

What is Well-being?

by Tanya Kennard-Campbell

Well-being has been considered in different ways. It has also been attributed to many things, including the absence of illness, poverty, deprivation, discrimination and stress, and described as a feeling of being in control, content, happy or calm.

We are all able to define what Well-being means to us, and at times in our lives we know when we are experiencing a sense of well-being, this knowing is unique to us as individuals.

However, Well-being is not a static experience, it comes and goes. It is experienced to different degrees and levels and is influenced and affected by different things and to different degrees, depending on each individual. The beauty of Well-being is that no one is exempt from the experience; it holds no stigma and does not discriminate. It is our personalised non-discriminatory immunity from mental ill-health, as suggested in this statement by Jack Pransky, an author on Well-being and prevention.

“Well-being is more than simply the opposite of mental illness; in fact, it is the antidote. A person suffering from mental illness or emotional distress may become disconnected from his/her Well-being, but the fact remains that Well-being can never be lost or damaged. Well-being is an inborn and inalienable human resource.” (2006)

If we truly believed this, that we all have Well-being inside us as an inbuilt resource, the impact would be tremendous on the hope and control we feel for our lives. Well-being has become of great interest to policy makers, commissioners and those who deliver services and support that affect the Well-being of our communities. Perhaps this is because of the fact that Well-being

is everybody's business. This chapter will offer different perspectives on what Well-being is, what affects it and the impact this has on our lives. This section will offer a new way of looking at Well-being as a means of stimulating further thought on this important issue.

The Whole Life Approach advocates the principles underpinning Well-being, and the importance of making Well-being the central focus when considering what helps in recovery from mental distress and in achieving the kind of lives we want. The ethos of the Whole Life Approach is to always consider what is meaningful and effective for each individual and, as reflected within this workbook, personal stories of 'what helps' offer us valuable insights into what we can learn from these accounts. These personal accounts indicate that simple pursuits such as walking the dog, dancing, singing, meditating or being in nature, can bring about a sense of Well-being.

Just as recovery happens in an instant or a moment, (see 'Emperor's new clothes' section in the Recovery chapter), Well-being is experienced in the moment, in the instant. Well-being is experienced when all the memories and experiences of the past do not affect or influence you, and, you are not craving for something that is yet to come. You are experiencing fully the moment you are in and enjoying it. Your mind and body are completely connected in synchronicity bringing with it a truly beautiful feeling.

Being human and fallible, we want to recreate this exquisite feeling over and over again. So our intellectual minds draw on the memory of this experience in order to recreate the feelings associated with it.

This, of course, is common

knowledge, common sense even, and is reflected in the stories within this chapter. We know instinctively (and by drawing on experience) what will make us feel good, soothe us or connect us to our sense of Well-being, no matter who we are. These things can recreate this feeling of being connected, alive, happy even. But the difficulty or frustration comes when we realise that replicating the behaviour not work. We also know that our ability to run, sing, dance, meditate, drink alcohol or walk the dog, etc. can be taken away from us at any moment. This thought can quickly dissipate any feeling of Well-being we had, when we consider what we have to lose.

Following 'feel good pursuits' therefore is only part of the answer. It is important instead to consider why these pursuits can make us feel good – the answer – because the pursuits get us into this state of Well-being by helping us to experience nothing but the moment we are in. When we access the feeling of well-being in this way, we offer infinite possibilities for sustaining well-being in the long-term. The Whole Life Approach urges an emphasis on your own wisdom and knowledge of why pursuits make you feel good, therefore reducing the need for dependence on the actual activities themselves.

From a Whole Life Approach, we suggest you think about what helps, what is sustainable, doesn't create over dependence on others' knowledge and instead favours an individual's own learning and wisdom.

By taking a deeper look at what Well-being is, what principles underpin it, and how we can all achieve this, we are able to realise the affect this can have on our lives and on those whom we support.