Happiness Clubs: Cultivating Positivity and Well-Being in Children and Young People

1. Introduction

Happiness Clubs provide a unique approach to fostering emotional well-being and positivity among children and young people. Developed as a response to the growing need for accessible mental health support in schools and communities, these clubs offer fun, interactive sessions based on the Ten Keys to Happier Living. By equipping children with practical happiness skills, Happiness Clubs aim to build resilience, enhance emotional intelligence, and create a brighter future for young generations.

2. Background

Happiness Clubs were born from the vision and dedication of Val Payne, an education consultant, and Peter Harper, a clinical psychologist and both members of the Action for Happiness national charity team. Both have championed the Ten Keys to Happier Living framework, working tirelessly to promote well-being in Schools since 2014, creating the ‘Keys to Happier Living Programme and Toolkit’.

Peter was among the Action for Happiness volunteers who founded the Northamptonshire Hub and until recently he served as an Action for Happiness Northamptonshire Hub executive member and was instrumental in local activities, including the development of the Community of Practice. Val is also an active member of the Community of Practice run by the Northamptonshire Hub.

To address the challenges schools faced in integrating the Ten Keys program into an already packed curriculum, Val and Peter collaborated with Suzy Greaves, editor of Psychologies magazine, to launch Happiness Clubs in 2015.

Over the past three years, Peter and Val have worked closely with partners such as Charlotte Nobbs, Sally Norman, and others to ensure that Happiness Clubs reached schools and communities. Northamptonshire Hub executives, champions and volunteers have played an important role in raising awareness locally and creating opportunities for children to benefit from this transformative program.

3. The Problem

Many children struggle with a negativity bias, finding it difficult to recognize and appreciate the positive aspects of life. This challenge hinders their ability to develop resilience and emotional well-being. Without targeted interventions, these children face obstacles in achieving their full potential, both academically and personally.

4. Goals and Objectives

Happiness Clubs aim to:

- Provide accessible, short sessions outside school hours.
- Offer engaging activities based on the evidence-based Ten Keys to Happier Living.
- Empower children to build happiness skills, fostering resilience and emotional intelligence in a supportive environment.

5. Approach and Activities

Happiness Clubs are structured around fun, interactive sessions that encourage children to become "Happiness Detectives." Each session explores one or more of the Ten Keys to Happier Living, which include Giving, Relating, Exercising, Awareness, Trying Out, Direction, Resilience, Emotions, Acceptance, and Meaning. Activities range from mindfulness and positivity exercises to crafts, outdoor exploration, and kindness projects.

A key resource is the 50 Ways to Be Happy Book, which provides step-by-step guides and activity ideas. These activities are designed to be enjoyable, repeatable, and adaptable for children of all ages. For younger participants, parents and carers often engage alongside their children, while older children can enjoy the program independently.

6. Key Partnerships

The success of Happiness Clubs is rooted in strong collaborations, including:

- Kingsthorpe Grove Primary School, where a nursery manager and mental health lead implemented the first school-based Happiness Club.
- Peterborough Diocese, which launched a national project bringing Happiness Clubs to church schools.
- Hope From Every Home and Hope Together UK, whose three-year project has helped scale Happiness Clubs and provide critical resources.
- West Northamptonshire Council Healthy Schools Programme, which has supported awareness and engagement with schools across the county.

These partnerships have expanded the reach and impact of Happiness Clubs, ensuring they remain sustainable and adaptable.

7. Impact

The response to Happiness Clubs has been overwhelmingly positive:

- Children have reported increased optimism, confidence, and the ability to "find what's good" in their daily lives.
- Teachers, parents, and school governors have observed significant improvements in children's emotional resilience and behavior.

Following an event organized by the Healthy Schools Team, numerous schools expressed interest in starting their own Happiness Clubs, resulting in growing adoption across the county.

The success of these clubs will be showcased further during Children's Mental Health Week 2025. Countywide library events will feature resources like the 50 Ways to Be Happy book and the Ten Keys to Happier Living, promoting well-being for children and young people.

8. Challenges

The journey to establishing Happiness Clubs has not been without its hurdles. One major challenge has been balancing the secular nature of Action for Happiness with the faith-based initiatives of partners such as the Peterborough Diocese. By focusing on shared goals and dividing responsibilities—Action for Happiness on training and resources, and the Diocese on supporting local schools—these challenges have been addressed.

Overcoming challenges such as balancing secular and faith-based approaches has been possible through collaboration. Action for Happiness has focused on training and resources, while partners like the Peterborough Diocese and Hope Together UK have supported implementation in church schools.

Raising awareness among public health practitioners has also been a priority. With their growing support, including invitations to events like the Healthy Schools Team meeting, the program has successfully expanded its reach and continues to inspire new clubs across the region.

9. Future Plans

The vision for Happiness Clubs is ambitious: to establish them in every school and community organization that supports children. Scaling up training and resources, along with fostering more partnerships, will be key to achieving this goal. With continued support, Happiness Clubs can become a cornerstone of well-being education for future generations.

10. Conclusion

Happiness Clubs offer a transformative approach to supporting children and young people. By providing practical, enjoyable tools to enhance happiness and resilience, these clubs create a foundation for emotional well-being and long-term success. The support of stakeholders and funders is vital to ensuring the continued growth and impact of this initiative.

11. Call to Action

We invite stakeholders and funders to join us in expanding Happiness Clubs. Whether through funding, advocacy, or collaboration, your support can help bring these life-changing programs to more children and young people. Together, we can make happiness a priority for future generations.