

Building the State of Wellbeing

A Strategy for South Australia

Professor Martin Seligman



Adelaide Thinker in Residence 2012-2013

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Prepared by Professor Martin Seligman
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Government of
South Australia



Department of the Premier and Cabinet C/O PO Box 2343 Adelaide SA 5001
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Premier's Foreword

A message from Jay Weatherill

South Australia is proud of its reputation as one of the most liveable places in the world.¹ Our Government is committed to further enhancing South Australia's reputation as a place with safe and healthy communities and a vibrant capital city.²

Professor Martin Seligman, one of the world's leading minds in positive psychology, came to Adelaide with a new way of thinking about how communities can flourish.

Life often presents challenges. Some circumstances require resilience and mental toughness just to get through them. In addition to life's challenges, one in five adults will experience mental illness in any year in Australia. More worryingly one in four young people experience mental health problems during adolescence.

Professor Seligman has shown that if individuals can increase their PERMA (positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment) they build the capacity to handle life's challenges and potentially reduce the severity of mental illness. He believes that we can build the skills to re-orient our thinking from 'what is wrong' to 'what is right?'

The shifts in perspective and behaviour that result from positive psychology interventions, when scientifically measured in various groups, are shown to build resilience and protect against mental illness and suicide. From evidence gathered from educational settings as well as the United States Army, it is now clear that positive psychology has something to offer a modern society.^{3,4}

1 The Economist 2012

2 Government of South Australia 2013

3 Lester et al, 2011

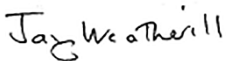
4 Gillham et al. 2012

How do societies evolve? How do they become more enlightened? They evolve because new ideas take root and grow. These ideas challenge us to look at ourselves differently and examine who we are and who we want to be, as a society.

As a society, South Australia appreciates the value of innovation and social reform and we know how to lead change. Over time, as a state we introduced votes for women and decriminalisation of homosexuality. We led the country with our Festival of Arts and our film industry. We reduced littering and piloted container deposit schemes and reusable plastic bags. When put into policy and practice these new ideas have changed the deep fabric of our society. They have changed who we are.

Wellbeing is a new frontier for modern societies. It is a new way to understand the links between the individual and society with a new set of tools to build a healthy and effective modern society. This work is the beginning of a culture change –a change to a more human-centred society where people and relationships matter more.

I thank Martin for his work with us. I congratulate the partners for their leadership, particularly the Department for Education and Child Development, St Peter's College, Adelaide and SA Health, the lead partners in this residency. I also appreciate the leadership of the Economic Development Board for their commitment to taking this work forward.



Jay Weatherill
PREMIER

Executive Summary

This report outlines Professor Martin Seligman's theory of wellbeing, introduces and explains the main concepts of wellbeing and discusses how South Australia could move from theory to practice to increase the wellbeing of all South Australians.

This report does not provide a full academic summary, but, as with all Adelaide Thinkers in Residence reports, it is designed to capture key components and concepts of the Thinker's expertise (in this case Positive Psychology) and to argue the logic behind the specific and detailed recommendations for South Australia.

The report begins with a discussion of how and why this residency came about and what it might mean for South Australia. Professor Seligman shares his core ideas through the lens of the *science of Positive Psychology*. Professor Seligman asserts that psychology has evolved in recent times, moving from a focus on 'repairing misery' to one on building wellbeing.

This report summarises the science behind Professor Seligman's PERMA dashboard of wellbeing (positive emotion, engagements, relationships, meaning and accomplishment) and explains how these elements can be built.

A brief overview of the theoretical constructs on which this work is based is followed by a discussion on how the theory has been implemented in interventions designed to increase wellbeing. The evidence of the efficacy of these interventions is included in Chapter 2: *Understanding PERMA: The Science of Wellbeing*. This is a gathering of some key research for early entrants to the area, with references for those who wish to delve more deeply.

Professor Seligman explores how measurement and interventions to build wellbeing could be conceived and *handled at the scale of a state*—how to build wellbeing across a broad group of citizens, made up of many different cohorts, with a particular focus on young people in schools. Professor Seligman proposes that this will require two broad, interdependent strategies:

- measuring wellbeing across the population
- teaching, building and embedding wellbeing in schools, workplaces and other settings.

Professor Seligman suggests that the implementation of these two broad strategies at scale, combined with the support from citizens (bottom-up) and top-level leadership, could position South Australia to become the *world capital of wellbeing*.

These three strategies can be summarised as:

- 1 Position South Australia a world leading State of Wellbeing**
- 2 Measure the wellbeing of all South Australians**
- 3 Teach, build and embed wellbeing science in South Australia.**

Following the main body of the report is an addendum which describes some of the significant body of work already under way in South Australia in organisations, schools, workplaces and communities.



About the Thinker

Professor Martin E.P. Seligman PhD, is one of the most widely known psychologists of our time. He has spent over 40 years working on the issues of depression, optimism and pessimism. His ‘learned helplessness’ theory is one of the most influential psychology theories of last century, shedding light on problems such as depression, child abuse and domestic violence.

In 1996, Professor Seligman was elected President of the American Psychological Association, by the largest vote in modern history. Since 2000, his main mission has been the promotion of the field of positive psychology.

This discipline includes the study of positive emotion, positive character traits, and positive institutions. For 14 years, Professor Seligman was the director of the clinical training program of the psychology department of the University of Pennsylvania.

Professor Seligman is currently working with the US Government on wellbeing and resilience for the army, focusing building the mental fitness of the army, so that there is just as much emphasis as on physical fitness.

He has worked with Australia, the US and UK governments in education settings. He continues to have a strong focus on training psychologists in positive psychology—individuals whose practice can make the world a happier place, in a way that parallels clinical psychologists having made the world a ‘less unhappy’ place.

Professor Seligman is currently Zellerbach Family Professor of Psychology and Director of the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania. He is well known in academic and clinical circles and is a best-selling author, having written 25 books and 250 articles on motivation and personality. Among his better-known works are *Flourish* (2011), *Authentic Happiness* (2002), *Learned Optimism* (1991), *What You Can Change and What You Can't* (1993), *The Optimistic Child* (1995), *Helplessness* (1975, 1993) and *Abnormal Psychology* (1982, 1988, 1995, with David Rosenhan).

The Residency on Wellbeing: a Narrative

A number of suggestions came to the Adelaide Thinkers in Residence office over time regarding the need for a residency on the wellbeing of citizens. In particular, people wanted to know how to manage the serious toll of mental illness on young people, families and the workplace, how to deal with the growing effect of stress in modern life, and how to build the vibrancy and energy of the society.

The questions that arose from these suggestions were:

What can we do to protect young South Australians from increasing rates of mental illness?

What can we do to help strengthen our population so that when the crises of life hit, people have the resilience to cope?

How can we interest our society in the brightness of our future rather than focussing on the pains of our past?

These questions led to investigation into the offerings of positive psychology and how it could contribute to the goal of building wellbeing and resilience across our society.

Positive psychology science offers a unique contribution in this area, and Professor Martin Seligman, a world leader in positive psychology, was supported as South Australia's 24th Thinker in Residence by a leading group of South Australian public and private organisations who invested in the residency in 2011.

Martin Seligman launched a powerful idea in his recent publication *Flourish* (2010). He offered the challenge that if societies were really determined to prevent mental illness and promote wellbeing using positive psychology, 51% of the world's population could be flourishing by 2051. Responding to this bold idea, the South Australian residency partners launched the residency under the title: *Wellbeing and Resilience: Building a flourishing state*.

Both The Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) and St Peter's College, Adelaide had committed to building the wellbeing and resilience of their students at the time the residency was being discussed. Since 2004, DECD schools and pre-schools have been utilising a range of approaches to nurture and build the wellbeing of children. St Peter's College, Adelaide had already commenced a systematic approach to introducing positive psychology across the whole school community. This residency offered an opportunity to build on and elevate this work and both DECD and St Peter's College, Adelaide committed to work with us to lead the residency⁵.

- The lead partners in the residency were:
- The Department of the Premier and Cabinet
- The Department for Education and Child Development
- St Peter's College, Adelaide.

⁵ More information about the work that DECD and St Peter's College, Adelaide have been doing can be found in the addendum to this work.

Other partners included:

- The Department for Health and Ageing: Mental Health Unit
- The Department for Communities and Social Inclusion
- The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI)
- The Smith Family
- BeyondBlue
- Principals Australia Institute
- The Reach Foundation
- The Office for Design and Architecture SA (Formerly the Integrated Design Commission)
- Catholic Education SA
- The University of Adelaide
- Flinders University
- The University of South Australia.

PriceWaterhouseCoopers, HotelCare and the Entertainment Centre also participated in the residency as sponsors.

Professor Seligman and his partner group began the hard work of the residency over eighteen months ago. Over 9000 South Australians attended events and conferences on positive psychology—they were psychologists, teachers, parents, public servants, principals and psychiatrists and more. Over 50 meetings were conducted throughout the residency; 25 schools and health settings began active work on positive psychology; and 290 people participated in the Penn Resiliency program.

South Australia's enthusiastic response to this residency has been remarkable: 15 partner organisations (40% private sector investment), 9000 people at public events, 39,500 accounts reached by Twitter during Professor Seligman's final lecture, and over 27,000 video views on the Adelaide Thinkers in Residence YouTube channel specifically on Seligman material.

Continuing South Australia's tradition of being a leader of social and cultural innovation, Martin's bold suggestion that South Australia becomes the 'state of wellbeing' is clearly an idea whose time has come.

Top down and bottom up, Professor Seligman had the attention of South Australia. Here is what happened.

Gabrielle Kelly
Director, Adelaide Thinkers in Residence

THE CHALLENGE IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

South Australia, like most modern societies, faces serious mental health challenges:

- Between 14% and 18% of young South Australians suffer from mental illness.
- At least 54,400 children and young people have mental health issues⁶.

In Australia:

- One in five adults experience mental illness in any year, costing AUD\$21 billion annually⁷.
- Over 75% of these people will have their first episode before 25 years of age⁸.
- Mental illness is associated with high rates of:
 - substance abuse (costing AUD\$55 billion annually)⁹
 - family and social problems (domestic violence costs AUD\$13 billion annually)¹⁰
 - poor health behaviour (e.g. obesity costs AUD\$21 billion annually)¹¹
- Future loss in productivity as a result of mental illness during adolescence is valued at AUD\$25 billion per year, and AUD\$10.6 billion is spent annually on treating mental illness in those aged 12 to 25 years¹².

The World Health Organisation (WHO) predicts that depression will be the number one cause of disability by 2030.

6 Sawyer et al. 2000

7 McGorry 2010

8 Council of Australian Governments 2006

9 Collins & Lapsley 2008

10 Herbert 2011

11 Begg et al. 2007

12 McGorry 2010

13 World Health Organisation 2011

Recommendations

1. LEAD: Position South Australia as the State of Wellbeing

- 1.1 Establish South Australia as the first political unit in the world to deliberately measure and build the wellbeing of all citizens to reduce mental illness, increase resilience and enable every citizen to flourish.
- 1.2 Use the PERMA dashboard of wellbeing as the central framework to build wellbeing in all settings.
- 1.3 Expand the vocabulary and focus of mental health and educational professionals, and the community broadly, to include wellbeing and mental health (positive assets) as well as mental illness (deficits).
- 1.4 Start with the immunisation of young people against mental ill-health by working with all schools to measure and build wellbeing.
- 1.5 Build support for the vision of Adelaide as the World Capital of Wellbeing.
- 1.6 Establish a Wellbeing Institute to envision and execute the Australasian wellbeing agenda.
- 1.7 Establish a World Wellbeing Council to envision and execute the international agenda of improving global wellbeing by systematic introduction of positive psychology science, using the Adelaide experience as a prototype.

2. MEASURE: Measure the wellbeing of all South Australians

There are three principles that are always relevant when referring to measurement recommendations in the context of this report:

Always use measures that can be mapped to PERMA.

Always use evidence-based measures.

Always link measurement instruments to interventions.

- 2.1 Establish a cross-sector Wellbeing Measurement Committee to make recommendations about how and when to measure wellbeing across different cohorts in the state. The committee will need to:
 - examine measures that can be mapped to PERMA
 - identify different measurement requirements for different cohorts
 - identify and assess measures already in use or under development in South Australia
 - identify and assess measures already in use or under development around the world
 - examine evidence-base, reliability and validity of identified measures
 - examine any South Australian contextual considerations for identified measures
 - determine the best mechanism for measuring the wellbeing of all young people in South Australian schools

- determine the best mechanism for measuring the wellbeing of large numbers of South Australian adults in various settings, including those in the workplace, long-term unemployed, retirees and unpaid carers
- recommend how and when preferred measures should be introduced
- identify how the preferred measures link to agreed interventions (see Recommendation 3.2).

- 2.2 Measure the wellbeing of all young people in South Australian schools, based on the findings and recommendations of the Wellbeing Measurement Committee.
- 2.3 Measure the wellbeing of large numbers of South Australian adults in various settings, including those in the workplace, long-term unemployed, retirees and unpaid carers.
- 2.4 Ensure that the state-wide wellbeing data can be made available for research use.



3. BUILD: Teach, build and embed wellbeing science in South Australia.

There are three principles that are always relevant when referring to intervention recommendations in the context of this report:

Always use interventions that relate to PERMA.

Always use evidence-based interventions.

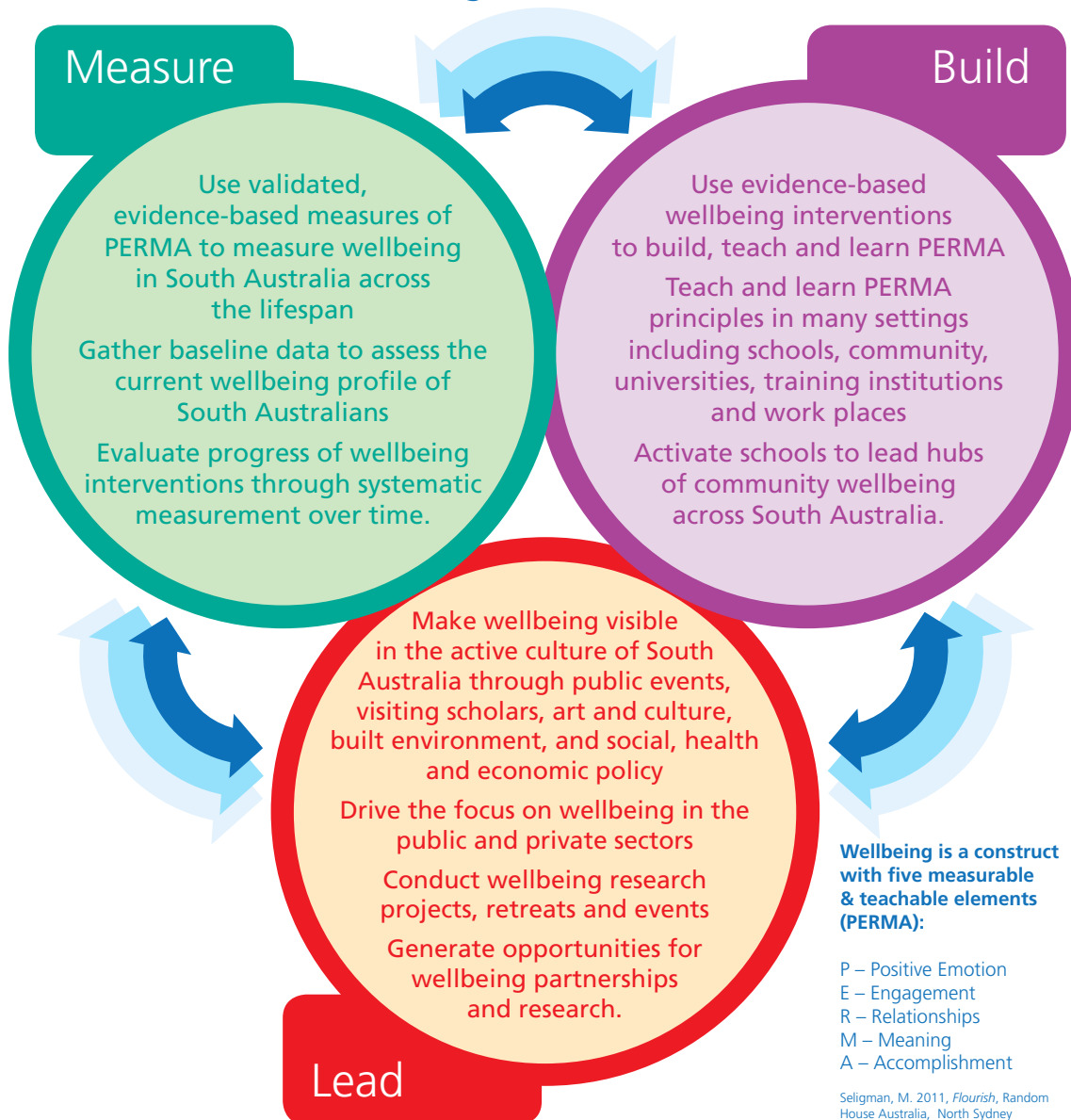
Always link interventions to measurement.

- 3.1 Continue to build broad support for the goal of immunising all South Australian children against mental illness, and produce a clear strategy to achieve this goal by 2016.
- 3.2 Establish a cross-sector Wellbeing Interventions Committee to make recommendations about a suite of interventions for the teaching of wellbeing. These interventions will need to consider:
 - each of the five elements of PERMA
 - programs and curricula for various year levels of school students
 - programs for teachers, nurses, mental health workers and a broad range of other professions.
- 3.3 Develop a positive psychology training plan to train a cohort of teachers by the end of 2014 in positive psychology delivery methods.
- 3.4 Invest in a qualified trainer to live and work in Adelaide in 2014–15 to offer cost-effective, 'Train the Trainer' positive psychology training in South Australia. This position will be managed through the proposed Wellbeing Institute.
- 3.5 Promote participation in the Positive Education Schools Association.
- 3.6 Continue to support the shared learning of key schools and school-based hubs already working with the residency.
- 3.7 Support the evolution of the concept of a school as an activating hub of wellbeing, as demonstrated by the work of Mt Barker High School in the Adelaide Hills.
- 3.8 Invite other distributed networks of South Australians, such as football clubs, banks, local government, community houses, libraries and cultural institutions to become activating hubs of wellbeing, modelled on Mt Barker High School.
- 3.9 Establish a Masters of Applied Positive Psychology at a South Australian University, ensuring the highest quality of research and teaching to provide a mechanism for professional training and research.
- 3.10 Establish undergraduate units of Positive Psychology and Graduate Diploma qualifications for use by students in many different fields: education, social work, aged care, allied health and psychology.



Building a Flourishing State

A comprehensive approach to building and sustaining the wellbeing of South Australians



Everyone has a role to play in wellbeing

Figure 1 Building a State of Wellbeing: A comprehensive approach to building and sustaining the wellbeing of South Australians





Chapter 1

Wellbeing is Everyone's Birthright

Key concepts in this chapter:

- A Positive Future
 - A historical hangover: the focus on misery
 - A new role for positive psychology
 - The natural negativity bias
 - Understanding wellbeing
 - Creating a common language for large scale change
- Positive Psychology Benefits the Entire Population

A Positive Future

A historical hangover: the focus on misery

Through most of human history, life has been a 'vale of tears'. When nations are poor, at war, in famine, in plague or in social disharmony, it is perfectly natural that their science, their art and their thoughts turn to survival, defence and managing trauma.

Historically, the most that any government or individual could do was to minimise suffering — to hold our misery to zero.

When nations are wealthy and at peace—not in plague, not in famine, not in poverty—their goals can be elevated.

In times like these, I ask no less a question than this: what is the most you can hope for in life? What is the most you can hope for in the future of your children? What is the most you can hope for in the future of your nation?

A new role for positive psychology

Mental health practice over the last century has focused on helping people find a way not to feel bad. Helping people feel better is an important goal but when it is reached, and the broken part is 'fixed', you are back to a neutral state. Traditional psychology does not give people the tools to feel good, to flourish. This is a deficit approach—an approach that focuses on mental illness or incapacity.

Thirty years ago, the idea that it would be a good thing to build wellbeing in individual lives, corporations and nations would not have been taken seriously. That is because we did not know how to define or measure wellbeing; we did not know how to build it. Thirty years on, we do know how to define, measure and how to build wellbeing. We can prove that there are benefits. We have made it a science—the science of Positive Psychology and wellbeing

Positive Psychology is the scientific study of the strengths, characteristics and actions that enable individuals and communities to thrive. The field is founded on the belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within themselves, and to enhance their experiences of love, work, and play. While the positive psychology perspective has ideological underpinnings in philosophy and religion, it is a relatively recent field in psychology and it is growing exponentially.

Positive psychology does not replace 'psychology as usual'. There is still a great need for traditional psychology to work to alleviate human suffering and misery. However, positive psychology can be a complement to this—another arrow in the quiver.

There is a great deal to be proud of in the work that has been done on weakness. Now it is time to start working explicitly on strengths as well as mental illness.

Incorporating positive psychology into the broader discipline of psychology means psychology starts to:

- be as concerned with strength as with weakness
- be as interested in building the best things in life as in repairing the worst
- be as concerned with making people's lives as fulfilling as with healing pathology
- develop interventions to increase wellbeing, not just to decrease misery.

The range of human experience can be understood as a scale extending from -10 to +10 (see Figure 2).

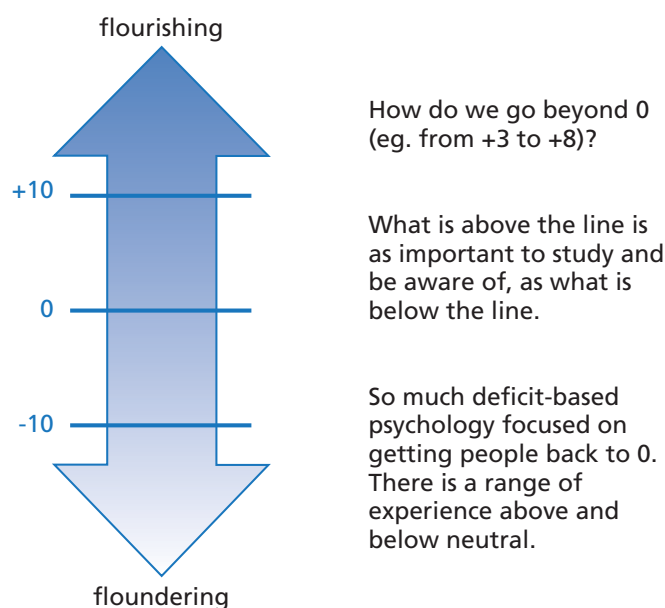


Figure 2 Focus of positive psychological perspective



When people lie in bed at night, by and large, they are not thinking of how to go from minus-eight to minus-two in life. They are thinking about how to go from plus-two to plus-six. They are thinking about how to get that incremental improvement in wellbeing and satisfaction.

'Psychology as usual' has been about going from minus-eight to minus-three. Positive psychology is more focused on how to go from plus-two to plus-five.

Until recently there has not been an articulated science to validate the desire for this incremental improvement or how to go about achieving it. My goal is to develop more ways to help those who are at 0 on the spectrum of mental health to rise above that point and move towards +10.

I ask how can those of us who are surviving, coping, or living quite well begin to build on the positives in our lives and live even better?

Psychology was the starting point for investigations but the ideals have value across many sectors and facilitate multidisciplinary shared inquiry¹⁴. The core perspective of positive psychology seems to have great value across sectors. There are now many specialised areas of positive psychology dedicated to implementing the principles in different spheres, including positive education, positive health, positive neuroscience and positive film-making. It has been exciting and rewarding to witness this growth.

The natural negativity bias

Humans have a natural negativity bias.

The negativity bias is the natural tendency in humans to give more weight to the negative. It is defined as 'the propensity to attend to, learn from, and use negative information far more than positive information'.^{15[1]}

This is an evolutionary response to managing risks and surviving threats. By focusing on the good things we can help overcome this natural tendency and build a more positive response to life events.

The goal is to help people flourish rather than merely exist. It is the science of wellbeing, the science or study of human flourishing.

Understanding wellbeing

Wellbeing is not a one-dimensional idea but a multifaceted construct composed of different elements. Wellbeing is sometimes used interchangeably with the word 'happiness'. In positive psychology, 'happiness' is one of the elements of wellbeing, rather than the only consideration.

There is no one number that tells you how well a person, corporation or a nation is doing, but several numbers together give a good picture. This 'dashboard' approach works like a car or an aeroplane. To use a metaphor, if you are a pilot, there is no one number that tells you how an aeroplane is functioning, rather it is the fuel gauge, the wind speed, the altimeter, and the interaction of those.

14 Rusk & Waters 2013

15 Vaish A., Grossmann T., Woodward A. 2008, 'Not all emotions are created equal: the negativity bias in social-emotional development', *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 134, pp. 383-403



Figure 3 The PERMA dashboard

The PERMA theory of wellbeing posits that there are five wellbeing indicators: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment. We can measure each of these elements and get an overall reading of wellbeing.

Previously we could only measure the negative expressions of mental illness. Now we can measure positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment about as well as we can measure schizophrenia, depression, and alcoholism. We also know that we can build these elements. By taking certain actions we can actually have more positive emotion than we do right now, we can have more engagement, better relationships, more meaning and more purpose in life.

[The PERMA dashboard gives people the tools to feel good, to flourish.](#)

Those of us who are surviving, coping, or living quite well can now begin to build on the positives in our lives and live even better and have even more resilience to deal with life's challenges. Those of us with a tendency towards mental ill-health can develop strategies to reduce or overcome challenges such as depression and anxiety.

'Flourishing' focuses on building upon the strengths of the individual to build the resilience to overcome challenges and enhance wellbeing. The capacity to work from one's strengths creates better, stronger and more positive relationships between and within individuals, families and communities.

[By measuring and building wellbeing and resilience in communities we can begin to address the causes of mental illness, rather than its symptoms, and give every individual the skills to flourish in their daily lives.](#)

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

When talking about positive psychology, people ask me:
What's in it for me? What's in it for my child?

Here are the benefits I believe can be found in systematic use of positive psychology:

- more PERMA (certain)
- less depression (likely)
- less anxiety (likely)
- better relationships (probable)
- higher achievement (possible)
- higher achievements (possible)
- more success in life (possible)
- better physical health (possible)

Wellbeing is everyone's birth right.

Creating a common language for large-scale change

If building wellbeing is to become a deliberate goal of a group, a family, a school, a workplace or a society, there has to be a common understanding of what wellbeing is. PERMA provides conceptual scaffolding and a common language for thinking about and discussing wellbeing.

Historically, in order to achieve a large-scale shift towards something new and innovative such as disease immunisation, reduction in smoking or better school attendance, societies have been persuaded of the value of new ideas. People have needed to know 'why?' in order to be attracted to new behaviours. The word 'wellbeing' can mean different things in different contexts. When wellbeing is unpacked to be made up of the elements of PERMA, building wellbeing becomes attractive and achievable. It becomes easy to communicate and easy to understand.

When the desire for wellbeing enters the culture of a society and the tools to build it become well understood by large numbers of people, then we can say we are building a *flourishing society*.

Positive Psychology Benefits the Entire Population

Using positive psychology at scale is an exciting prospect.

What is expressed in Figure 4 below is the proposition that by implementing positive psychology at-scale we can increase the wellbeing of the entire population.

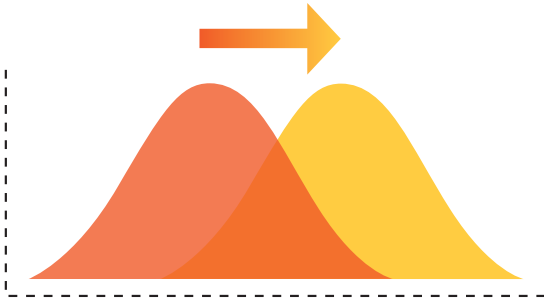


Figure 4 Moving the mean for large scale change

I believe that by teaching whole populations positive psychology skills and principles, we can shift an entire population in a positive direction to be flourishing in life. We can move the whole bell curve of wellbeing forward which will benefit everybody, from those who are struggling to those who are flourishing.

It must be reiterated that the goal of moving the population as a whole towards better wellbeing does not discount the important work of addressing disadvantage, inequity, trauma and severe mental illness. That work must continue to be funded and researched.

Both universal work and work targeting subsections of the population with specific needs is required. Just as a public health response to reducing numbers of smokers sits alongside targeted treatments for smoking related illness, a population response to building wellbeing, as well as targeted support for groups and individuals who need support for treating mental illness will reduce suffering across the whole of society.





Government of
South Australia

What's so
flour
?



Chapter 2

Understanding PERMA: The Science of Wellbeing

Key concepts in this chapter:

A definition of wellbeing: PERMA

- Positive emotion
- Engagement
- Relationships
- Meaning
- Accomplishment
- Evidence base for positive psychological interventions: a brief overview of the evidence
- PERMA: A state and national goal

A definition of wellbeing: PERMA

Wellbeing is one of the central constructs in the field of Positive Psychology.

Wellbeing is more than the absence of ill-being. It is something over and above not suffering.

If our goal is to build a flourishing state, we need to know exactly what it is that we want to build. We need to ask 'how do we describe wellbeing so that we can measure and increase it?'

There are many definitions of wellbeing. The theory and definition of wellbeing that is guiding this work and this residency is the PERMA construct.

The acronym PERMA represents the five components that can be built to increase wellbeing (see Figure 3):

- Positive emotion
- Engagement
- Relationships
- Meaning
- Accomplishment

Each element of PERMA is something that people choose to pursue for its own sake. No one element defines wellbeing, but each element contributes to the overall experience of wellbeing. A flourishing person has not just the *absence* of misery but also the *presence* of these five elements in their life.

The levels of any of the elements of PERMA are not predetermined for any individual or organisation. Each of them can be built, and this is the aim in South Australia: to build the elements of PERMA in individuals, in organisations and across the state.

The remainder of this section looks more closely at each element and provides an overview of some of the relevant research to-date.

Positive emotion

The first element of PERMA is positive *emotion*.

Positive emotion is more than just 'happiness'. There is a range of positive emotions, including amusement, awe, compassion, contentment, gratitude, hope, interest, joy, love, and pride. Some of our capacity for experiencing positive emotions is inherited but we do have capacity to purposefully experience more positive emotion.



*POSITIVE EMOTION
University of South Australia
PERMA design visualisation*

*Design Direction: Veronika Kelly,
Designed by: Danielle Larosa,
University of South Australia*

It is good to feel good, but positive emotions do more than makes us feel good. Professor Barbara Fredrickson, the leading researcher in this area, describes positive emotions as:

*...short-lived, momentary, fleeting experiences that have, in the moment, ways of altering the ways we think, the ways we behave, the way we see other people. Over time those momentary effects of positive emotions add up and really change who we become, change how people grow and change over time.*¹⁶

In summary, having more positive emotion can:

- broaden people's attention and their ability to think and act¹⁷
- build physical, intellectual, social and psychological resources¹⁸
- promote resilience¹⁹
- undo the effects of negative emotions²⁰
- increase creativity²¹
- help prevent and speed-up recovery from illness, including the common cold,²² stress and heart disease²³
- predict a longer life-span.^{24,25,26}

EXCERCISE

Building Positive Emotion: Hunt the Good Stuff

An exercise that can increase your positive emotion of gratitude is *Hunt the Good Stuff* (also known as *Three Blessings exercise* or a *Gratitude Journal*).

This exercise involves pausing each night to write down three things that went well that day and why they went well.

It turns out that if you *Hunt the Good Stuff* for a week, six months later you will have significantly less depression, less anxiety and higher life satisfaction (Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005). Participants report feeling better about their lives overall, feeling more optimistic about the future, having fewer health problems or illness, and experiencing even better sleep!

Importantly, it is also addictive—people *like* doing this exercise.

16 Jarden 2012

17 Fredrickson & Branigan 2005

18 Fredrickson 2003

19 Tugade & Fredrickson 2004

20 Garland, Fredrickson, Kring, Johnson & Meyer 2010

21 Fredrickson 2003

22 Cohen, Doyle, Turner, Alper & Skoner 2003

23 Fredrickson & Levenson 1998

24 Xu & Roberts 2010

25 Danner, Snowdon & Friesen 2001

26 Levy, Slade & Kunkel 2002



Engagement

The second component, the E in PERMA, is [engagement](#).

When we are truly engaged in a project, a task or a situation, we experience *flow*. During flow experiences, we are intensely focused on what we are doing; time seems to stop, as we lose ourselves in the task at hand. Some people have described it as *being in the zone*, or *being at one with the music*.²⁷

Professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is a leader in this field. He posits that flow occurs when people's highest strengths are matched to the challenges that come their way:

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) describes the state of flow and conditions for entering flow as:

*...a sense that one's skills are adequate to cope with the challenges at hand in a goal-directed, rule-bound action system that provides clear clues as to how one is performing. Concentration is so intense that there is no attention left over to think about anything irrelevant or to worry about problems. Self-consciousness disappears, and the sense of time becomes distorted. An activity that produces such experiences is so gratifying that people are willing to do it for its own sake, with little concern for what they will get out of it, even when it is difficult or dangerous.*²⁸

In summary, the two main conditions for entering flow are:

- perceived challenges, or opportunities for action, that stretch but do not overmatch existing skills
- clear proximal goals and immediate feedback about the progress being made.²⁹

This is represented in Figure 5: flow is achieved when you have the combination of a challenging task and the opportunity to use your skills/strengths

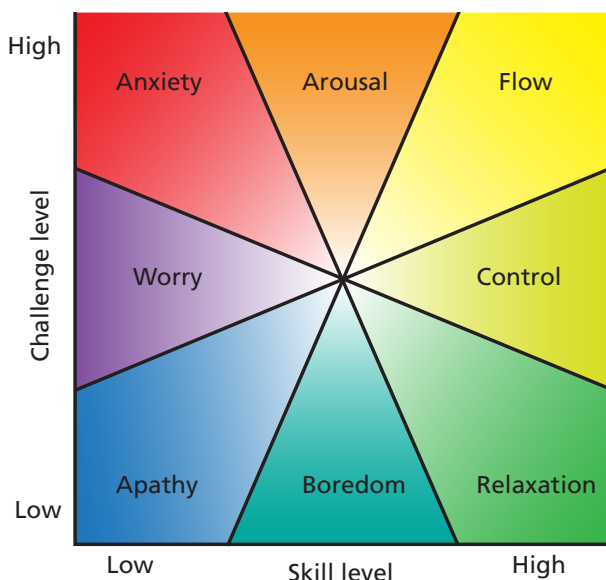


Figure 5 Challenge versus Skill³⁰

27 Seligman 2010

28 Csikszentmihalyi 1990

29 Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi 2002

30 Csikszentmihalyi. 1997



ENGAGEMENT

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PERMA design visualisation*

*Designed Direction: Veronika Kelly,
Designed by: Lucinda Aitchison,
University of South Australia*

EXERCISE

Challenge versus Skill

When you are asked to do something challenging, ask your self how you can use your strengths to make the challenge more engaging.

There are three vital points here.

The **first** is that it is important for people to understand their strengths and how to access them.

The **second** is that in education or workplace settings, having people work to their strengths is likely to lead to better outcomes for students, teachers, employees and employers.

Third, research indicates that experiences of flow correlate with increased happiness, further learning and skill development, and improved performance.^{31,32}

Flow experiences may occur at school, at work, at home, or at play. Living an engaged life, in which flow experiences are common, contributes to wellbeing.

31 Csikszentmihalyi 1990 & 1997

32 Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi 2009

Finding and using your strengths to achieve flow

People are more able to go into flow when they are using their top character strengths. Knowing and employing your strengths contributes to wellbeing. Professor Chris Peterson and I believe that there are 24 universal human strengths.³³

These are moral strengths and are different from talents. Talents are a means to an end. We value IQ and perfect pitch not in their own right but because they lead to things like intelligent decisions and playing the violin.

In this context character strengths mean moral strengths, things we value in their own right, not as means to an end—like gratitude, kindness, fairness, sense of humour, and the like. Discovering your individual strengths is easy to do. The Values in Action (VIA) surveys are available for free on my website, www.authentic happiness.org. The tests help you identify, relative to roughly two million people, what your signature strengths are and how they rank.

We also teach people how to recognise and develop their own and others' strengths. When people take something they do not like doing and find ways of doing it using their highest strength(s) the effects can be remarkable, and using one's strengths often becomes self-reinforcing.

EXERCISE

Using your strengths

As an example, one of my students was a waitress, working her way through graduate school. She hated all of the heavy trays and felt patronised by customers. She took the Signature Strengths questionnaire and the results indicated that her highest strength was social intelligence. So her task became to re-craft waitressing using her highest strength. She decided she would make each encounter with a customer the social highlight of their evening. By putting what she was best at in the world on offer, continually, waitressing became fun, her tips became larger, and the trays seemed less heavy.

Research findings about strengths

Strengths can be reliably tested in children and adults. When people use their strengths more they go into flow more. Among numerous other findings, researchers report that:

- individuals who tried using their strengths in new ways each day for a week were happier and less depressed six months later³⁴
- people who reported using their strengths also reported more positive emotion, and greater vitality and self-esteem, compared with people who did not feel they used their strengths³⁵
- use of character strengths contributes positively to both physical and mental wellbeing³⁶
- for employees having the opportunity to do what they do best every day is the single best predictor of employee engagement³⁷

33 Peterson & Seligman 2004

34 Seligman et al. 2005

35 Wood et al. 2011

36 Proctor, Maltby & Linley 2009

37 Harter, Schmidt & Keyes 2002



Summarising engagement—the E in PERMA:

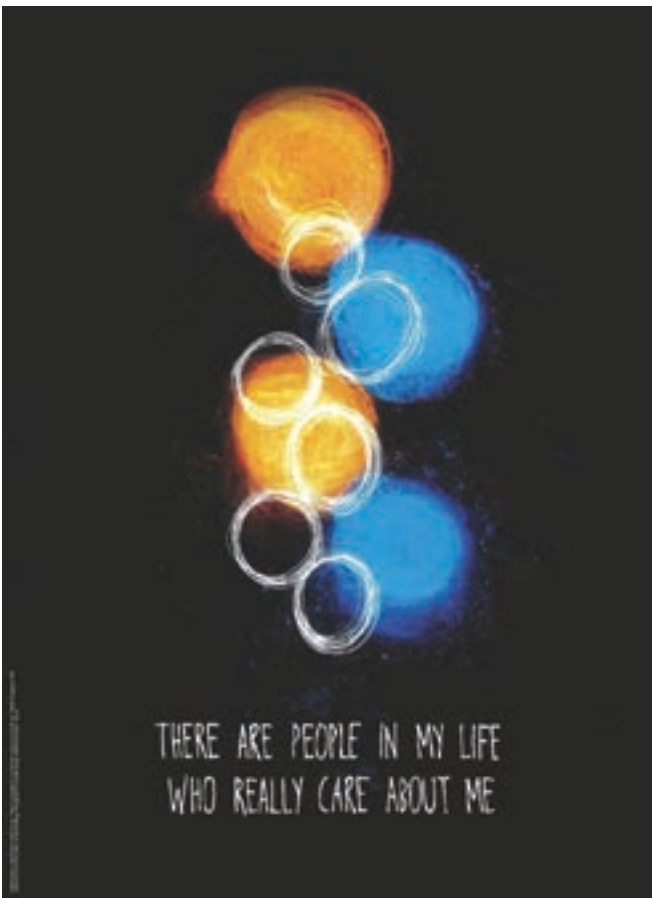
- People pursue engagement for its own sake.
- Research has linked experiences of engagement and flow to numerous benefits for individuals and groups.
- Levels of engagement can be measured.
- People can learn how to build more engagement in their life.
- I believe that engagement can be measured and built at scale, at the level of a state.

Can you be more engaged in life than you are now? Can you identify and build on your own strengths and the strengths of the people around you?

Relationships

The R in PERMA is for [Positive Relationships](#).

This is about a person's relationships with many different people: their partner, their boss, their friends, their colleagues, their family, their children and their community. Social networks affect people's physical and mental health and wellbeing.³⁸



RELATIONSHIPS

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Design Direction: Veronika Kelly,
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The hallmark of a positive relationship is not one from which negative experience or interaction has been eradicated. In fact, positive relationships do include some negativity. However, the balance between positive and negative should be a healthy one, where the positive outweighs the negative.³⁹

Some people are blessed with knowing how to build good relationships, but it turns out that good relations are a skill. Discoveries in the last decades about these skills tell us that we can teach these skills.

The Losada Ratio: balancing positive and negative

Researchers Professor Barbara Frederickson and Dr Marcial Losada (2005) went to 60 American corporations to record every word that was said over a period of time. Of the corporations they visited, 20 were flourishing economically, 20 were stagnating and 20 were going bankrupt.

Fredrickson and Losado set out to determine the ratio of positive to negative words spoken in these organisations and how that related to the economic position of the corporation. What they discovered was that there was a relationship between the type of language used in the company and its economic success; this is known as the Losado Ratio.

The corporations in which the ratio of positive words to negative words was 2.9 to 1 or greater, were more likely to be flourishing economically. If the positive:negative ratio was between 1 and 2.9 they were likely to be stagnating, and if the positive:negative ratio was such that the negative words outweighed the positive words, they were likely to be going bankrupt.

This ratio also applies to relationships.

My colleagues John and Julie Gottman locked couples into an apartment for the weekend and they recorded every word that was said. They computed the Losada ratio and then attempted to predict divorce. Their research showed that if the ratio was lower than 5 to 1, it was a significant predictor of divorce.⁴⁰

While there is some controversy over the exact ratio, the principle remains valuable.

Research findings on positive relationships

The research on positive relationships is probably best summed up in a famous saying by my great friend and closest colleague, the late Professor Chris Peterson: 'Other people matter'.

Other people matter, in a number of ways, and more than you might think.

In 2002 a study of the happiest 10% of the population was undertaken. One characteristic that was common to every member of that group was their strong ties to friends and family, and their commitment to spending time with them. While having strong relationships was not sufficient in itself to place people in that upper echelon of happiness (there were unhappy people who had strong relationships too), there were no loners in that top group.

39 Gottman & Silver 1995

40 Fredrickson & Losada 2005

Strong ties are ESSENTIAL to a life well-lived.⁴¹

George Vaillant has been steward of one of the most comprehensive longitudinal studies ever undertaken. This study has followed 268 men from when they enrolled at Harvard University in the 1930s, throughout their lives and now into old age. One of George's key findings from the Harvard data is that

'Our intimate attachments to other people—and them to us—matter and they matter more than anything else in the world' in both the short and long term.⁴²

In addition, Gallup research indicates that 'employees who have a best friend at work are much more likely to be engaged in their jobs—and they're more likely to have engaged customers'.⁴³

Other research indicates that the quality and quantity of our positive relationships relates to outcomes, including:

- greater longevity⁴⁴
- lower levels of stress⁴⁵
- lower levels of obesity⁴⁶
- faster recovery from illness⁴⁷
- better heart health.⁴⁸

EXERCISE

Teaching better relationship skills

There is a lot we can do to teach people to have better relationships.

One skill we teach people to build better relationships is Active Constructive Responding. About eight years ago, a group of marital therapists, led by Shelly Gable, said, let us not look at how people fight, let us look at how they celebrate.

They asked: when your spouse comes home and shares a good event, a victory, what do you say? You can divide what you say into four common types of responses, using a two-by-two matrix.¹ (see Figure 6.)

1 Gable et al.2004

41 Diener & Seligman 2004

42 Vaillant 2012

43 Rath 2010

44 Berkman & Syme 1994

45 Cohen & Wills 1985

46 Christakis & Fowler 2007

47 Cohen 2005

48 Brummett, Barefoot, Siegler, Clapp-Channing, Lytle & Bosworth 2001

**Can you
have better
relationships
than you do
now? What
could you
do today to
make your
relationships
stronger**



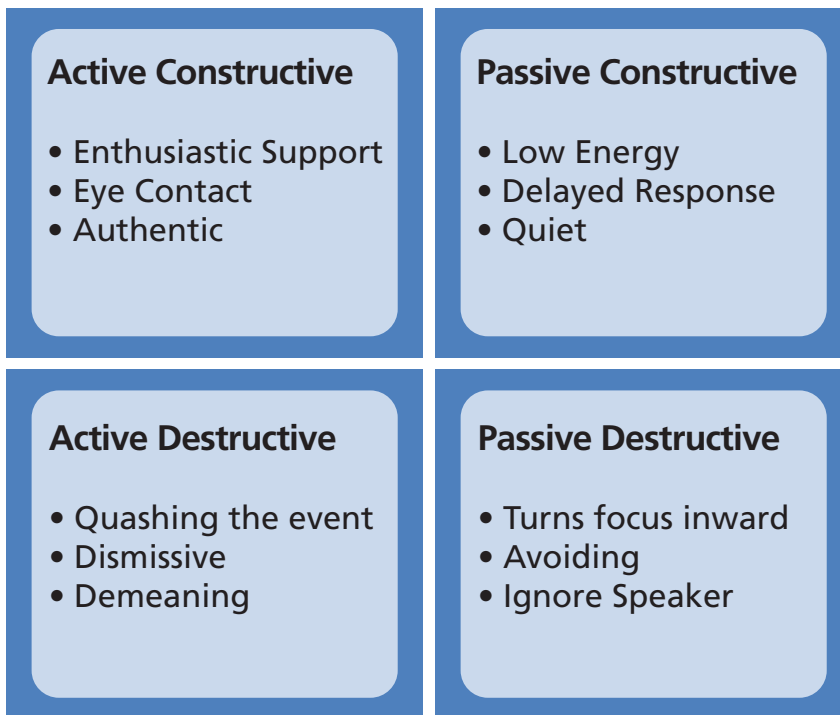


Figure 6 Ways of Responding

The best way to understand this is through an example. Imagine that your partner comes home one evening from work and announces that they have received a promotion.

An **active-destructive** responder might say something like ‘Do you know what tax bracket your promotion’s going to put us into?’

A **passive-constructive** responder may say: ‘Congratulations dear, you deserve it.’ While this type of response is not destructive, it has no effect on building positive relationships. You might as well not say anything at all. It has no effect. *Most people tend to respond this way.*


A **passive destructive** response might be: ‘What’s for dinner?’

The response that matters, and the one that does not come naturally for many people, is **active constructive**. It is not a short cut, it is a ‘long cut’ around celebration. One such response could be: ‘Dear, I’ve been reading your reports to the company and the last one you wrote on the pension plan, you know, for me was the single best fiscal report I’ve seen in all my years in business. You have earned this promotion. Now, exactly where you were when your boss told you the great news?’

The psychological aim of responding in this manner is getting your partner to relive the event and to put them in touch with their higher strengths. When you teach people to do this, divorce predictors go down and love and commitment increase.

This is not just a technique for marriage, it is a technique for friendship. This might seem surprising, for even in my 35 years of teaching clinical psychology, I always taught my students about how to deal with awful events. What this research has taught us is that

the real secret to building positive relationships is to have people in your life who will be there for you when things go right.

A group of five people are in a grey inflatable raft navigating white-water rapids. They are all wearing yellow helmets and blue and yellow life jackets. The water is splashing around the raft, and the people have expressions of excitement and focus. The background is a blurred view of the river and surrounding rocks.

How can you
build a more
meaningful
life?

Strangely enough, we tend to have little or no training in asking people what is best in their lives and then asking the right questions to help them capitalise on what is working well and to build the relationship.

Active-constructive responding is a skill, which can be learned, and should be, as it is the only one of the four response styles that actually builds positive relationships.

Each of the other three styles erode relationships over time.

Summarising positive relationships—the R in PERMA:

- People pursue positive relationships for their own sake.
- Positive relationships have been linked to numerous benefits for individuals and groups.
- Positive relationships can be measured.
- Positive relationship skills can be taught.
- believe that positive relationships can be measured and built at scale, at the level of a state.

Meaning

The fourth element in PERMA is M: *meaning and purpose in life*, belonging to and serving something that one believes is bigger than the self.



MEANING

University of South Australia
PERMA design visualisation

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Human beings inevitably search for meaning and are deeply altruistic. It is possible that we have not only been individually selected as Darwinian theory proposed, but also group selected. We are both selfish creatures and hive creatures. That is part of the reason why we Homo sapiens are so biologically successful. Homo sapiens as a species has survived and flourished because of our ability to work and innovate as a group. Within the group/species, individual selection takes place. Part of what is attractive to a mate (in survival of the fittest) is some level of altruistic tendencies.⁴⁹

The research findings on meaning

Many people have researched meaning in life and found that it can arise from multiple sources.⁵⁰ Kaufman (1986) found that most life stories have between four and six different main themes, including relationships, life work, service, growth, belief, pleasure or happiness, and health.⁵¹

We consider our lives meaningful when our lives matter,⁵² and for something to matter, it must matter to others, or to a larger purpose. A greater sense of purpose that transcends the everyday monotony and chaos makes us feel that our lives are meaningful.⁵³

A strong sense of purpose leads to:

- greater life satisfaction
- greater confidence
- feelings of self-efficacy towards goals
- greater feeling of resilience to obstacles.

People who live their life with purpose enjoy greater health, life satisfaction and overall wellbeing.⁵⁴

Summarizing meaning—the M in PERMA:

- People pursue meaning for its own sake.
- Having a sense of meaning and purpose in life has numerous benefits.
- Meaning can be measured.
- People can be taught ways to increase meaning and purpose in their lives.
- I believe that this can be done at scale, at the level of a state.

49 Szalavitz 2012

50 Lukas 1986; Reker & Chamberlain 2000

51 de Vogler & Ebersole 1980

52 King, Hicks, Krull & Del Gaiso 2006

53 King et al.2006

54 Kashdan & McKnight 2009

Accomplishment

The final element of the PERMA acronym is A, **accomplishment**, or achievement, mastery, competence.

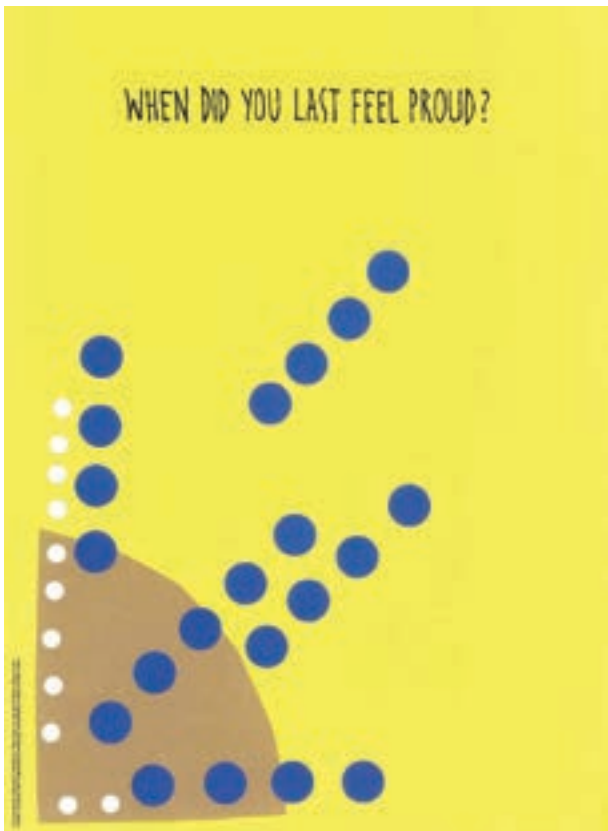
Accomplishment is often pursued for its own sake, regardless of whether it will bring you more positive emotions, engagement, relationships or meaning. This is ‘winning for winning’s sake’ or the ‘achieving life’.

Of course, for most people the achieving life is linked to a sense of meaning or positive emotion, but for some the increase in these areas is simply a side effect of the accomplishment when they are driven by a motivation to win.

Research findings on accomplishment

One of the new developments in terms of accomplishment is the measurement of grit and self-discipline. It’s the question of who never gives up.

We spend a great deal of our time trying to get people to do better in school, for example. Angela Duckworth, who is the leading person in this field, measures students’ IQ and self-discipline. She then goes on to predict what’s going to happen to their grades and if they are going to get into a good university. It turns out in general and across the board, Angela finds that self-discipline is roughly twice as important as IQ in academic success. It predicts grades, it predicts who’s going to stay with it at places like the American Military Academy, it predicts who’s going to win this bizarre spelling bee—that’s self-discipline.⁵⁵



ACCOMPLISHMENT
University of South Australia
PERMA design visualisation

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55 Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly 2007

Summarising accomplishment—the A in PERMA:

- People pursue accomplishment for its own sake.
- Accomplishment has been linked to numerous benefits for individuals and groups.
- Accomplishment can be measured.
- Researchers are working to discover more ways that people can increase their levels of accomplishment.
- I believe that accomplishment can be measured and built at scale, at the level of a state.

How can you have more feelings of accomplishment in your life?

Evidence-base for positive psychological interventions: a brief review of recent meta-analyses

Wellbeing interventions are shown to work in various settings. While a full analysis of available data is beyond the scope of this report, an overview of two recent meta-analyses can provide a snapshot of the findings.

Meta-analyses use “statistical methods to combine results of individual studies”.⁵⁶

Combining the results of similar studies is advantageous because it increases the power of analyses—that is, the strength of the assertions that can be made about treatments, outcomes or effects. In the field of positive psychology, two notable meta-analyses are by Sin & Lyubomirsky (2009; 51 studies, 4266 participants) and Bolier, Haverman, Westerhof, Riper, Smit and Bohlmeijer (2013; 39 studies, totalling 6139 participants).

These meta-analyses review and comment on the effectiveness of positive psychology interventions, defined by Sin & Lyubomirsky (2009) as ‘treatment methods or intentional activities that aim to cultivate positive feelings, behaviours, or cognitions’ (p.468). These meta-analyses included studies which used a comparison group (comparing, for example, intervention versus no intervention) and were clearly informed by the theoretical tradition of positive psychology.⁵⁷ Positive psychology interventions can range from brief exercises, such as writing gratitude letters, to extensive and ongoing programs. What they all have in common is that they seek to build psychological strengths to buffer against the onset of mental illness (or in an attempt to undo the root causes of mental illness).⁵⁸

In sum, these meta-analyses made the following conclusions regarding positive psychology interventions:⁵⁹

- Positive psychology interventions significantly increased self-reported scores on measures of wellbeing and decreased scores on depressive indicators.⁶⁰
- Positive psychology interventions can be used in combination with treatment, problem-based interventions or other evidence-based interventions with positive approaches (like mindfulness, behavioural activation).⁶¹

56 Cochrane Collaboration 2002

57 Sin & Lyubomirsky 2009

58 The interested reader is invited to review the full list of interventions included in the aforementioned meta-analyses

59 Please keep in mind that these findings should be interpreted with caution because the meta-analytic technique has limitations (only those studies that fit the inclusion criteria set were included) and causality cannot be inferred

60 Sin & Lyubomirsky 2009

61 Bolier et al. 2013

- Both clinically depressed and non-depressed people are likely to experience benefits from positive psychology interventions as their strength focus offers scope to treat lingering depressive tendencies and prevent future experiences of depression.⁶²
- Participant motivation: participants who chose to be involved in positive psychology interventions (as opposed to those that were not self-selected) benefited more. Providing encouragement and support motivation is important to achieving outcomes for all participants.
- The benefits of positive psychology interventions tend to increase with age; this may be due to greater wisdom and emotional regulation.⁶³ This finding does not suggest that positive psychology interventions do not have value for younger cohorts, but that more encouragement may be required.
- The mode of delivery played a role in the effectiveness of intervention. For example, individual therapy was most effective, followed by group-administered positive psychology interventions, then self-administered.⁶⁴
- The duration of intervention also played a role in the effectiveness of the intervention. Longer interventions were more likely to produce greater gains in wellbeing;⁶⁵ this may be because habit formation is supported. Indeed, Boiler et al. (2013) recommend that interventions be delivered over a longer period (at least four weeks and preferably eight weeks or longer).
- Positive psychology interventions are preventive in nature because they are easily accessible and non-stigmatising.⁶⁶ Applications include:
 - mental health promotion campaigns
 - low-intensity interventions that can be delivered one-to-one through a professional or via self-directed learning (e.g., over the internet).⁶⁷

This is a very promising beginning for the new science of positive psychology. Boiler et al. (2013) highlight the need for more 'high-quality peer-reviewed studies in diverse (clinical) populations' to strengthen the evidence-base and inform positive psychological interventions in practice.

PERMA: a state and national goal

PERMA can be measured and built at an individual level - I believe it can be done at scale. It is a noble goal for state and national governments to want to increase the wellbeing of their citizens. This is the proposition for South Australia.

Twenty years ago this would have been an impossible goal because we would not have been able to quantify wellbeing. Now that we can measure wellbeing, it is something that governments could and should be pursuing.

62 Sin & Lyubomirsky 2009

63 Sin & Lyubomirsky 2009

64 Boiler et al. 2013; Sin & Lyubomirsky 2009

65 Sin & Lyubomirsky 2009

66 Boiler et al. 2013

67 Boiler et al. 2013





Chapter 3

Wellbeing for Everyone at the Scale of a State

Key concepts in this chapter:

- Wellbeing in Australia and South Australia—the current climate
- A Florentine moment for South Australia
- South Australia: The State of Wellbeing
- Adelaide: The World Capital of Wellbeing
- A Stepwise Plan for Building a Flourishing State
 - Step 1: Leadership, coordination and collaboration
 - Step 2: Start with measurement and intervention in primary and secondary schools in South Australia
 - Step 3: Measure and teach wellbeing in other cohorts

Wellbeing in Australia and South Australia—the current climate

The Human Development Index (HDI), published annually by the United Nations, ranks nations according to their citizens' quality of life rather than strictly by a nation's traditional economic figures. In 2012, Australia is ranked the second most liveable country, one ranking behind Norway.⁶⁸ That makes Adelaide the most liveable city⁶⁹ (according to the local citizens) in the second most liveable country in the world.

Yet, Beyond Blue alerts us that one in five Australians will experience episodes of depression. One in four will experience one type or other of anxiety disorder. Suicide rates are high. More than 2000 Australians take their lives every year.

Some are of the view that Australia's children are not universally doing well.⁷⁰ A 2007 study of 10–14 year olds found 46% of respondents did not feel confident or secure in themselves, 54% were worried about not fitting in and 40% felt they were not performing well enough.⁷¹

68 United Nations 2013

69 Property Council of Australia 2012

70 Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth 2013

71 Waters 2011

This shows that our young people are struggling with issues related to stress and anxiety and we need to focus on wellbeing and mental health in schools. Indeed, as Associate Professor Lea Waters summarises:⁷²

Today's students face a future of environmental degradation, peak oil, global warming, famine, poverty, health pandemics, population explosion, terrorism, increasing natural disasters, and other environmental and social issues. This complexity and stress is taking a toll on our young people's mental health.

Australia has made great progress in this realm with a re-invigorated mental health focus at both a federal and state level.

The Federal Government has invested \$2.2 billion in mental health in recent years through the national mental health reform plan, which includes free online counselling (MindSpot, www.mindspot.org.au/), improved access to psychological services and the work of Mindmatters (www.mindmatters.edu.au/default.asp) and Kidsmatter (www.kidsmatter.edu.au/). The successful headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation is delivering an important element of this plan: Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Centre (EPPIC). The EPPIC model of care has been championed by the 2010 Australian of the Year, psychiatrist Professor Patrick McGorry. There are 90 headspace centres already funded across the country.

The National Commission for Mental Health, established in January 2012, recognises the importance of taking a national and cross-sectoral leadership approach to mental health reform. It publishes an annual National Report Card on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, provides independent advice to the Australian Government, engages people with a lived experience of mental health issues, and builds relationships and partnerships across government and the community to leverage effort and outcomes.

THREE MONTHS BEFORE I ARRIVED IN ADELAIDE IN NOVEMBER 2011, I WROTE:

Could Adelaide become a Flourishing City?

Could South Australia become a Flourishing State?

A 'flourishing' individual (for me) means an individual with abundant PERMA: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Positive Relationships, Meaning, and Positive Accomplishment. I have spent much of my career researching this in individuals. But is flourishing possible beyond a single person? A corporation, a school system, a city, or even a state? As far as I know, no respectable group has ever attempted to create this before.

Who will be the first major political unit in the world to measure and build wellbeing? It could be South Australia.

I certainly don't know how to do this, but I have a vision of the opportunity and how to begin....

72 Waters 2011

This mental health reform work is proceeding strongly and I congratulate Australia on this progress.

But this is a complex picture. Despite these policies, living in a recognised 'liveable' country and despite the relative wealth of this state and the country, many South Australians are not thriving.

Wellbeing itself, not just the absence of misery, can be an individual goal and, I believe, a plausible and useful State and national goal.

A Florentine moment for South Australia

There are instances in human history in which nations are wealthy and not at war, not in famine, and not in civil turmoil. Florence of 1450 is an excellent example of this.

As you may know, Florence by about 1450 had become terrifically wealthy, mostly through the banking genius of the Medici family. During this time of peace and wealth, Florentines asked themselves the question: what shall we do with this wealth? This opened a great debate. Military voices, for example, advocated that they should conquer the peninsula. But under the leadership of Cosimo the Elder it was decided that Florence would invest its wealth in beauty. It gave us what 200 years later people called the Renaissance.

Now ranked by Forbes as one of the most beautiful cities in the world, Florence is famous for its artistic and architectural heritage, culture, resulting from the very decisions made by Cosimo the Elder and others during these pivotal 15th century moments.

South Australia is now in a time we might call *a Florentine moment*. This is a time of long-term peace, surrounded by a climate and beautiful landscape that enables outdoor lifestyles, with all major infrastructure in place to enable people to move and get help when needed, stay healthy and generally enjoy social experiences. In spite of local concerns about savings and balanced budgets into the future, it is clear that South Australia is generally enjoying an historic moment of grace and good fortune.

**What will South Australia do with this Florentine moment of history?
What will South Australians of today be remembered for in 100 years?**

South Australia could choose to invest in the wellbeing of its citizens, using the latest wellbeing science and insights to build a resilient and successful society, demonstrating to the world a new 21st century version of a fit, industrious and confident society.

This is the opportunity for South Australia to use its present day good fortune to build the resources of this society through the wellbeing of its citizens.

South Australia: the State of Wellbeing; Adelaide: the World Capital of Wellbeing

Now more than ever, at the completion of my residency, I believe that South Australia could be a prototype for the world.

Never before has an entire state or political unit undertaken to systematically understand and build population wellbeing. South Australia could be developing the prototype for the mental and physical health for the planet.



My bold vision for South Australia is that of the State of Wellbeing.

Building upon the liveable city status, South Australia can become known as the State of Wellbeing, and Adelaide the Capital of Wellbeing. This involves not only enhancement of population wellbeing, increases in PERMA, decreases in depression and anxiety, but also decreases in diseases like cardiovascular disease⁷³

So, part of the logic is that by building mental health, in the long run, there is the opportunity to decrease health care expenditure, morbidity and mortality.

This kind of bold social reform is consistent with the cultural heritage of South Australia. Not only does the vision of the *State of Wellbeing* resonate with and build on South Australia's liveable city reputation, but it also builds on its global reputation for innovation and social reform.

South Australia can develop the prototype for optimal mental and physical health for the planet.

The wellbeing vision is the way of the future for enlightened societies. This goal is so profound, it could have numerous positive implications. It includes research and student teaching opportunities for participating universities in Australasia, giving rise to new business opportunities to address the appetite of the massive global wellbeing revolution for new products and services.

73 Giltay, Geleijnse, Zitman, Hoekstra & Schouten 2004

Wellbeing is a big conversation globally. China, France, the United Kingdom and other places are pursuing these opportunities aggressively. It is likely that more nations will start taking the wellbeing of their citizens more seriously.

'We should be thinking not just what is good for putting money in people's pockets but what is good for putting joy in people's hearts.'

Conservative United Kingdom Prime Minister David Cameron

I believe that this vision of the State of Wellbeing is entirely achievable.

Right now, largely because of the momentum built through this residency, South Australia is uniquely placed to take up this magnificent challenge: to become the first state in the world to build wellbeing in its citizens at the scale of the state—a flourishing state.

For this to be a goal we need to understand how it might be possible: where do we start? What is it going to look like?

The Plan for Building a Flourishing State

This section begins to describe the steps for South Australia to become the *State of Wellbeing*.

STEP 1: Leadership, coordination and collaboration

The Adelaide Thinkers in Residence team has driven this Residency far and fast. In the implementation of this vision, this team will need to be replaced by a new organisation to drive the state-wide wellbeing agenda forward and align the partnerships which will be required.

Already the State Government Economic Development Board has shown strong leadership towards this vision. This support, strengthened by the leadership of the current partners and those who have come on board to the vision, will need to continue.

A goal will be to create a shared vocabulary for people throughout South Australia in the language and understanding of wellbeing.

To further the vision of the *State of Wellbeing*, I recommend that an independent organisation be established in South Australia to:

- Lead the work of embedding and sustaining wellbeing in policy and practice in South Australia;
- Position South Australia globally as a leader in wellbeing;
- Invite international wellbeing science speakers and manage public and research gatherings;
- Commission and launch research projects with university and other partners;
- Publish and disseminate research findings and communications;
- Create and manage community wellbeing awards; and
- Launch the World Wellbeing Council with states and nations around the world who are interested in pursuing wellbeing at scale.

STEP 2: Start with measurement and intervention in primary and secondary schools in South Australia

With the partners in this residency, we have begun to explore the possibility of the 'psychological immunisation' of school-aged children and teenagers (aged 5–17 years).

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMMUNISATION CAN CHANGE THE WORLD

Jonas Salk, best known for the discovery and development of the polio vaccine, was a wonderful scientist and a strong influence on my life.

Late in Jonas' life I asked him what he would do with his life if he had the chance to live all over again. He said: 'I would still focus on immunisation, but it would be psychological immunisation.'

I suggest that we can use the science of positive psychology to do just that. And we can start in South Australia.

It is logical to begin a state-wide wellbeing initiative by focusing on school-aged children and teenagers for three reasons:

- Young people, with their whole lives ahead of them, have arguably the most to gain (over a lifetime) from experiencing increased wellbeing.
- Young people are really suffering - between 14% and 18% of young South Australians have a mental illness⁷⁴.
- The majority of 5–17 year olds can be reached through the distributed network of primary and secondary schools in South Australia. We can begin embedding the principles of positive psychology through schools.

I will articulate the specific components of Step 2 in greater details in Chapters 4 and 5 of this report, but right now I just want to tell you how I think that the wellbeing of young people in South Australia can begin to be enhanced. This can begin to be achieved by:

- **the measurement of the wellbeing of every primary and high school student in South Australia**

Measuring the wellbeing of all primary and high school students in South Australia will provide baseline data in the many school locations across the state.

This data will allow South Australia to determine what action should be taken to increase wellbeing (through wellbeing interventions).

Over time it will be possible to do subsequent measurements across the state to examine whether interventions are having the intended effect on youth wellbeing.

74 Sawyer et al. 200

It is important to commit to ongoing, incremental measurement so that longitudinal data can inform policy and decision makers about how young South Australians are tracking over time and the effectiveness of wellbeing interventions.

- **the systematic, long-term delivery of a suite of positive psychology interventions to school students, teachers, and parents in school communities**

There is good evidence that wellbeing can be increased and depression decreased by various interventions. Here, the vision is to bring together the evidence-based programs and deliver these at-scale to young people in primary and high schools in South Australia. I believe that this vision can be delivered by educators and other professionals in the state.

One great outcome of this approach is that there will be intersection points with parents, so that parents can understand what their children are learning and learn skills themselves.

In this way we not only begin the process of immunising young people against mental illness, but through engaging with parents we also start build wellbeing in the community. We can begin to conceive schools (the teachers, students, parents in them) as activating hubs of wellbeing. This way we can begin to work outwards from every school into the community.

STEP 3: Measure and teach wellbeing in other cohorts

Because primary and secondary schools are networks, they are a model place to begin the work of deliberately increasing wellbeing for large numbers of people.

However, to increase wellbeing for all citizens, it will be necessary to move beyond the school system.

Parallel networks exist, such as workplaces, care and community services and local governments. It is possible that these can be used to access and engage different groups of people. This may include people in aged care or community care settings, young mothers receiving home visits, migrant groups or indigenous groups. When people are engaged in ongoing services or business structures it will be easier to deliver or embed wellbeing interventions at scale.

It is likely that measures and interventions developed for primary and high school students may not be appropriate for adults in workplaces. While I believe that PERMA should be a guiding framework, it will be necessary to develop tailored measurement and intervention to learn about and enhance the wellbeing of individual cohorts of people.

In summary, I recommend that South Australia undertake to measure the wellbeing of its young people, followed up with evidence-based and evaluated interventions and then ask: what has the effect been on wellbeing? This knowledge should be used to expand the wellbeing vision to all citizens.

Once achieved, this new knowledge of the scale application of wellbeing science to build a flourishing society, can be shared nationally and internationally.

Vision splendid!

WELLBEING IN THE WORKPLACE

South Australia and Australia are said to have a relatively low productivity rate., Building PERMA in individuals and workplaces may lead to a corresponding increase in productivity.

There is not sufficient evidence to make this claim, but if a larger number of people are focused on having more meaning and accomplishment, and corporate teams are built using positive relationship skills, it is fair to assume that workplaces are likely to change for the better. Staff who have good working relationships and find meaning in their work are likely to be more productive as well as having higher wellbeing.

It has been said 'tall poppy syndrome' is widespread in Australia, yet modern economies rely on creativity and innovation in the workplace which require risk taking and originality.

Embedding PERMA principles into public policy and public life could help shift the cultural outlook to a more positive perspective. Building PERMA principles into the public and cultural life may help foster vibrancy, innovation and creativity.



RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY

At this point in time there is no clear way to measure the wellbeing of children aged under five years.

We can measure maternal wellbeing as a proxy for the wellbeing of very young children, or ask parents and early learning teachers to rate the wellbeing of children in their care, but there is no stand-alone self-report measure of the wellbeing of young children.

We know that, developmentally, the first years of life are crucial.

This is an area that requires further development: it is a research opportunity for South Australia.

Recommendations

1 LEAD: Position South Australia as the State of Wellbeing

- 1.1 Establish South Australia as the first political unit in the world to deliberately measure and build the wellbeing of all citizens to reduce mental illness, increase resilience and enable every citizen to flourish.
- 1.2 Use the PERMA dashboard of wellbeing as the central framework to build wellbeing in all settings.
- 1.3 Expand the vocabulary and focus of mental health and educational professionals, and the community broadly, to include wellbeing and mental health (positive assets) as well as mental illness (deficits).
- 1.4 Start with the immunisation of young people against mental ill-health by working with all schools to measure and build wellbeing.
- 1.5 Build support for the vision of Adelaide as the World Capital of Wellbeing.
- 1.6 Establish a Wellbeing Institute to envision and execute the Australasian wellbeing agenda.
- 1.7 Establish a World Wellbeing Council to envision and execute the international agenda of improving global wellbeing by systematic introduction of positive psychology science, using the Adelaide experience as a prototype.





Chapter 4

The Wellbeing Strategy: Measure Wellbeing

Key concepts in this chapter

- What governments care about (economics versus wellbeing)
- International leadership
- The South Australian context
- Why measurement matters

What governments care about (economics versus wellbeing)

A 'progress paradox' exists in many modern societies. While over the last 50 years gross domestic product (GDP) has increased in developed countries, people are not more 'satisfied' with life, and anxiety and depression continue to rise. As governments struggle to stabilise their countries' economic status, four years post-global economic crisis,⁷⁵ citizens worldwide are aspiring to live in:

... [societies] that allow them to thrive and prosper...[are] more inclusive ... [and they are] concerned about the quality of their life: their jobs and working conditions, their health and skills, the time they devote to their families and friends, their ties with other people in their community, their capacity to act as informed citizens, the quality and security of the environment where they live. [People] are concerned about the sustainability of natural resources, and have expectations for better governance and more responsive institutions.⁷⁶

This aspiration calls for recognition that economic growth is a by-product of flourishing societies, communities and individuals.⁷⁷ GDP should not be considered a sufficient measure of societal progress, and governments are being challenged to consider how they can understand and enhance the lives of their citizens.⁷⁸ Governments (for example, Australia, Bhutan, United Kingdom, Ecuador) and organisations (such as the OECD) have begun to define and measure progress and related constructs (sustainability, wellbeing and quality of life).⁷⁹

75 OECD 2012

76 OECD 2012

77 Keyes & Lopez 2002

78 Hall, J. et al 2010

79 Hall, J. et al 2010

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) was the first national statistics branch to develop national progress measures, and the Australian National Development Index aims to produce an annual national composite of progress.

Wellbeing is a construct with particular currency in these discussions; it is multidimensional and context-specific, spanning concepts as broad as liveability, productivity, social sustainability, community capacity, social cohesion and the prevention of mental illness. It has many applications and is a key component of the World Health Organization's (WHO) conceptualisation of mental health as 'a state of wellbeing in which every individual realizes [their] own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to [their] community.'⁸⁰

International leadership

As we move beyond the Millennium Development Goals (post-2015), there is an opportunity to reset the global agenda. With the desire to move focus from the 'bottom-line of higher economic production',⁸¹ it is imperative that people identify what is most important to facilitate measurement and inform responsive policies.⁸²

The United Nations (UN) captures this opportunity in *Resolution 65/309. Happiness: towards a holistic approach to development* (adopted August 2011). Resolution 65/309 makes seminal statements, including that:

- the pursuit of happiness is a fundamental and universal human goal and aspiration
- GDP was not designed to, and does not adequately, reflect the happiness and wellbeing of people
- there is a need for a more inclusive, equitable and balanced approach to economic growth that promotes sustainable development, poverty eradication, happiness and the wellbeing of all peoples.

Through *Resolution 65/309*, member states are invited to identify 'measures that better capture the importance of the pursuit of happiness and wellbeing'⁸³ to guide public policy. This is strengthened by OECD expressing the urgent need 'to measure what matters the most to people and to use this information to make more informed policy decisions, to develop appropriate implementation mechanisms and to better monitor outcomes.'⁸⁴

The Himalayan country of Bhutan (population: 800,000) is, arguably, the world-leader in thinking that moves emphasis from GDP to other metrics of value. Bhutan put the politics of happiness on the UN's agenda, leading to Resolution 65/309. Subsequently, the UN charged Bhutan with forwarding the 'Wellbeing and Happiness—A New Development Paradigm' resolution through the formation of an International Expert Working Group and Steering Committee. This work is in its early stages.

Those of you who follow British politics may know that Prime Minister David Cameron campaigned on the notion that wellbeing should be an aim of government and that he would measure wellbeing across the UK. Most importantly, he decided to hold himself accountable for public policy by changes in wellbeing, as well as changes in GDP.

80 WHO 2011

81 OECD 2012

82 OECD 2012

83 UN 2011

84 OECD 2012

Every three months the statistical group in Britain makes 200,000 randomized phone calls and they ask subjective wellbeing and PERMA questions. The answers provide a dashboard of indicators. Overall wellbeing can be measured through this PERMA dashboard.

What one wants more of is not just life satisfaction but positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment.



South Australian context

South Australia's progress is guided by a number of strategic visions, including South Australia's Strategic Plan and the Seven Strategic Priorities for Government. Indeed, the Strategic Plan clearly articulates a commitment to developing measures of wellbeing:

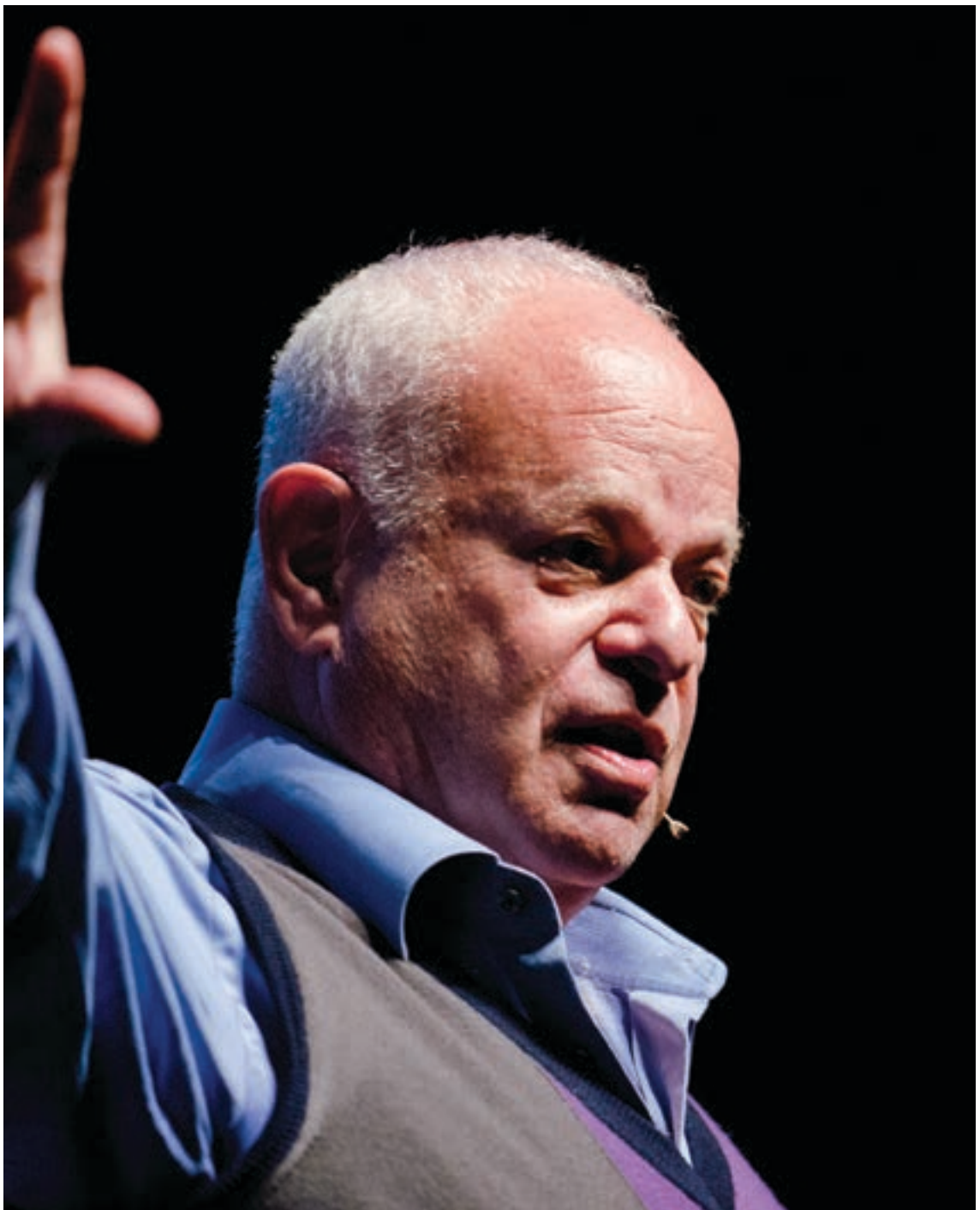
While ... gross state product give[s] a sense of our economic health, there are no such measures that adequately indicate social and environmental health; let alone an inclusive snapshot of these three critical components...[it is] recommended that South Australia establish a Wellbeing Index to track ... progress on attaining wellbeing.⁸⁵

Safe Communities and Healthy Neighbourhoods, one of the Seven Strategic Priorities for South Australia, has public health planning as a cornerstone, a process to be informed by measurement of community wellbeing (see www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/publichealthact)

85 Government of South Australia 2013

The State Government has also nominated *Creating a Vibrant City* as one of the Seven Strategic Priorities. Using PERMA principles both in city planning and in conceptualising what citizens get when they interact with their city could create authentic and sustainable vibrancy. Adelaide should be a place where people find positive emotion through parks and public spaces; engagement in cultural institutions and events; better relationships through social interactions; and meaning and accomplishment through work, education and city life.

In conjunction with these strong statements, the SA Government, universities and non-government groups recently invested in furthering an understanding of how to increase the wellbeing of South Australians through my residency with Adelaide Thinkers in Residence.



Why measurement matters

Measurement allows action to be evaluated and is politically and philosophically powerful because '(as) a society we care about what we measure, we use what we measure and what we measure drives policies and [our] direction'.⁸⁶ Population-level measurement of wellbeing is an essential starting point for any government considering enhancing the wellbeing of its constituents.

In addition, measurement provides facts about the society which can become the basis for communication, dialogue and engagement with citizens. It can give rise to a discussion about values and can lead quickly to policy changes and the redirection of government investment.

'A healthy political process needs a citizenry with access to accurate information about policies'; what if 'an agreed fact-based discussion [took place] on whether and how a nation was progressing, and what needed to change?'⁸⁷

In summary, measurement can provide the basis for this fact based discussion. It:

- provides a statement of values
- informs evaluated intervention
- captures population interest
- can provide leverage for policy changes
- is a basis for engaging in dialogue and action
- shifts focus from inputs and outputs, to outcomes and results.

'What you measure affects what you do. If you don't measure the right thing, you don't do the right thing.' Nobel prize-winning economist, Joseph Stiglitz⁸⁸

By naming wellbeing as valued enough to be measured, people, communities, teachers and managers will find ways to increase their wellbeing and that of their community members, children, spouses, clients and staff.

This is an 'invisible hand' argument (this term comes from Adam Smith's notion of the invisible hand as it relates to free market economics), which suggests that when we start monitoring and measuring and setting targets for something, we find ways to achieve those targets.

86 Braun 2009

87 Hall, J. et al 2010

88 Forgeard et al. 2011

We measure what we value.
We value what we measure.



We take action to reach the target.
We find ways to achieve targets.

Figure 7 The Invisible Hand

In summary:

- There is growing dissatisfaction with the way that progress and standards of living are measured by governments worldwide, through a focus on *Gross Domestic Product*.
- It is now widely recognised that the quantity of goods and services produced and exported by a country does not reflect the subjective wellbeing of its citizens. Most societies have reasonable measures of mental ill health such as anxiety, depression and suicide, but no established ways to measure wellbeing.
- We need to combine subjective and objective indicators of wellbeing in order to tell how we are going.
- It is true to say that the measurement of wellbeing is advancing all over the world, with work being done by the United Nations, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the European Union, major universities and key economists.

Measurement of the wellbeing of South Australia's citizens is foundational to building the *State of Wellbeing*.

Recommendations

2 MEASURE: Measure the wellbeing of all South Australians.

There are three principles that are always relevant when referring to measurement recommendations in the context of this report:

Always use measures that can be mapped to PERMA.

Always use evidence-based measures.

Always link measurement instruments to interventions

- 2.1 Establish a cross-sector Wellbeing Measurement Committee to make recommendations about how and when to measure wellbeing across different cohorts in the state. The committee will need to:
 - examine measures that can be mapped to PERMA
 - identify different measurement requirements for different cohorts
 - identify and assess measures already in use or under development in South Australia
 - identify and assess measures already in use or under development around the world
 - examine evidence-base, reliability and validity of identified measures
 - examine any South Australian contextual considerations for identified measures
 - determine the best mechanism for measuring the wellbeing of all young people in South Australian schools
 - determine the best mechanism for measuring the wellbeing of large numbers of South Australian adults in various settings, including those in the workplace, long-term unemployed, retirees and unpaid carers
 - recommend how and when preferred measures should be introduced
 - identify how the preferred measures link to agreed interventions (see Recommendation 3.2)
- 2.2 Measure the wellbeing of all young people in South Australian schools, based on the findings and recommendations of the Wellbeing Measurement Committee.
- 2.3 Measure the wellbeing of large numbers of South Australian adults in various settings, including those in the workplace, long-term unemployed, retirees and unpaid carers.
- 2.4 Ensure that the state-wide wellbeing data can be made available for research use.



Chapter 5

The Wellbeing Strategy: Teach, Build and Embed Wellbeing

Key concepts in this chapter:

- What you teach is what you get
- Immunisation against mental illness
- Teach the Wellbeing
- Embedding positive psychology in tertiary education
- Engaging trainers and using training programs
- Public domain resources
- Wellbeing interventions – a coordinated decision between sectors
- Back to the invisible hand: measurement as intervention

What you teach is what you get

We now arrive at this key question: we can measure wellbeing through the PERMA framework? Can it be built using positive psychology interventions? What evidence is there to support this?

First question: What do you most want for your children?

Now I suspect that one of the first things to spring to mind was *happiness*. Other responses may include fulfilment, health, civilisation, love....

Second question: What do schools teach?

What came to mind was probably something like literacy, numeracy, discipline, knowledge, work skills.

I invite you to imagine the notion of *positive education* in which we can both apply traditional education—numeracy, literacy, knowledge, theory—and teach our children wellbeing, happiness, health, fulfilment. When these two things are taught at the same time and embedded in each other they are synergistic, not antagonistic.

I have come to believe that the content of what we teach—spelling, geometry, fractions—is a medium for something else, and that what we are really trying to teach first is *social navigation*: how to get an adult to like you, how to get peers to like you.

Secondly, we are trying to teach rhetoric: how to tell a good story, how to write a good story, how to make a compelling argument, how to ask the right questions, how to listen.

And finally, and most importantly, I believe that in our schools we are trying to teach good character.

David Levin is the Head of the KIPP Schools. KIPP stands for the ‘Knowledge Is Power Program’ and these schools are a national network (141 schools) of free, open-enrolment, college-preparatory public charter schools with a track record of preparing students in underserved communities for success in college and in life.

David Nevin shares my view and articulates it as such:

By teaching PERMA in education—Positive Education—we are helping young people learn the skills that help them belong to and participate in the world. The other curriculum and skills they learn at school develop on top of that.⁸⁹



89 Tough 2011

Immunise against mental ill-health

As articulated in Chapter 3, I have a vision, inspired by my mentor Jonas Salk, and that is to immunise young people against mental ill-health. I believe that the realisation of this vision could be achieved through the teaching of PERMA and other skills through the primary and secondary school systems of South Australia and beyond.

Mainstream psychology, which has been about the relief of misery and the relief of mental suffering—as expressed earlier this is about taking people from minus-8 to minus-2 (see Figure 1).

In line with a positive psychological view, we try in our own lives and with our children to go from plus-3 to plus-6. We want our children to be high enough on the scale of mental wellbeing that, if they have a blow to their mental health or a challenging life circumstance, they will still cope well and not fall into the pit of mental illness, depression or anxiety, from which it is hard to remerge.

Nothing in this idea, about immunisation against mental illness, is to suggest that we abandon our effort to reduce misery and support people with serious mental illness. This work must continue.

But our children can be immunised against mental illness—they can have in their lives:

- more positive emotion than they have now
- more engagement at school, better relations
- more meaning in life
- more accomplishment and mastery
- more PERMA!

This is a realistic goal for all children and for the whole society because each of the PERMA dimensions is buildable.

In South Australia, a good beginning to enhancing population wellbeing would be to actively begin to teach signature strengths (like kindness and gratitude) and PERMA enhancing skills to the children of South Australia, in as many schools as possible.

Teach wellbeing

I believe that the primary and secondary teachers of South Australia are the catalysts and drivers for the enhanced wellbeing of South Australia's young people.

This view is reinforced by Waters (2011) noting the important role of classroom teachers in the delivery of positive psychology interventions:

...most of the Positive Psychology Interventions were implemented by the teachers. This may have enhanced the success of the programs, given that teachers already have an ongoing relationship with the students and can also keep reinforcing the lessons after the curriculum has been completed. Another design feature that shows promise is the infusion of teaching positive psychology skills (e.g., character strengths and meditation) into the already established school subjects such as arts, language, health development and religion. However, the programs that were housed in pastoral care (e.g. Green et al., 2007; Nidich et al., 2011) also proved to have a significant effect on student wellbeing.⁹⁰

90 Waters 2011



To immunise its young people at the population level, South Australia will need to **rapidly** develop a workforce capable of teaching wellbeing: managing measurement, teaching positive psychology interventions and managing the evaluation of the interventions.

Below are several ways that this could be commenced.

Embedding positive psychology into tertiary education

For seven years now, we have been delivering the Masters of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) at the University of Pennsylvania. This is very specialised, very high level training. We select 35 students out of about 200 applicants from around the world every year, and they come once a month to the University of Pennsylvania as Masters students. There are always more applications, than students we can take. The program brings together the leading global researchers and teachers in positive psychology.

Building on the success of our program at the University of Pennsylvania, I have recommended to the universities of South Australia that they launch a local Masters in Applied Positive Psychology to support the dissemination of positive psychology principles in the state.

With the launch of postgraduate studies in Applied Positive Psychology, five years from now there could be several hundred Australians with advanced knowledge about positive psychology, who are able to disseminate positive psychology principles in various settings, such as in businesses and schools.

Engaging trainers and using training programs

Several types of training are offered around the world. South Australia could engage lead trainers to train the first trainers for schools.

INTERACTIVE TRAINING DEVICES: AN OPPORTUNITY IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA?

Interestingly, the United States Army has spent millions of dollars now to develop interactive training devices for positive psychology and resilience. They undertook the 8-day Master Resilience Training (a program developed by the University of Pennsylvania) and put many of the parts into interactive 15-minute video clips, so that every soldier can access the training anytime, anywhere. If a soldier does not do very well on 'family fitness', they can take the interactive Active Constructive Module to develop better skills in relationships. This resource is owned by the army but the idea is highly replicable. South Australia may choose to produce interactive wellbeing modules suitable for Australasia, as it progresses on the path of scalable delivery of wellbeing interventions.

The Penn Resiliency Program is a thorough, well-researched curriculum, with clear outcomes. There are at least 21 replications of it around the world. Although there are very few qualified trainers in Australasia, South Australia could engage lead trainers from the United States of America or the United Kingdom to come to Australia in the first instance.

More than 240 South Australians have undertaken this training over the course of my residency in South Australia and it has provided a solid introduction to positive psychology concepts, especially in the building of resilience and mental toughness.

My colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania are working with the US Army and have based the Master Resilience Training on the Penn Resiliency Program concepts. The Penn Resiliency Program team is in great demand globally and are likely to be available in Adelaide again. Accessing this training to build knowledge is a possibility for South Australia—although this will not be the long-term answer to large-scale training needs, due to cost and the high demand globally.

A number of programs already exist or are being developed in Australia and this work is promising. Evidence of the efficacy of some of this work is not clear yet but many groups are undertaking evaluation. These may also be viable training options.

Public domain resources

There are also manuals, books and YouTube clips on positive psychology that are available in the public domain.

This includes my website: www.authentic happiness.com, where measurement options and positive psychology interventions can be accessed.

In short, there are many resources available that can be used to build and embed wellbeing, from the 'Rolls Royce' version to the 'Volkswagen' variety.

Wellbeing interventions—a coordinated decision between sectors

In meeting with the leaders of the public schools, the independent schools and the Catholic schools of South Australia, it has been agreed that the large systems of education in the state should together choose a suite of wellbeing interventions appropriate to South Australia. A short research project can quickly ascertain global best-practice and build upon the research of other groups such as the London School of Economics, the Cambridge University Wellbeing Institute, or the approach taken by the United Kingdom Resilience Program. Similarly, a piece of work needs to be done to establish which entity will deliver and manage cost-effective measurement in a way which centralises data for the state.

By doing this in concert, a set of wellbeing intervention standards can be developed and maintained in South Australia. Individual principals and teachers will be spared the effort of finding out how to do this on a case-by-case basis and, most importantly, systematic evaluations can be conducted to determine the efficacy of the work. This will allow South Australia to contribute new knowledge about how to deliver scale interventions to build wellbeing through schools, at the scale of a state, which will be a world first.

Back to the invisible hand: measurement as intervention

Finally there's the invisible hand argument. This premise is that when we measure PERMA, as part of what being a good teacher or a good manager means, then we will raise PERMA. If people are asked to raise PERMA as part of their job it will move managers and teachers to create local interventions, which will raise PERMA.

A good analogy for the invisible hand argument is a marriage. If the goal of a husband or wife is to increase the PERMA of their spouse, they will think of all kinds of specific ways to raise their spouse's positive emotion, meaning and sense of accomplishment. What is done will be particular to their partner—the interventions will be home grown.

One of the great attributes of positive psychology is that it is really free. It just says: 'change your goals to PERMA and these now become well defined goals for living, for marriage, for schools. So now it's your job to home grow them.'

Recommendations

3 Teach, build and embed wellbeing science in South Australia.

There are three principles that are always relevant when referring to intervention recommendations in the context of this report:

Always use interventions that relate to PERMA.

Always use evidence-based interventions.

Always link interventions to measurement.

- 3.1 Continue to build broad support for the goal of immunising all South Australian children against mental illness, and produce a clear strategy to achieve this goal by 2016.
- 3.2 Establish a cross-sector Wellbeing Interventions Committee to make recommendations about a suite of interventions for the teaching of wellbeing. These interventions will need to consider:
 - each of the five elements of PERMA
 - programs and curricula for various year levels of school students
 - programs for teachers, nurses, mental health workers and a broad range of other professions.
- 3.3 Develop a positive psychology training plan to train a cohort of teachers by the end of 2014 in positive psychology delivery methods.
- 3.4 Invest in a qualified trainer to live and work in Adelaide in 2014–15 to offer cost effective, 'Train the Trainer' positive psychology training in South Australia. This position will be managed through the proposed Wellbeing Institute.
- 3.5 Promote participation in the Positive Education Schools Association.
- 3.6 Continue to support the shared learning of key schools and school-based hubs already working with the residency.
- 3.7 Support the evolution of the concept of a school as an activating hub of wellbeing, as demonstrated by the work of Mt Barker High School in the Adelaide Hills.
- 3.8 Invite other distributed networks of South Australians, such as football clubs, banks, local government, community houses, libraries and cultural institutions to become activating hubs of wellbeing, modelled on Mt Barker High School.
- 3.9 Establish a Masters of Applied Positive Psychology at a South Australian University, ensuring the highest quality of research and teaching to provide a mechanism for professional training and research.
- 3.10 Establish undergraduate units of Positive Psychology and Graduate Diploma qualifications for use by students in many different fields: education, social work, aged care, allied health and psychology.





Chapter 6 Conclusion

The ideas outlined here are bold but enticing: set out to support South Australia to flourish using Positive Psychology science.

The steps are as follows:

- Use the latest wellbeing science, called Positive Psychology, to build wellbeing at scale.
- Start with the young people – go through the school systems and use teachers as trainers.
- Build the impulse in schools and link to surrounding community.
- Make each school an *Activating Hub of Community Wellbeing* by building wellbeing in schools and building active links to the community.
- Measure before you start anything to get a baseline level of wellbeing so that you will know if you are making progress.
- Use evidence-based and evaluated wellbeing interventions.
- Get agreement from all parties about the way you will measure and intervene; this may take some research.
- Evaluate over time to see if what you are doing is working.
- Involve other groups of citizens in similar strategies to measure and build wellbeing in cohorts such as employees, older South Australians, the unemployed, Indigenous Australians, new arrivals and new mothers.
- Measure, intervene and evaluate every time.
- Write up the learning and share it with the world!

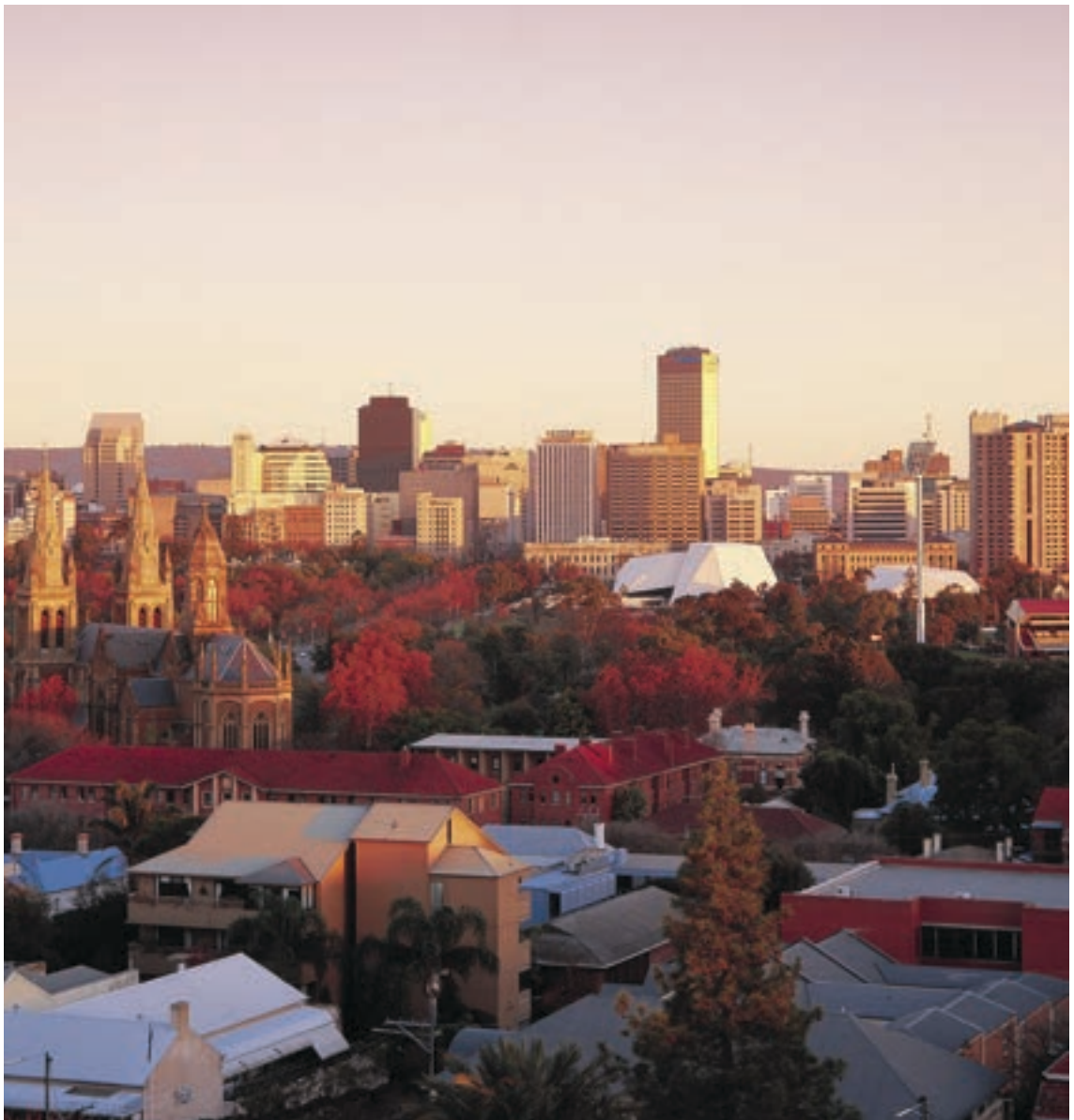
This may sound flippant and I do not underestimate the time and effort in bringing the many stakeholders along on this journey together over the next 10 years. But the highly effective collaborative work achieved by the partnership in one-and-a-half years, led by Adelaide Thinkers in Residence and using the Thinkers in Residence methodology, has demonstrated to me that South Australia has the capacity to achieve a broad-based change using the latest science of Positive Psychology.

South Australia is the right size to be a social laboratory; it has the predisposition for social innovation and the current economic and social circumstances are fortuitous. It has a proud record of social innovation and can lead the next work of social reform – using the latest science of positive psychology to build the psychological resiliency and mental toughness of its citizens.

Social reform and cultural evolution is an unstoppable impulse. It has many false starts but the trajectory is towards greater civilisation, more freedoms and better societies.

I suggest to you that, in the work of building individual and community wellbeing at the scale of the state, South Australia is leading the world. Not only will this contribute to a South Australian society better equipped to step into the 21st century future that is calling but it will pave the way for the rest of Australia and the world to follow. This is the way a positive future is built. This is the evolution of civilisation.

Martin Seligman 2013



Acknowledgements

I'm deeply grateful to the Premier of South Australia the Hon. Jay Weatherill for inviting me to South Australia, and to the people of South Australia for the hospitality shown to my family. We have had a wonderful time in South Australia. Our time in Adelaide was indeed a gift.

The greatest gift of this residency for me, however, is in the contribution South Australia is making towards the future of wellbeing worldwide. For many years I have been working to try to understand how we might help people live their best lives. Much of the work to date has focused on individuals. There is much we now know about what is effective one-on-one. A couple of years ago I waved the banner that 51% of the world's population should be flourishing by 2051 by positive psychology criteria. The opportunistic part of me was asking, 'what's the next step?' I believe that the next step is a political unit, a state. Then the Premier invited me to come to South Australia. I had no idea what would happen. It became clear within the first few days that the Premier had a platform for child wellbeing that fitted exactly into a Jonas Salk model. *Can we immunise our children against depression and ill-being?*

Being in South Australia has opened my eyes to the real possibility that a political unit, a state, could become the Florence of Wellbeing for the world, the capital of wellbeing in the world. *A State of Wellbeing* such as this could spur the global movement toward 51% of the world's population flourishing. South Australia is well placed to take on this challenge.

So, thank you all, all South Australians, for the hope and the hard work, *past, present and future*, needed to make this vision a reality.

Specific and sincere thanks must go to the support of all of the residency partners, particularly our lead partners: to the Department for Education and Child Development (Chief Executive Keith Bartley, David Rathman, Marg Sandow, David Engelhardt) and SA Health (Chief Executive David Swan, Pauline McEntee, Mark Diamond and Danny Broderick) for demonstrating what cross-sector collaboration can look like and to St Peter's College, Adelaide (Simon Murray and Dr Mathew White) - our inspiring and gracious hosts.

Many others have played significant roles in the accomplishments of the Residency to date, including the staff of Mt Barker High School (Warren Symonds, David Garrett and Jenni Cook), the Hon. Lea Stevens from Northern Connections, Raymond Spencer Chair of the Economic Development Board, The University of Adelaide (Professor Deborah Turnbull, Professor John Dunn and Dr Anthony Venning) and Associate Professor Lea Waters from the University of Melbourne. I thank them.

Some of my team from the University of Pennsylvania have been here and contributed much by way of expertise and support. Thank you, Amy Walker, Dr Peggy Kern and Robert Rebele.

The Residency Catalysts are another excellent component of the Thinker in Residence model. Sue Eddowes from the Department of Education and Child Development and Dr Rachel Earl from Families SA, SA Health and the University of Adelaide were wonderful in their roles. I thank Catherine Jamieson for her work on the *Prospecting the Future* retreat and the private sector investors who supported it.

A deep expression of gratitude to the Adelaide Thinkers in Residence team for the passion, determination and many hours they gave to this project. In particular, I thank Gabrielle Kelly for her never-flagging vision and leadership, Anne Rhodes, project lead of a great hard-working and dedicated team - Deanna Howland, Margot McInnes, Todd Clappis, Mike Carroll, Kerryl Murray McGlennon, Amy Muscara, Jennifer Tirrell, Kieron Howland and Joanna Hughes. I would also like to acknowledge the late Ian McGlennon for his contribution to the development of the residency.

Finally, deepest thanks to Mandy, Carly and Jenny for making Adelaide feel like home.



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