

## Action for Happiness Course Evaluation

Summary for Stakeholders - January 2020

The Action for Happiness course (Exploring What Matters) is an 8-week, volunteer-led intervention for face-to-face groups who meet in their local community. It has recently been the subject of a full Randomised Controlled Trial study [1], led by academics from the Centre for Economic Performance (LSE) and Wellbeing Research Centre (Oxford), supported by the What Works Centre for Wellbeing.

The study found that, relative to a randomised control group, the course leads to significant impacts in terms of increasing subjective wellbeing, reducing mental health symptoms and increasing pro-sociality, as illustrated in Figure 1.

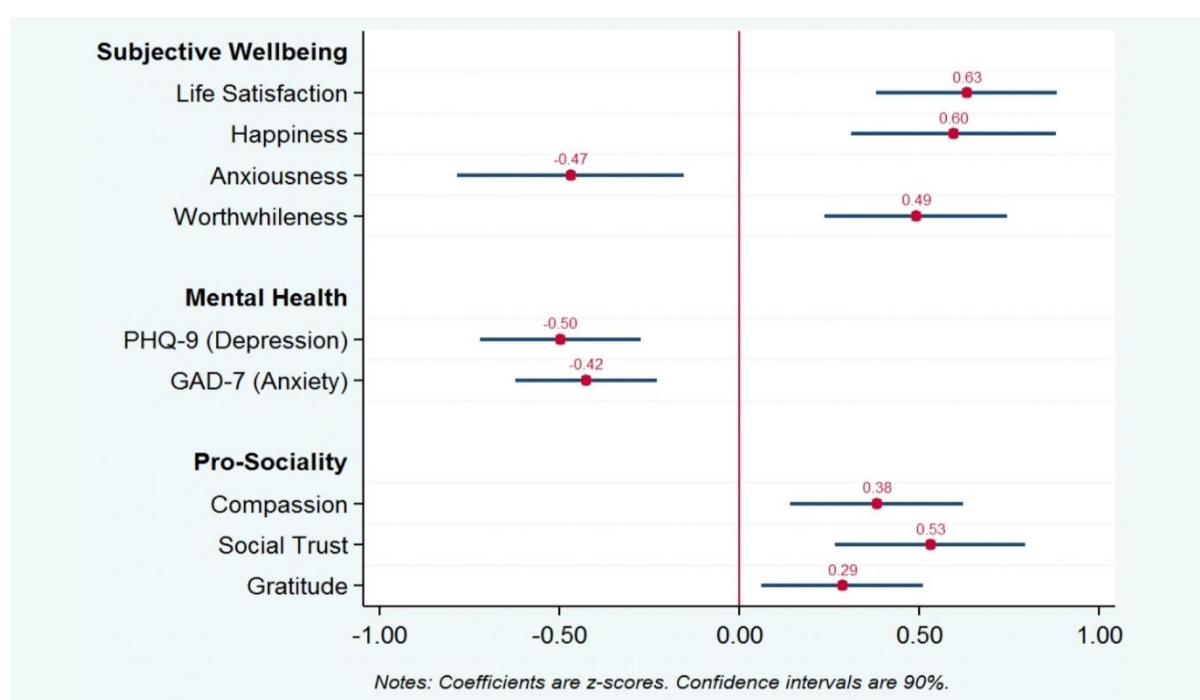


Figure 1: Summary of impacts of the course on Wellbeing, Mental Health and Pro-Sociality

The study summarised the impacts in each of these three main areas as follows:

- In terms of **subjective wellbeing**, the course significantly increases life satisfaction by about 63% of a standard deviation, happiness by about 60%, and worthwhileness by about 49%; anxiousness, on the contrary, significantly decreases by about 47%. These effect sizes are large: for life satisfaction, for example, the effect size corresponds to an increase of about one point on a zero-to-ten scale; Participants who report a mean life satisfaction score of 6.1 (well below the population level) prior to taking the course see it rise to 7.1 (about the population level).
- In terms of **mental health**, the course significantly decreases both depression (PHQ-9) and anxiety (GAD-7) scores, respectively, by about 50% and 42% of a standard deviation. These effect sizes are again large: participants, prior to the course, report mean scores corresponding to a clinical symptomatology of mild depression and anxiety. The course improves scores to a symptomatology of minimal depression and anxiety, the lowest category for both measures.
- In terms of **pro-sociality**, the course significantly improves both compassion and social trust, respectively, by about 38% and 53% of a standard deviation (about 0.5 and 1 point respectively).

## Comparing the impact on Life Satisfaction of the course vs other life events

Life Satisfaction is one of the most important and widely used measures of personal wellbeing and, as such, it is interesting to compare the impact of the course against other studies which have investigated the impacts of other life events on Life Satisfaction.

The chart below shows the changes in Life Satisfaction (10-point scale) from two major life events, being partnered as opposed to single (+0.59) and being employed as opposed to unemployed (+0.7), based on published cross-sectional studies relating to wellbeing in the UK [2] and compares this to the impact of the Action for Happiness course (+1.0) [1].

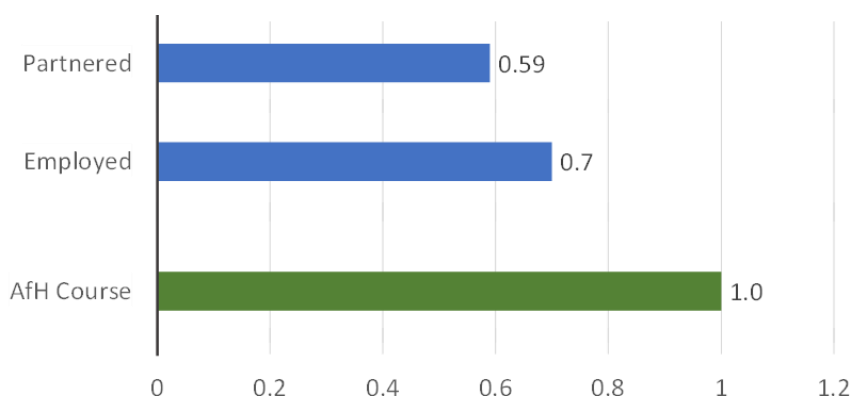


Figure 2: Change in Life Satisfaction (0-10 scale) – comparison with other major life events

This shows the impact of the course is highly effective relative to these other major life events, although these changes in Life Satisfaction were measured immediately after the course and it is not clear how long they last. However, the study used a waitlist design which also included measuring the subjective wellbeing of the treatment group two months after the course had completed.

As the chart below shows, the benefits from taking the course (from time t=0 to time t=1 for treatment group) appear to increase after the end of the course (time t=2). Further research is now recommended to investigate the effects over a longer period (e.g. one year after the course).

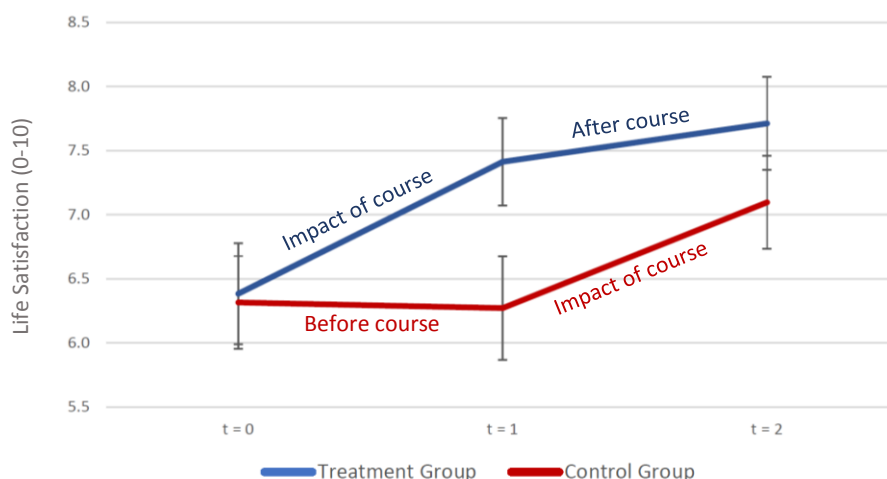


Figure 3: Changes in Life Satisfaction (0-10) - before course, after course and 2 months on

[1] C. Krekel, J.-E. De Neve, D. Fancourt, and R. Layard, "A local community course that raises mental wellbeing and pro-sociality", Discussion Paper, Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics and Political Science, January 2020. ISSN 2042-2695

[2] A.E. Clark, S. Fleche, R. Layard, N Powdthavee, G. Ward, "Origins of Happiness: The Science of Wellbeing over the Life-Course", Princeton University Press, January 2018. ISBN: 0691177899