

# NZAPP Newsletter 3

March 2009

- **Welcome.**

- Welcome to the third newsletter for the New Zealand Association of Positive Psychology (NZAPP). The purpose of an occasional and brief newsletter such as this is to keep members informed about new developments in positive psychology both generally and around New Zealand.

- **NZ Research.**

- March 1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> marks the beginning of the Wellbeing Study ([www.wellbeingstudy.com](http://www.wellbeingstudy.com)). The Wellbeing Study is a broad study of wellbeing over time. Many studies of wellbeing are limited to a small number of questions, a specific angle, a small population, or a snapshot in time, and fail to control for the positive and negative events that people experience. This study aims to learn more about the positive aspects of human nature and how these change over time. The study has nine assessment points three months apart, and ends in March 2011. Each participant completes five consecutive identical assessments. For example, if a participant starts on March 1st 2009, he or she will also complete the study in June 2009, September 2009, December 2009, and March 2010. The study takes about 25 minutes. Participants are provided with a report of their scores after their fifth assessment, are entered into draws for Amazon.com vouchers, and offered the opportunity to join free courses. This study is open to the general population to participate in, so type in [www.wellbeingstudy.com](http://www.wellbeingstudy.com) into your web browser in order to participate! (you can also forward this to partners, family, friends & colleagues...).

- **Areas of Positive Psychology.**

What is Psychological Resilience? – by Reuben Rusk.

- Resilience is the ability to cope well with hard circumstances, skillfully manage everyday adversity, and bounce back from major emotional trauma. Resilience also gives people confidence to risk new endeavours and experiences. Research shows that resilience is vital to success, productivity, health, education, relationships, character development, and overall subjective wellbeing. The thinking strategies of non-resilient people pull them down into negative emotions and destructive behaviours, which only reinforce their thinking and perpetuate the downwards spiral. This downwards tendency causes negative events to emotionally snowball, and quickly erodes feelings of happiness. Non-resilient people thus learn to see themselves as helpless victims of circumstance, and are more likely to develop anxiety, depression and risk aversion. In contrast, a well-functioning system of thinking strategies will tend to perpetuate an upwards spiral, and this upward tendency provides resilience and the ability to recover from even major setbacks. Research by Reivich and Shatté (2003) has highlighted seven key cognitive abilities of resilient people. 1) They self-regulate their emotions. 2) They control their behavioural impulses. 3) They are highly empathic. 4) They interpret circumstances in constructive and optimistic ways. 5) They believe they will deal effectively with their circumstances – like they have done in the past. 6) They accurately analyze the causes of events and emotions, and predict the effects of their own behaviour. 7) They see failure as a necessary part of success, they risk potential failure to broaden and build their life. Without intervention, non-resilient cognitive strategies are usually self-reinforcing. For this reason, it is very important to foster resilience in children. Yet research has shown that resilience can also be significantly increased in later life by developing the above abilities. The most effective methods to increase resilience address at the same time all three facets of resilience: emotion, behaviour, and cognition.
- Recommended books on resilience:
  - Benard, B. (2004). *Resiliency: What we have learned*. San Francisco: WestEd. (Excellent synthesis of academic research.)
  - Reivich, K., & Shatté, A. (2003). *The resilience factor: 7 keys to finding your inner strength and overcoming life's hurdles*. New York: Broadway Books. (Accessible introduction to resilience and how to develop it.)
  - Siebert, A. (2005). *The resiliency advantage: Master change, thrive under pressure, and bounce back from setbacks*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers. (Outstanding practical book by an expert in the field.)

- **Positive Psychology in NZ practice.**

Positive Education Conferences, Australia 2009 – Denise Quinlan.

- Positive Education Conferences were recently held at Geelong Grammar School near Melbourne, Australia. I was a trainer with the University of Pennsylvania team, led by Prof. Martin Seligman and Dr. Karen Reivich, which through January 2009 trained 280 teachers, school psychologists, counsellors and youth workers in positive psychology for schools. In addition, 100 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations senior officials attended a separate conference.

Content was focused on the Penn Resilience Program, shown to reduce the incidence of depression in children and which has had 17 international replications over 20 years, and the Strath Haven Positive Psychology Program which, in a three year study, increased students' life satisfaction, learning strengths, social skills and academic achievement (in non-honours students). As Dr. Reivich has pointed out, the Strath Haven results suggest that "increasing education's focus on positive development does NOT conflict with its focus on achievement".

The conference gave teachers an opportunity to apply the material to their own lives; identifying their strengths, practising resilience in challenging situations, and using positive emotions to enhance relationships. Teachers and schools can use positive psychology at three levels; they can live it, embed it in their organisation and administration, and teach it. During the conference, teachers identified practical steps to take their learning back to their schools. This highlighted the importance of networking and information sharing between teachers and schools.

Geelong Grammar School teachers who were trained in positive psychology in January 2008 have been applying their learning and developing applications for the classroom throughout 2008. Their practical experience in using positive psychology and a strengths approach in pastoral care, discipline policy and on the sports field illustrated what is possible when a school adopts this approach. Although Australia is ahead not only of New Zealand in embracing positive psychology in education, (Martin Seligman says it leads the USA and UK right now), there is interest in New Zealand which we hope will grow quickly.

- **Book Review.**

- Fredrickson, B. L. (2009). *Positivity: Groundbreaking research reveals how to embrace the hidden strength of positive emotions, overcome negativity, and thrive*. New York: Crown Publishers. - reviewed by Aaron Jarden. (Available at: [www.positivepsychology.org.nz](http://www.positivepsychology.org.nz) resources tab, reviews).

- **Events.**

- The big event on the positive psychology stage this year will be the 'First World Congress on Positive Psychology'. This will be held in Philadelphia, USA, from June 18<sup>th</sup>-to-21<sup>st</sup>. More details about this conference can be found by clicking through to the International Positive Psychology Association website: <http://www.ippanetwork.org>
- 'Happiness & Its Causes: Tools & techniques for a Happier Life' is a little closer to home, hosted in Sydney 14th-15th May 2009: [www.happinessanditscauses.com.au](http://www.happinessanditscauses.com.au)
- It is hoped that there will be a positive psychology symposium or workshop at this year's New Psychological Society's Annual Conference in Palmerston North in August (27<sup>th</sup> -29<sup>th</sup>).

- **NZAPP Website.**

- The website now has a list of 'ten top books in positive psychology' ('Learn more' tab from home page), and an example Membership Certificate ('Resources' tab) - available on request.
- Also, the New Zealand Psychological Society has launched its new website with great new resources: [www.psychology.org.nz](http://www.psychology.org.nz)

- **NZAPP Membership Total.**

- 179 (up from 126, Dec 2008).

- **Lucky Member.**

- In the last newsletter, member Mei Williams was randomly drawn and won a free copy of *The Happiness Training Plan* ([www.happinesstrainingplan.com](http://www.happinesstrainingplan.com)). This time we had a free copy of 'An Introduction to Positive Psychology', 2005, by William Compton. Dr. Alex Mackenzie randomly chose a number between 1-173, which was 129, and after members were sorted by e-mail address, member 129 was Mandy Lacy – congratulations!

- **Support.**

- You can support your association by informing your networks, friends, and colleagues about the NZAPP, or by contributing to the next newsletter (i.e., book review, article review, general comment/question, write about an area of positive psychology).

- **Quote.**

- Emmy Van Deurzen, *Psychotherapy and the quest for happiness*, "Good living is more like good cooking: there are many different good foods and many different ways to cook, but not all are desirable and not all ingredients are good. There are certainly issues of taste and preference involved in what cuisine or what life to choose. And we may not want the same menu all our lives. But there are certainly culinary secrets. There is an art of cooking and it can be learnt and perfected. We cannot all be chefs or cordon bleu cooks, but we can all learn to prepare palatable food and make a meal more tasty and satisfying. Life, similarly can be served up with more zest and flavour when we know more about it" (p. 53, 2009).