, employment and good health among its citizens. Beyond these roles, state intervention can become harder to justify. Dolan provides one example, “It's shown that married people are happier – so what does that mean for politics? Is that... something that should be left to individual choice?” Within a stable relationship, an active sex life also promotes wellbeing, but would the public welcome sex advice from politicians?

Rather than offering their views on relationships, politicians might instead ensure that expert advice and support for people in relationships is readily available. A

host of leading third sector organisations, such as Relate and fpa, already have vast experience in providing such services.

Demos has partnered up with Relate to start to explore how people experience happiness, and unpick some of the assumptions around wellbeing, through a new project exploring the relationship between love and happiness in everyday life. People express love in a practical sense through partnerships and parenting. Research suggests that people who are in long-term stable relationships are happier than singles. Although the narrative linking unhappiness and conflict in family life and reduced outcomes for children has been well researched, the converse story around the impact of stable, happy experiences is rarely told.<sup>8</sup>

Wellbeing policies also touch other neglected parts of the sector. The BBC's helpful "Happiness Manifesto", which draws on the television series *Making Slough Happy*, encourages us to do "a good turn for someone each day" and to "say hello to a stranger". Some third sector organisations, such as Taunton Deane Voluntary Action, are using these activities as benchmarks to measure social capital in their areas.

At a broader level, such actions would appear to translate neatly into public participation in philanthropy, volunteering, and community development. Although Paul Dolan argues that in this case "the evidence about causality has been overstated,"<sup>9</sup> a growing body of research supports a connection between the third sector's work and the wellbeing of those delivering it.

Professor Oswald and Jonathan Gardner at the University of Warwick asked 7000 Britons to rate their overall job satisfaction on a scale of one to seven. Those working in the third sector scored significantly higher than their public and private sector counterparts.

Philip Bartey, Chief Executive of THSA, says:

"Our philosophy and approach at THSA is to work hard at making every member of the team (at all levels) feel important, valued and listened to.

"For some people this simply rhetoric for the annual report, but we have tried hard to bring it to life as a core aspirational value. In reality it means the management team try to ensure that credit for success is given to others as a first resort, and in so doing we try to make heroes out of the people we manage. A core value in this is that the management team do not try and demand respect from the staff they manage. Respect is not something that we believe we are entitled to- it is something that we aim to give to others. It's a simple philosophy but it works for us.

"We do lots of other things to contribute to well being and happiness but we recognise that staff turnover and demotivation is mainly the result of people not feeling valued and listened to and not being allowed to actively participate in the wellbeing and happiness and success of the organisation."

<sup>8</sup> [www.demos.co.uk](http://www.demos.co.uk), accessed 30<sup>th</sup> April

<sup>9</sup> "Q&A Professor Paul Dolan, Chair in Economics, Tanaka Business School, Imperial College" eGov monitor, 16 Oct 2006

Professor Paul Whiteley, Director of the ESRC Democracy and Participation Research Programme, confirms a correlation between working to help others, and contributing to your own happiness. "[Our] research has revealed an interesting link between helping others and enjoying a good quality of life. It seems that when we focus on the needs of others, we may also reap benefits ourselves. It means that voluntary activity in the community is associated with better health, lower crime, improved educational performance and greater life satisfaction. Communities with lots of civic and community engagement are also communities that have environments that foster favourable outcomes such as these."

Organisations such as the National Trust and the Central Council of Physical Recreation actively increase happiness by supporting activities, including volunteering and recreation, that promote it. According to the CCPR, recreation counts for 26% of formal volunteering. The National Trust has 3.4 million paying members.

A growing number of organisations have begun to highlight an explicit focus on wellbeing: London South Bank University recently created a new "Academy of Sport, Physical Activity and Wellbeing", while Age Concern Darlington has developed "Lifestyle 50 plus", a portfolio of activities which unashamedly sets out to "create contentment" by enabling people to develop healthy living, learning and leisure pursuits.

Kevin Mayne, Director of the Cyclists Touring Campaign, says

"Our board has just re-framed our Vision statement to focus on the enjoyment and life enriching qualities of cycling as well as its transportation and utility:

*A future in which CTC is an innovative, thriving organisation of cyclists and supporters working to promote cycling for all people; cycling that is accessible and safe; cycling that is enjoyable and functional; cycling that enriches lives and communities and cycling that reduces the impact of society on the environment. CTC improves lives by promoting cycling for fair and inclusive access to health, mobility, transport and leisure.*

"It was part of our founding purpose as the Cyclists Touring Club and one we have carried for nearly 130 years. 10 million people must be getting something from cycling!"

David Griffiths, Chief Executive of Ecas , says:

"At Ecas, a charity established in Edinburgh in 1902 to help those with physical disabilities, we have long recognised that quality of life can make a huge difference to happiness and thus overall wellbeing. We therefore include holidays, as well as equipment, in the list of things we will provide grants for. Applicants decide where they want to go and can apply for funding up to £500 for a holiday, and we will also assist with the costs of carers where applicable. We get quite a few applicants and this year clients have been to a number of foreign destinations as well as holidays in the UK."

Nick Ellerby, Co-Director of The OASIS School of Human Relations, aims to provide imaginative interventions to increase people's sense of control over their working lives. He says:

"We work with the whole system of an organisation from what we term a human relations perspective. Underpinning our approach within Oasis and with those we work alongside is the ideal of Whole Person Learning - a way of working that encourages organisations and those within them to enable more of the whole person to come to work. A whole person tends not to live a fractured life but rather an interconnected existence - this helps to sustain a being that is well.

"Giving more concrete examples, our confidential counselling and mentoring services is one means by which organisations can ensure staff, and the organisation, remain as healthy as possible and are working as effectively as they are able. Access to an independent practitioner who offers an impartial, unbiased space for exploration of issues and concerns is acknowledged to be a real benefit."

Such organisations are on the happiness frontline. We may hope that their work will, in future, be regarded as essential to national quality of life, in the same way as mainstream public services. As Anthony Crosland famously remarked, "What one generation sees as a luxury, the next sees as a necessity".

In the meantime, some third sector organisations are directly involved in research to build our understanding of the psychology behind wellbeing:

Simon Denegri, Chief Executive of the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC), sits on a Government Foresight Group investigating Mental Capital and Wellbeing in more depth, along with other third sector leaders. He says:

"Medical research charities have an important role in increasing our understanding of the health, social care and wider factors that influence wellbeing."

Governments around the world are embracing this agenda to different degrees. Nordic countries, Finland in particular, are placing the happiness of citizens at the centre of government policy. Meanwhile, in Singapore, government ministers are to receive a bonus linked purely to growth in GDP. Assuming that many governments will continue to focus primarily on economic progress, independent funders might take a more central role in supporting work to promote wellbeing:

David Emerson, CEO of the Association of Charitable Foundations, says:

"The wellbeing agenda emphasises the important role of Foundations who not only embody this outlook - the aim of our giving is not about creating individual economic wealth - but with our independence we may be one of the few 'groups' in a position to positively promote and act upon the argument.

"Layard's evidence confirms the necessity of the work and role of Foundations as an antidote to the emphasis in wider society on goals that we see do not contribute to happiness."

To the extent that the government values wellbeing, policies should recognise and support the organisations that promote it. Meanwhile, the leaders of third sector organisations should not forget their own wellbeing.

As Sue Evans, CEO of Reach, points out:

“Knee-deep in an information swamp, stretched to the gills with two Friday bid deadlines, steering a strategic review and managing staff pécadilloes, trustee preoccupations, and shoe-string delivery, your message on 'Happiness and Wellbeing' provides a laugh-out-loud moment for the charity CEO. Well done.”

Nick Aldridge, May 2007