



WELL-BEING NETWORK NEWSLETTER

February 2022

Why has the well-being network been set-up?

In July 2021 WISERD launched a wellbeing Research Network, headed by Professor Steve Smith, at The University of South Wales. The network is focussed on well-being research and has been set-up recognising two main factors which have profoundly affected well-being research in recent years.

- The increasing academic importance of well-being research for understanding civil society and its goals, coupled with the growing political significance, in Wales and elsewhere, of using well-being as a key measure of social and economic progress.
- The increasing range of well-being research undertaken, from a variety of often disparate disciplines and settings, across a wide range of subject areas, and for a number of different purposes.

What are the aims of the well-being network?

Given the above developments in well-being research, WISERD thought it timely to set-up a well-being network with the following aims in mind:

To champion interdisciplinary well-being research, drawing from a range of disciplines, for example, (but not exclusively and in no particular order): social policy, sociology, economics, social geography, political science, psychology, criminology, health sciences, pedagogy, creative arts and cultural industries, business studies, and applied social and political philosophy.

To facilitate cross-organisational and intra/inter-institutional exchanges and partnerships, concerning well-being research across a wide range of subject areas, within and between the WISERD partners, other relevant research centres, individual researchers, and including those from outside the WISERD partner institutions.

To systematically engage in co-productive research reflecting the agendas, knowledge and experience of key non-academic stakeholders in well-being research, with a view to including these stakeholders in the research process, working alongside academics, and within various professional and policy-based contexts.

To inform and positively impact the development of policy and practice across statutory and non-statutory settings, for example (but not exclusively and in no particular order), in social services, health, education, housing, income maintenance, education, youthwork, workplaces, community groups and activities, businesses and social enterprises, and other public, private, and third sector settings.

First step - compiling the network register

- We have collated a *register* of those researchers who have become members of the well-being network, with presently over 40 members, representing 8 universities in Wales and England, and 4 other organisations which variously engage with well-being research and policy development.
- We have sent this register to members, beginning the process of sharing what kind of well-being research members of the network are presently engaged in, with details about relevant
- organisation(s) or institution(s) that members are affiliated to and partner with, including contact details, weblinks, and so on.
- The network will update the register periodically, to ensure its currency, and with a view to using this register as a basis for supporting the above aims.
- Members are encouraged to promote the network and recruit new members, inviting potential new members to contact Steve Smith, the network lead, at steve.smith@southwales.ac.uk.
- The network's leadership team has also developed a strategy to provide a framework for implementing the above, and which includes producing this newsletter.

The purpose of this newsletter

To promote the current research of members, organised under cognate subject headings. The February 2022 newsletter reports on research from four broad areas:

1. Creative arts, performance, language and education
2. Measuring inequalities in health and well-being
3. Philosophy and theory-building
4. Psychology, mental health, and the built environment

Contributions below from members are presented alphabetically, according to subject areas and name, with details about institutional affiliation, position, and contact details.

Creative Arts, performance, language and education

Barrie Llewelyn, University of South Wales

Barrie is Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing at the University of South Wales, focussing on facilitating creative workshops with people seeking sanctuary in Wales, and story-telling of those reporting loneliness and social disconnection during the Covid Pandemic. barrie.llewelyn@southwales.ac.uk

As stated, her present research is concerned with aiding English language acquisition for people who are seeking sanctuary in Wales. The ability to speak and understand the local language is key to education, gaining meaningful work, accessing medical and other essential professional advice, and integrating within the local community. She wondered if the creative workshops she facilitates in her role as a creative writing tutor could add something to the work of her colleagues involved in the delivery of ESOL. The successful *Speak to Me* project was launched out of this idea in January 2020.

Two current projects follow from the success of *Speak to Me*.

Café Chit Chat meets online every week via Zoom. Local English speakers are paired with English learners to chat about a topic. They often go into breakout rooms and then come back to tell the whole group a summary of their conversation. A real community exists amongst the group supported by a WhatsApp group in which people share their triumphs and problems and in that way the project has become much more than an aid to language acquisition.

Walk and Talk meets every month or so, depending on Covid restrictions. The aim is for local English speakers to 'walk and talk' with people seeking sanctuary in Wales. Everyone is welcome. We have walked and talked in the Brecon Beacons, in Bath and in Cardiff Bay. The next event is planned for a very long 'walk and talk' in London.

Alice Vernon, Aberystwyth University

Alice is a Lecturer at Aberystwyth University, focussing on the history of medicine, particularly the representation of illness in literature, for example, examining the different ways the inside of the human body has been imagined and interpreted. amv@aber.ac.uk

She is also part of The Department of English and Creative Writing at Aberystwyth University and is a department which is continuing to develop their 'Creative Wellbeing' research strand. In October 2021, Dr Jacqueline Yallop and Dr Alice Vernon held a very successful writing day at Hospice At Home Aberystwyth (HAHAV) on the theme of 'Writing the Night'. Participants shared some excellent work and the feedback suggested that they felt inspired to continue to use creative writing exercises to promote wellbeing. Alice has also received an Aberystwyth University Joy Welch Research Grant for her medical humanities project, *Inner Workings*, which seeks to examine how we imagine the inside of the human body. In December 2021, she joined Mold Alun School's creative writing club to give an online writing workshop which encouraged students to think about their inner workings in new ways. More workshops will take place over the next few months. The project will run until April 2022, and will contribute to a non-fiction book proposal.

Emily Underwood-Lee, University of South Wales

Emily is a Professor at the University of South Wales, focussing on contemporary feminist performance, autobiographical performance, and first person narratives in performance and the maternal and storytelling in health. emily.underwood-lee@southwales.ac.uk

On the 15th February she launched her new co-authored book *Maternal Performance: Feminist Relations* on. Emily was joined by her co-author Dr Lena Šimić, and [Prof. Elaine Aston](#), series editor of Contemporary Performance InterActions at Palgrave Macmillan, and four artists whose work is featured in the book - [Hannah Ballou](#) (US/UK), [Catriona James](#) (UK), [Lynn Lu](#) (Singapore/UK), and [Nanna Lysholt Hansen](#) (Denmark). For more information visit [Maternal Performance: Feminist Relations Book Launch Tickets, Tue 15 Feb 2022 at 19:00 | Eventbrite.](#)

Emma Wheeler, University of South Wales

Emma is a Lecturer and Doctoral Researcher at The University of South Wales, focussing on educational change, using arts-based methods to gather stories from Foundation Year students examining mental health and additional learning needs. emma.wheeler@southwales.ac.uk

She is presently exploring the 'Widening Participation' ethos which underpins two current projects, both endeavouring to bring change to higher education learning environments. The work recognises social, political and cultural complexities that surround an inclusive agenda for students at every level.

The practices of Foundation Year and postgraduate teaching, community arts collaboration and art psychotherapy practice, offer the researcher opportunity to reflect and articulate learning through an action research approach. The research is firmly embedded in the act of teaching, and the identity of a research-full practitioner is embraced within the process of ongoing reflective and creative journaling, art making and reflexive response.

The researcher collaborates with participants, facilitating mutual learning and articulation of lived experiences associated with learning differences. Mental health and wellbeing, understood here as the encouragement of 'comprehensibility, manageability and meaning', is of primary consideration. Promotion of creative methods in research and teaching drives the study.

Critical theory which seeks to acknowledge and challenge oppression and injustice, frames the perspective with commitment to interdisciplinarity. Through conversing and building relationships with for example a physicist, poet and psycho geographer, the work presents a *bricolage* or quilt of multiple mini explorations that when assembled will hopefully provide an exposition of journeys walked.

The research process is slow and immersive, happening alongside and within meaningful reflective practice. The culmination aims to impact both art therapy and education professional contexts by building on empowerment discourse and contributing to co-produced policy and practice development.

Measuring inequalities in health and well-being

Gary Higgs, University of South Wales

Gary is a Professor at the University of South Wales, focussing on spatial inequalities in health and well-being, applying computer Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping to investigate potential associations between access to services/facilities and well-being gary.higgs@southwales.ac.uk

His research within the GIS Research Centre has largely been concerned with using spatial analytical approaches to examine social and spatial inequalities in access to key services. This WISERD-funded research has involved developing multi-modal approaches to examine spatial patterns of access in relation to measures such as the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation in order to examine any disparities in access. Early studies were concerned with examining access to health services such as primary health care and cancer screening services as well as with investigating the geographical impacts of the closure of, for example, sports facilities, post offices and libraries on communities.

More recently their research has investigated some of the early impacts of COVID-19 on access to residential and nursing care home places, banks and building societies and green spaces. The next stages of the work package (*Inequalities, civic loss and well-being*) will involve investigating potential associations with for example health outcomes and with including the impact of changes in public transport provision and active travel opportunities within the GIS models.

Philosophy and theory-building

Gideon Calder, University of Swansea

Gideon is an Associate Professor at the University of Swansea, focussing on philosophical understandings of how conditions of well-being apply to children, how well-being fits into considerations of fairness and social justice, and across different social groups. g.j.calder@swansea.ac.uk

His current theoretical work on children is how conceptions of the well-being of children relate to four other factors: (i) the well-being of those same children as future adults; (ii) the distribution of opportunities among children along the lines of social divisions, particularly class; (iii) questions around the composition of the family and the rights of parents, and (iv) the weighing of different goods and values in children's lives.

Specifically on that last note, he is currently working on an article with Matteo Bonotti, a political philosopher at Monash University. This piece of work addresses the tensions between a 'public health'-based understanding of the well-being of children, and one which takes other factors into account – for example, the unique value of family relationships. In the article they work on the idea of 'opportunity pluralism', proposed by Joseph Fishkin in his work *Bottlenecks* – and argue for an expanded and pluralised understanding of what it means for a child to enjoy well-being, in which the health-centric model sits alongside other goods and values.

On a completely different note, his recent empirical work on the implementation of co-production in social services, as part of the Welsh Government-funded evaluation of the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014, has planted the seed for some planned future work on how co-production relates to social welfare. He is partly interested in the extent to which the necessarily intersubjective and deliberative elements of a co-productive process both enhance individual well-being in a unique way, but also serve to change people's understandings of where their own well-being lies.

And lastly, he has a forthcoming article on the well-being of family carers during lockdown, with Maria Cheshire-Allen – it's in the *International Journal of Care and Caring*, in their first issue of 2022.

Steve Smith, University of South Wales

Steve is a Professor at the University of South Wales, focussing on applying abstract philosophical principles concerning social values (including well-being) to social and public policy and to various professional and welfare/health practices. steve.smith@southwales.ac.uk

He has recently signed a book contract to complete a research monograph exploring well-being, hopefully to be published early in 2023. It is entitled, *The Ontology of Well-Being in Social Policy and Welfare Practice: Examining the Human Condition and Conflicting Experiences of Time, Emotion, and Self-Consciousness*.

The book explores the human ontological question, what kind of creatures *are* we such that we can experience something we call well-being? According to the book, addressing this question is fundamental to issues concerning what we might know about human well-being and how we should promote it as a social value. Yet, surprisingly, it is a question that is often side-lined or ignored in political and academic debates about well-being. In an attempt to address this question, head-on, the book identifies and explores what are named as six features of the human condition: human embodiment, finiteness, sociability, cognition, evaluation, and agency. Covering a range of human experiences, the book argues that these features reveal the conflicting character of our 'being human', which, in turn, has a profound

bearing on the possibilities for both increasing and diminishing well-being.

Significantly, the book claims that our conflicting experiences of time, emotion, and self-consciousness, mean that potentially we can experience well-being in complex, rich, and multi-dimensional ways. It then systematically applies these insights to social policies and welfare practices, concerning, for example, pensions, disability, bereavement counselling, social prescribing within medical practices, the promotion of mental health, and co-productive practices.

Chris Woodard, University of Nottingham

Chris is a Professor at the University of Nottingham, focussing on issues concerning classifying philosophical theories of well-being, and what philosophical theories of well-being (and ill-being) can learn from empirical studies. christopher.woodard@nottingham.ac.uk

He has recently been exploring how philosophical discussions of well-being typically try to identify the components or constituents of a life that is good for the person who lives it. They discuss a range of different proposals—for example, that a good life consists in pleasure, or that it consists in getting what you want, or in getting certain specified goods (such as achievement, friendship, or important knowledge).

More recently, attention has turned to the parallel question about ‘ill-being’: what are the components or constituents of a life that is bad for the person who lives it? This question seems to be just as important as the one about positive well-being. It could be that the answers to the two questions are symmetrical: perhaps positive well-being consists in pleasure, while ill-being consists in pain, for example. But this need not be the case—we should be open to the possibility that the answers are not symmetrical in this way. What’s more, some of the proposals about positive well-being don’t seem to extend symmetrically to ill-being. For both of these reasons, the sub-topic of ill-being is an exciting area in current philosophical discussion of well-being. Chris is currently working on a paper on ill-being, which he hopes to finish in the summer of 2022.

Sam Wren-Lewis, University of Nottingham

Sam is an independent scholar and Honorary Associate Professor at The University of Nottingham, with a PhD on the science and philosophy of happiness. He focuses on wellbeing and happiness measurement, also collaborating with the Centre for Thriving Places, What Works Centre for Wellbeing, and the New Economics Foundation. samwrenlewis@gmail.com

He is the author of *The Happiness Problem: Expecting Better in an Uncertain World*, published in 2019 by Policy Press, and has published a number of academic papers on happiness, wellbeing, and mental health. He is also a self-employed wellbeing measurement and policy advisor, where he carries out collaborative research and policy work with a wide range of wellbeing organisations in the UK, including the Centre for Thriving Places and the What Works Centre for Wellbeing.

Following on from the theories outlined in his book *The Happiness Problem*, Sam is presently interested in the kind of mindset required for lasting happiness and wellbeing, and how this mindset relates to wider social issues, such as progress, freedom and equality. In particular, he’s interested in the distinction between principles of control and connection. Over the past 250 years, society has been dominated by an ideology of control – one that has delivered an unprecedented amount of progress, but is becoming increasingly problematic, most notably with the destruction of the planet. Solving today’s major social problem – from climate change and mass inequality to political polarisation and the mental health crisis – requires thinking in terms of connection, not control. His research aims to highlight how this mindset is not just required for lasting happiness and wellbeing, but for most of the things in life we care about.

Psychology, mental health, and the built environment

Alexis Bennett, Cardiff Metropolitan University

Alexis is a Senior Research Assistant and Doctoral Researcher at Cardiff Metropolitan University, focussing on behavioural neuroscience and cognitive and environmental psychology, looking at improving well-being in built environments. albennett@cardiffmet.ac.uk

She is presently investigating the effects of nature exposure on stress and cognitive performance (attention and memory) and the related potential in built settings, particularly in challenging circumstances. Measures include electrodermal activity (EDA) / skin conductance, heart rate, visual analogue scales, and cognitive tests. She is also part of the CF PROSPER research group, investigating the needs, impacts, and decision making related to pregnancy and cystic fibrosis (CF).

Michaela James, University of Swansea

Michaela is a Research Officer at the University of Swansea, focusing on young people's wellbeing, and how physical and mental wellbeing relates to physical activity, play, and the built environment. m.l.james@swansea.ac.uk

She also manages HAPPEN Wales (The Health and Attainment of Pupils in a Primary Evaluation Network - Wales), a network which brings together education, health and research in line with the new curriculum proposals for health and wellbeing in Wales. By taking part in our HAPPEN Survey, the network aims to empower teachers and pupils to make meaningful changes by gaining a better understanding of pupil's physical, psychological, emotional and social health. HAPPEN presents the opportunity for pupils to learn and make informed decisions about different aspects of health and wellbeing. The report schools get upon completing the survey can be used in school programmes such as Pupil Voice to allow children to be ambitious and creative to improve their wellbeing. The network is established across Wales with over 500 schools registered to take part.

Their work during the pandemic has highlighted the significance of the school environment in reducing health inequalities as well as giving teachers a platform to emphasise the importance of prioritising whole-school health and wellbeing. In light of the pandemic, this work is more important than ever as children have spent significant time away from school and we must ensure they have a voice alongside school staff to influence the ways in which their schools and communities nurture and promote health and wellbeing. You can find out more about our research and impact at www.happen-wales.co.uk.

Find out more

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