



## The Work and Interests of Regional Researchers and Practitioners

As part of our commitment to research and showcasing local talent, we highlight the work of researchers, practitioners, as well as pioneering organizations in the field of positive psychology throughout the region. We applaud their work, wish them every success and hope you may connect with them for meaningful partnerships. We hope to see your name here in our next issue.

### Research

#### Exploring Happiness at a Middle East University

*Dr. Lani San Antonio and Dr. Jobila Sy, Zayed University, Abu Dhabi, UAE*

In the United Arab Emirates, there is a strong investment in the wellbeing of citizens. In 2016, the country appointed their first Minister of State for Happiness and Wellbeing. As a result, Zayed University (ZU) created a course entitled *The Quest for Happiness*. This course is part of the University College, in the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies (IDS) and is taken by students in their first year. In this course, students explore topics such as meaning, purpose, resilience, motivation, emotional intelligence, gratitude, mindfulness, altruism, empathy, and happiness around the world. Dr. Lani San Antonio and Dr. Jobila Sy, assistant professors and co-chairs of the IDS department, hope to understand the impact of happiness on first year students.

As higher education researchers, we are interested to see how positive psychology and the tools gained from this new course will ultimately help first year students in their transition to the university. Additionally, there is the added layer of being in the MENA region. Much of the research on positive psychology and in higher education focuses on students from Western institutions and cultures; consequently, there is a need to investigate the application of positive psychology in non-Western settings.

We plan to conduct a pre and post survey on happiness to see if taking this course has any impact on the student's level of happiness. A similar survey will be conducted for the faculty teaching this course to explore if their personal level of happiness increases. Additionally, the researchers hope to learn more about how cultural values and religion shape their life's purpose. Lastly, we are also interested in how students connect physical wellbeing to happiness. This is an area not always discussed in the current research regarding happiness and college students. We believe that due to the experiential nature of the course, students and faculty who spend a semester engaging in meaningful PERMA related reflective activities will be positively impacted, leading to higher levels of happiness and overall wellbeing.

Dr. Lani San Antonio and Dr. Jobila Sy are Assistant Professors in the University College at Zayed University, United Arab Emirates and co-chair the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies (IDS) on their respective campuses in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. For collaboration, contact



Dr. Lani San Antonio (Dubai); Email: [Lani.sanantonio@zu.ac.ae](mailto:Lani.sanantonio@zu.ac.ae) +971 4-40232249, or Dr. Jobila Sy (Abu Dhabi); Email: [Jobila.sy@zu.ac.ae](mailto:Jobila.sy@zu.ac.ae) +971 2-5993268.

Prior to the UAE, Dr. San Antonio spent 10 years in residential life at Vanderbilt University, Clemson University University of South Carolina and University of South Florida, USA. She earned her bachelor's degree in Business Administration and Communications from Salem College, master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of South Florida and her doctoral degree in Educational Leadership from Clemson University. Her research interests include first year student resiliency, intersectionality, multicultural competence and emerging research methods. Dr. San Antonio is curious to understand how positive psychology can impact first year college students and prepare them for success.

Dr. Jobila Sy served as an associate professor at the American University of Antigua (West Indies) and Director of Academic Advising at the College of William and Mary (USA) prior to relocating to the UAE. She earned her bachelor's degree in Psychology from the University of Virginia and her master's and doctorate degrees in Educational Policy, Planning and Leadership with a concentration in Higher Education Administration from the College of William and Mary. Her research interests include international higher education, learning strategies, academic achievement, student development theory and academic advising. Dr. Sy would like to explore how teaching a positive psychology course impacts faculty behaviors and perspectives on happiness and wellbeing.

## **Fear of Missing Out and Wellbeing**

*Chasity O'Connell (ABD), American University of Sharjah, UAE*

I am exploring FOMO, the “fear of missing out” and social media and its relationship with psychological wellbeing and distress. FOMO is the “pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent; FOMO is characterized by the desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing.” Although it can occur at any point in a person's life, FOMO has gained widespread attention for its connection with social media. It has been associated with increased depressive and anxiety symptoms, stress, reduced psychological wellbeing (including social relationships and engagement in life), as well as increased risk of psychopathology, “addictive technological behaviors”, and dangerous behaviors such as texting and driving. FOMO can also have a negative impact on social relationships, quality of sleep, ability to complete tasks, and stress levels. Consequently, I am researching the prevalence of FOMO in a university context and exploring if a mindfulness and values intervention will have an impact on rates of FOMO, psychological wellbeing, and psychological distress. Connected to the work on FOMO, social media, and psychological wellbeing, I am interested in the construct of autonomy in a multicultural context, as well as integrating positive psychological interventions into clinical practice, with a particular interest in exploring how the therapeutic practices of clinicians in the UAE are modified or adapted to meet the diverse needs of the UAE population. To reach me or collaborate, email me at: [canthony@aus.edu](mailto:canthony@aus.edu) and/or [chasity.oconnell@hricdubai.com](mailto:chasity.oconnell@hricdubai.com)



## The Arabic Character Strengths and Virtues Project

*Dr. Marei Salama-Younes, Helwan University, Egypt*

د. مرعى سلامه يونس استاذ علم النفس في قسم علم النفس والإجتماع والتقويم الرياضى في جامعة حلوان - جمهوريه مصر العربية. عمل أستاذاً متعاقدًا وأستاذًا باحثًا و باحثًا في الجامعات الفرنسية (ران2، بريتانيا العليا، باريس نانتر). حاصل على دكتوراه علوم وتقنيات التربية البدنية والرياضة بتقدير مشرف جداً من جامعة ران2 في فرنسا، و حاصل على دكتوراه علم النفس الإجتماعي بتقدير مشرف جداً من الجامعة نفسها. مؤهل كأستاذ مساعد للتدريس والبحث من وزارة التعليم العالى والبحث العلمى الفرنسية في مجالات ثلاثة: العلوم النفسية، والعلوم التربوية، وعلوم وتقنيات التربية البدنية والرياضة. الباحث لديه 35 بحثاً وفصلاً محكماً منشوراً في المجلات الدولية. بالإضافة الى 3 كتب و65 مشاركة في المؤتمرات العالمية حول علم النفس الإيجابي وعلم نفس النشاط البدني والقياس النفسي في الثقافة العربية و الفرنسية. تم إختياره عضواً في مجلس إدارة الجمعية الدولية لعلم النفس الإيجابي، ثم في اللجنة الإستشارية للجمعية الدولية لعلم النفس الإيجابي 2013-2021. تم، أيضاً، إختياره كعضو اللجنة العلمية لشبكة العلوم النفسية العربية 2017. تم إختياره للتقييم في المؤتمرات العالمية والأوروبية لعلم النفس الإيجابي، وفي عدد من الدوريات والمجلات الدولية المتخصصة بعدد من المجالات البحثية لعلم النفس والتربية البدنية والرياضة. هو عضو الجمعية الكندية، و النيوزيلاندية، و الفرنسية، و الدولية لعلم النفس الإيجابي، وعضو الشبكة الأوروبية [msalamayounes@hotmail.fr](mailto:msalamayounes@hotmail.fr) للتواصل. لعلم النفس الإيجابي

[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Marei\\_Salama-Younes](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Marei_Salama-Younes)

Dr. Marei Salama-Younes is a professor in the Psychology, Sociology and Evaluation Department at Helwan University, Egypt, as well as associate researcher in Paris Nanterre University & LP3C and ESPE, Rennes 2 University, France. He has two doctoral degrees from Rennes 2 University, France in Sports Sciences and Psychology, and Social Psychology, and qualified from the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research to be an assistant professor in French universities. He is a reviewer/member of the advisory board on many journals like Journal of Positive Psychology and Wellbeing, Journal of Psychological Sciences, and the Middle East Journal of Positive Psychology, and on the scientific committee of the European and World Congress in Positive Psychology. He was the first Arabic researcher elected to the Board of Directors and Council Advisory of the International Positive Psychology Association (IPPA). His area of interest is the process in which optimistic style/optimism predicts performance, wellbeing, vitality, resilience, satisfaction and health in the context of school and sports. He has published more than 35 peer-reviewed papers and chapters in the Journal of Positive Psychology, European Review of Applied Psychology, Canadian Journal of Behavioral Science, and Journal of Psychology in Africa. Since 2004, he has participated in more than 65 communications in the European and World Congress on Positive Psychology. He published three books in French and Arabic and edited the first Arabic reference to integrate 20 internationally recognized researchers from five continents. He now leads the Arabic “Character Strengths and Virtues” project in coordination with researchers from nine Arab nations. To know more, contact him at [msalamayounes@hotmail.fr](mailto:msalamayounes@hotmail.fr)



## **Virtues, Diversity and Inclusion in MENA**

*Dr. Meg Warren, Western Washington University, USA*

I study inclusiveness and positive relationships that are motivated by virtues (e.g., compassion, respect/civility) and am interested in how the virtues and values of individuals, leaders, and organizations/institutions enable or hinder inclusiveness. One of my current projects examines the role of values on inclusive behaviors toward individuals from different nationalities and social class/status in the UAE. In this project, I am collecting data from university students on their values/virtues, attitudes toward individuals from nationalities different from their own, and prosocial behaviors toward these individuals. I am looking for access to university students for data collection. I am also interested in collaborations on topics related to diversity, inclusiveness, and virtues/values in university settings, organizations, and institutions, including professional associations, places of worship, etc. For collaboration, email [meg.warren@wwu.edu](mailto:meg.warren@wwu.edu)

## **Positive Psychology Interventions & Culture; National Accounts of Wellbeing**

*Dr. Louise Lambert, Emirates Center for Happiness Research; Editor of the Middle East Journal of Positive Psychology, United Arab Emirates University, UAE*

I am working on several projects this year, namely an intervention project whereby I offer 12 positive psychology interventions (PPIs) to groups of students over a period of six weeks with a second post-test 3 months on. Studies show that PPIs work; instead, my broader question is what impact does taking greater responsibility for one's happiness have on levels of collectivism and individualism, locus of control, and somatization. This is relevant to the region as most positive psychology models are designed for a North American population. I am also working with Smart Dubai and colleagues in Canada to determine happiness profiles and whether we can predict with greater certainty the fit of PPIs to personality variables as an example. The trend in PPI work is to personalize interventions as we know they produce differential effects for the extraverted versus introverted, neurotic, needy, or other personality styles. Knowing to what extent the prescription of PPIs can be effective can generate cost-savings, resource efficiencies, and faster wellbeing gains. I recently finished a paper on the contributors to life satisfaction in the UAE using Gallup data from over 17 000 participants in collaboration with Dr. Tatiana Karabchuk of the UAEU's Sociology Department and Dr. Mohsen Joshanloo of South Korea. We will expand this work to distinguish between working migrants and nationals across the GCC nations. I am also heading the UAEU's first course in Happiness and Wellbeing this January in collaboration with the Emirates Center for Happiness Research and Sociology department. We will assess its impact on wellbeing over time.

Finally, I take this spot to promote *An Introduction to Positive Psychology for the Middle East* (Lambert & Pasha-Zaidi, Eds.; Springer, 2019), which focuses on themes in the region like positive education, positive Islamic identity, big data and wellbeing, positive health, positive clinical psychology, national wellbeing policy development, commercial life and more. Connect with me on LinkedIn for the announcement <https://www.linkedin.com/in/dr-louise-lambert-89434927/>



## Islamic Quality of Life and Children

*Dr. Habib Tiliouine, Professor of Social Sciences, Head of the Laboratory of Educational Processes & Social Context (Labo-PECS), University of Oran2, Algeria.*

Dr. Habib's research interests include quality of life in Islamic societies, wellbeing research, child development and education, education reform and management and educational policies. He has collaborated with UNICEF and many international research institutions and groups. He has more than 60 publications in English, Arabic and French, and is an editorial board member and reviewer for academic journals (e.g., Journal of Happiness Studies, Applied Research in Quality of Life). He recently coauthored a chapter in the 2017 World Happiness Report. A comprehensive review of the state of positive psychology in the Arab world will be published in the *International handbook of positive psychology: A global perspective on the science of positive human existence*, (Chang, E. C., Ed.; 2019, Springer). Dr. Habib received the 2015 'Research Fellow Award' of The International Society for Quality-of-Life Studies and is Vice-President of external affairs there also. His research in the area of childhood wellbeing includes three main surveys in collaboration with the international Survey of Children's Wellbeing (isciweb.org). Follow-up studies have been published in *Child Development* (2018). Email [tiliouine.habib@univ-oran2.dz](mailto:tiliouine.habib@univ-oran2.dz)

## Appreciating the Positive in Organizations

*Dr. James Kelley, Assistant Professor of Marketing, Business Administration - (CBE), United Arab Emirates University, UAE*

I am focused on research that helps employees make positive decisions at the point of choice, the impact of appreciative inquiry for authentic leadership development, and the use of appreciative inquiry to support corporate health and wellness. I am currently working on Authentic Leadership Development framework and technology that creates an intervention at the choice in the workplace environment. I am looking for collaborators that have relationships with organizations that would be willing to explore the implications of the Authentic Leadership Development framework with their leadership team and the use technology interventions to create healthier workplace habits. Contact [jkelly@uaeu.ac.ae](mailto:jkelly@uaeu.ac.ae); <https://www.uaeu.ac.ae/en/spotlights/drjames.shtml>

## Positive Sociology: Investigating the Positive Across Society

*Dr. Tatiana Karabchuk, Assistant Professor of Sociology, United Arab Emirates University, UAE*

I am an assistant professor of Sociology and coordinator of the Social Research Unit (UAEU), as well as vice-director for the Eurasian Monitor. My research interests include youth studies, subjective wellbeing, measurement of job and life satisfaction, happiness and employment, students' engagement, research obstacles in higher education, subjective wellbeing and number of children, job stability and fertility, labor migration, cross-country comparative sociology, economic sociology, and labor market studies. Recent publications were done on family values, female



wellbeing, the happiness of youth, youth values and attitudes, job instability, pension mobility, fertility, gender equality values, and subjective wellbeing determinants, as well as life satisfaction determinants in the UAE. I previously worked as Deputy Director of Laboratory for Comparative Social Research at the National Research University Higher School of Economics in Russia. I was also a visiting researcher at the Population Centre of the University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill, USA), IOS Regensburg (Germany), GESIS EUROLAB (Germany), and Hitotsubashi University (Japan). To collaborate on any projects, please email: [tkarabchuk@uaeu.ac.ae](mailto:tkarabchuk@uaeu.ac.ae)

### **Intersectional Wellbeing: Decolonizing Research and Education**

*Dr. Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi, Faculty at University of Houston-Downtown and Houston Community College, USA, Editor of the Middle East Journal of Positive Psychology*

I currently teach psychology at the University of Houston-Downtown and Houston Community College. My research addresses wellbeing at the intersection of gender, culture and religion with an emphasis on Muslim populations. I utilized a participatory approach to gather international narratives for a co-edited anthology on hijab and veiling (Pasha-Zaidi & Pasha, 2017), a five-year project that helped me become a more vocal proponent for the decolonization of research methods. I continue to engage with students and colleagues from different regions of the world, including the Middle East region, to conduct research on wellbeing topics such as academic resilience, self-efficacy, and positive identity development. A recent collaboration resulted in an article comparing academic grit, motivational beliefs, and self-regulation among university students in three cultural contexts: the United States, United Arab Emirates, and Turkey (Pasha-Zaidi, Afari, Sevi, Urganci, & Durham, 2018).

With a background in language and literacy, I am also currently working with former students to investigate the relationship between cultural identity, gender, and reading self-efficacy, habits, and interests. We hope to publish initial results of data gathered from African American and Hispanic American youth in the coming months. Finally, in the upcoming book, *An Introduction to Positive Psychology for the Middle East* (Lambert & Pasha-Zaidi, Eds.; Springer, 2019), media analyst, Muna Odeh, and I introduce a model for Islamic identity development based on existing frameworks in the social science literature. We hope this model encourages further research and educational initiatives for the development of a positive Islamic identity.

I am always interested in collaborating on international projects! I am currently looking to develop a psychology course that helps college students in two different countries engage with each other using online tools to discuss the application of social science principles in their respective parts of the world. If you are interested in this project or any other, or have any great ideas you'd like to propose, please email me at [nausheempasha@outlook.com](mailto:nausheempasha@outlook.com)



## Practise

### **Sherif Arafa**

*Egyptian cartoonist, columnist, and self-development author*

Sherif is the founder and editor of the weekly news page, "The Science of Happiness" in the UAE's Arabic language "Alittihad" newspaper. He has an MS Degree in Positive Psychology, MBA in Human Resources and Bachelor's degree in Dental Surgery. He changed his career path from dentistry to wellbeing awareness and opposing political extremism through his books and cartoons. Sherif has received many awards for his work; his interests lie in scientific journalism, the promotion of social tolerance and open-mindedness, as well as increasing the public's awareness of positive psychology. For partnership or media inquiries, contact [DrSherif@DrSherif.Net](mailto:DrSherif@DrSherif.Net)

### **Silvia King**

*Positive Psychology Coach*

I am Silvia King, an enthusiastic empowerer of people! I hold an MA/lic.oec.publ. from the University of Zurich and am currently completing my MSc in Applied Positive Psychology and Coaching Psychology (MAPPCP) at the University of East London. I also hold several complementary therapy qualifications, including as a certified Laughter Yoga Teacher who trained with the creator of Laughter Yoga, Dr Madan Kataria. My journey as a Positive Psychology coach started in the UK and continues in Dubai/UAE. I see myself as both a Positive Psychology life coach with a business edge and a business coach with a holistic angle. I vividly remember my first coaching session with a Muslim client in the UAE: Much of the Positive Psychology and Coaching Psychology I had used in the UK didn't seem to work. It was the beginning of a journey of discovery to adapt not only my coaching style. It made me look at the cultural assumptions and values inherent in "mainstream" Positive Psychology and in my own thinking. Most of all, it opened a wonderful new perspective on the world by getting to know the region, its people and by developing a better understanding for their culture.

My journey of discovery and learning will gather pace in 2019 with the research project for my dissertation. Areas of interest are coaching psychology, specifically the Ershad coaching framework (van Nieuwerburgh & Allaho, 2017), in connection with Positive Psychology aspects, especially meaning and cross-cultural aspects. A particular interest of mine is laughter (rather than humour) as a positive psychology intervention, and I am delighted to be speaking on the topic at the MEPA 2019 conference in Kuwait. If you are working in any of these contexts and would like to discuss experiences and ideas, please contact me at: [silvia@positivity-international.com](mailto:silvia@positivity-international.com)



## Organizations

### Developing School-Based Character and Wellbeing

*Mrs. Natassja Williams, Deputy Head of Pastoral Care  
Cranleigh School, Abu Dhabi, UAE*

Across the world, educational institutions are increasingly focusing on positive education programming. One of the areas in which they concentrate is how values or character strengths are woven into their strategic vision, mission, motto and behavioral structure. Established in 2014, the Cranleigh School in Abu Dhabi believes there is a clear difference between schools that work to instill wellbeing into their DNA, and those that only pay lip service to the notion.

The International Positive Education Network (IPEN), with whom we work closely, considers the foundations of a positive institution to include a common understanding of shared values and virtues, positive relationships based on a sense of community, a notion of giving, communication and connectedness, and learning through experience. Key point people can be helpful in building such a climate, beginning with teaching staff and Senior Leadership teams, who make key elements of positive education programming endemic in everything schools do, from what it stands for and how it operates. It involves more than crafting an ethos or wordsmithing a framework of values and virtues. Emphasis placed on academics is matched by that placed on developing character and wellbeing. Both create a school culture that has purpose, meaning and ultimately, a positive impact on the children in its care. Yet, it would be naive to assume requisite skillsets are intrinsically found in all teachers. Many were not taught about wellbeing constructs, nor what success in this area looks like; thus, a coaching and support program is needed. Such concepts are regularly taught, explored and developed with teaching staff and we nurture this growth using a number of tools including policy implementation, as well as professional development for staff and curriculum tailoring for children.

Examples of positive education at the Cranleigh School are many. For instance, students took part in an introductory character program based on work conducted at the University of Birmingham's (UK) Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues. Baseline questionnaires were taken from The Centre's framework for character. We also measured children's wellbeing prior to programming using the EPOCH Measure of Adolescent Wellbeing (Kern, Benson, Steinberg, & Steinberg, 2014), which uses the five PERMA pillars developed by Dr. Martin Seligman (2011), including positive emotion; engagement; relationships; meaning and accomplishment. We highlight character strengths and wellbeing in our behavioral systems, policies, daily structure, routines and rewards process. We introduce dedicated days for kindness and mindfulness which are celebrated through tailored activities and guest speakers, engaging pupils of all ages and staff.

Further, our annual start of year staff INSET underlies our commitment to a balanced curriculum and is in line with IPEN's manifesto that academics need to be intertwined with character and wellbeing. We invite expert speakers to discuss and present on topics within the realms of wellbeing, positive psychology, character and mindset development. Staff meetings now link these elements to ensure a holistic and child centered culture. Looking forward, this term we



have been exploring a mindset program that draws from Ash Buchanan's work and explores the concept of a benefit mindset. We are also working with Angela Duckworth, crafting a program for the third term which draws on grit research.

There is ample evidence that children who use their character strengths and develop a solid sense of wellbeing do well academically; we are beginning to reap these rewards too. The evolution of our teaching practices which includes moral, civic, performance and intellectual virtues – integral to the educational journey of a school itself – allows us to do this. Yet, creating a positive culture of wellbeing and character takes time. All elements must be brought alive through interpersonal micro-connections. Common language must be used in all communications whether it is spontaneous conversation in corridors, instruction in cross-curricular activity, primary messages delivered in assemblies, content for development plans, headlines on material displays, meeting agendas and reports, curriculum maps and lesson planning. All touch points matter in the development of character and wellbeing.

There are conflicting views on whether there should be policy guidelines, benchmarks and structures leading to the certification process of a 'School of Character and Wellbeing', or a 'Positive Education School'. Some believe there must be standardisation to allow for measurement. In real life, too much protocol tends to burden schools with paperwork and worse still, promote a culture that focuses on meeting inspection standards rather than real educational and wellbeing gains. Schools should review traditional structures in the context of what we know modern education needs to deliver. The days of managing pastoral, academic and co-curricular programs separately are over. As student character and wellbeing is essential for successful learning, education must be about the whole child and a school's organisational structure needs to reflect this. For information about the Abu Dhabi Cranleigh School's positive programming, contact me at [NWilliams@Cranleigh.ae](mailto:NWilliams@Cranleigh.ae)

### **Alnowair: Kuwait's Positivity Program**

*Rokaya Hussain and Sheikha Intisar Al Sabah, Director and Founder of the Alnowair Foundation in Kuwait City, Kuwait*

The Alnowair Foundation is a non-profit initiative founded by Shaikha Intisar Salem Al Ali Al Sabah of Kuwait. Alnowair is Kuwait and the GCC's first non-profit creating positive social behavior change through educational, workplace and community programs and campaigns based on scientific studies in positive psychology. To date, Alnowair has engaged with more than 40,000 people across 21 national events, becoming a pioneering example for Kuwait's neighbor countries. It has an online marketing reach of almost 200, 000 people across several social platforms. Its founder and patron, Sheikha Intisar, was recognized as the Arab Woman of the Year in 2017 for her contribution to community development and Alnowair received the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) 2014 Award for its contribution to youth development. Alnowair is an official partner for London's 'Action for Happiness', Europe's largest NGO dedicated to human happiness. Alnowair in recent years has expanded its offerings significantly.



### ***Bareec***

The “Bareec Program for Positive Thinking and Wellbeing” is an educational curriculum developed in July of 2016, which uses a set of short, interactive and creative activities in university and high school classrooms to instill a positive mindset and attitude in students. The program relies on teachers and university professors to implement the program after training offered by Alnowair in such techniques. The program takes inspiration from scientific research and work done in the field of positive psychology. Initially implemented in three schools and one university class of the College of Social Sciences at Kuwait University, it was later expanded to 13 additional schools and four different faculties after positive results and a welcome reception. This unique program appealed greatly to school principals and university professors; its impact was noticed by parents as well. By the start of the 2017-2018 academic year, Bareec was already being implemented in 24 schools across Kuwait and seven university faculties. To date, the program exists in 37 schools and over 300 school teachers and university professors have been trained on how to implement the program with approximately 8000 students.

Bareec program goals were met with the findings of its preliminary study on approximately 1000 students published this year (Lambert, Passmore, Scull, Al Sabah, & Hussain, 2018), demonstrating the effectiveness of the program on student wellbeing, relative to non-participating control groups. Besides this evidence, school principals, teachers, university professors, students and parents shared a number of testimonials regarding the social, emotional and behavioral changes noticed in themselves, families, and school environments. Schools’ principals have also reported improvements in student performance, better attendance rates, lower violence rates, and less vandalism to school property.

The Bareec project was presented to the Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development and approved to be part of the 5-year development plan in collaboration with the Ministry of Education as well as Kuwait University’s “New Kuwait - 2035” strategy.

### ***Boomerang***

Boomerang is Kuwait’s first anti-bullying school outreach program that uses restorative drama therapy and kindness habits to help schools rise above bullying. The central tool of Boomerang is a transformative theatrical play that students perform at their school assembly following rehearsals at our restorative drama therapy workshop. At the workshops, student-actors (bullies, victims and bystanders) learn empathy skills through role-playing, in addition to creative problem-solving, collaboration, and positive communication. Close to completing its first year, Boomerang aims to reach over 7000 students across 14 private schools.

The three-year program aims to develop kinder school cultures and provide sustainable solutions to bullying through a variety of tools including creative role-playing workshops for students, group discussions in school assemblies, educational resources on kindness, kindness projects for students, kindness songs, kindness polls, the development of a humane education curriculum, student mentorship and creative focus groups. The program will also publish Kuwait’s



first report on 'Positive Solutions to School Bullying' which includes case-studies and survey findings of students, parents and school management (principals, teachers and counsellors).

Boomerang has already engaged 3800 students across 12 schools in the second season of its first year (April 2018 to date) through 19 plays comprising 92 hours of student engagement and 80 hours of restorative drama therapy workshops. Impact measurement analysis showed that on average, 81.4% of students who watched the restorative drama therapy play were "inspired to be kinder." Further, 85% of student-actors (bullies, victims and bystanders) engaged in restorative drama therapy workshops felt "more prepared to solve bullying through kindness."

### ***Yellowworks***

Yellowworks is a first-of-its-kind employee engagement program comprising strategic workshops that engages an organization's employees through positivity activities to generate positive behavior change, which, in turn, increase employee productivity and organizational profitability. It is designed on scientific studies which show that there is a positive correlation between positivity, productivity and profitability.

The workshops use experiments and emotions to trigger a deep sense of realization in participants and help them nurture a positive outlook towards their daily lives. It also equips participants with practical solutions and tools, which they can implement in their workplace. Yellowworks conducts pre-workshop analyses to understand the specific learning needs of each organization and then conducts workshops measured for effectiveness at regular intervals of 30, 60 and 90 days. The original edition of Yellowworks is called the 'Yellowworks Employee Engagement Workshops' focusing on entry level and middle management employees.

Since 2016, Yellowworks has trained 170 employees at Al Hamra Business Tower & Luxury Center, Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK), Boubyan Bank, EQUATE Petrochemical Company and Zain Kuwait through six workshops totalling 60 hours of strategic training. Not only have trainees demonstrated a significant 15% increase in positive workplace outlook within two weeks of the program, they have also benefited from practicing positivity at the workplace. This includes better stress management, increased resilience, inclination towards positive outcomes and attitudes, harmonious working relationships, and an increased ability to identify opportunities over obstacles. Visit [www.alnowair.com](http://www.alnowair.com) for more information about their programs and campaigns.

### **The Positive Psychology and Wellbeing Research Lab (PPWRL)**

*Dr. Saddigha Al-Ghalib, Effat University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia*

The Positive Psychology & Wellbeing Research Lab (PPWRL) is the first of its kind in Saudi Arabia. It specializes in the scientific study of Positive Psychology and Wellbeing. The PPWRL team is dedicated to exploring the practical uses of positive psychology in fostering individual wellbeing. Currently situated in Effat University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, it was founded by Dr. Saddiqa Al-Ghalib, a psychology professor at Effat University and former students Afeefah Salim, Rana Dahlawi, and Shaden Alkhalifah. The lab's vision is to lead the positive psychology movement in Saudi Arabia and significantly improve wellbeing in society by producing ground



breaking research. This is in accordance with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 that focuses on the happiness and fulfillment of citizens and residents by promoting physical, psychological and social wellbeing. It also aims to provide university students with an opportunity to improve their research skills through practical involvement with all aspects of academic research. The PPWRL has four functions that work simultaneously to help the lab achieve its mission.

**Research:** Its purpose is to conduct innovative research that investigates the practical implications of positive psychology theories in improving the wellbeing of individuals in Saudi society. It aims to provide a platform for passionate individuals to pursue and advance their research skills and produce applied research in various areas in Positive Psychology and Wellbeing through the Visiting Researchers Program. Another goal of this function is to increase the number of research publications in the MENA region. Current topics being investigated in the lab include gratitude, school spirit, happiness, wellbeing, mindfulness, obesity, Saudi women driving, life satisfaction, school spirit, depression, anxiety and stress.

**Assessment Development:** The lab aims to validate assessments and ensure they are appropriate to use on the Saudi population. It also aims to create new valid and reliable assessments that accurately measure various psychological constructs. Recent activities under this function include the development of the Women Driving Perception Scale (WDPS) and the School Spirit Scale. The WDPS measures the opinions of individuals regarding women's driving in Saudi Arabia, while the School Spirit Scale examines college students' loyalty, social involvement, sense of belonging and identity, relationship with faculty, positive attitude and pride.

**Community Service:** The members of the lab strongly believe in giving back to the community and providing opportunities for others to benefit from its activities. The lab arranges workshops, events and lectures to educate the public on the benefits of inculcating positive psychology in everyday life, as well as raise awareness of the importance of research in clinical practice. Such workshops focus on helping people achieve a higher quality of life by teaching them important life skills such as mindful eating, mindful learning, mindful listening, mindful living, etc. The Research Assistant Program provides undergraduate students with an opportunity to develop their research and presentation skills.

**Professional Service:** The lab provides professional and personal development workshops, training, certificates and diplomas. Recently, the lab provided college students, faculty and staff an opportunity to enhance their wellbeing by joining the new Mindful Jeddah Training Program.

### **First Positive Psychology Symposium in Saudi Arabia**

The Positive Psychology and Wellbeing Research Lab was inaugurated during the first Positive Psychology Symposium in Saudi Arabia hosted by Effat University on March 29, 2018. The aim of the two-day symposium was to share knowledge on enhancing human strengths and increasing human functioning in all domains of life. Participants from all walks of life were invited such as students, faculty, people from the community, etc. The purpose of this symposium was also to give a voice to researchers in the MENA and other regions who work tirelessly to promote positive psychology in their communities. The first day consisted of scholars from various countries who



presented papers on a variety of topics in the field, while the second included workshops, keynote speakers, panel discussions, entertainment by local artists, awards, and student project exhibitions.

The event had two keynote speakers, Dr. David Creswell and Dr. Louise Lambert. Dr. Creswell is an associate professor of psychology from Carnegie Mellon University (USA) who discussed his findings on various stress management techniques that alter coping and stress. Dr. Louise Lambert, editor of the Middle East Journal of Positive Psychology, discussed the importance of developing evidence-based positive psychology interventions and indigenous positive psychology research. A panel discussion entitled “Youth Matter” was held on the second day of the symposium for the purpose of engaging young Saudis and including them in the positive psychology discourse generated by the event. The panelists discussed how positive psychology can play a vital role in reaffirming the role of young Saudis in the Kingdom.

### **The Sunmarke School’s Journey to Whole School Wellbeing**

*Katrina Mankani and Amy Kellogg, Sunmarke School, Fortes Education, Dubai, UAE*

Over the past decade, there has been a growing acceptance of positive education as an effective model for increasing student wellbeing and academic success. The International Positive Education Network (IPEN) defines a positive education school as “a place where students not only cultivate their intellectual minds, but also develop a broad set of character strengths, virtues, and competencies, which together support their wellbeing” (State of Positive Education Report, 2016). Rigorous studies conducted by researchers such as Alejandro Adler, Margaret Kern, Mathew White, and Lea Waters have increased its credibility, in addition to data from schools pioneering Positive Education such as Geelong Grammar School, St. Peter’s College, and Shipley School. These early proponents of positive education shifted the prevalent pedagogical paradigm and its notion that “teaching wellbeing might divert valuable resources from the main objective of education - teaching students to succeed academically” (Adler, 2016). Contrary to this notion, a study by Adler (2016) looking at over 450 schools found that explicit teaching of positive education concepts resulted in an increase not only in student wellbeing but also overall academic performance. Yet, the successful development of such schools depends on a number of factors, including the readiness of society to accept such novel views on pedagogy.

#### **A Uniquely Fertile Setting**

While this innovative view of education might seem more readily received in the Western world, Dubai has become fertile ground for such growth through its government-based “Happiness Agenda” which states: *“Guided by the vision of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of UAE and Ruler of Dubai, we are fueling a city transformation to happiness. Adopting a globally unique, science-based and methodical approach, we are measuring, impacting, and sustaining happiness for the whole city”* (<http://en.happinessagenda.ae/#overview>). The Dubai Government’s Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) also promotes this mission: *“Together with the schools of Dubai we are working to support and improve the wellbeing and happiness of students in our schools.*



*We recognize that supporting and improving the wellbeing of our students will lead to students flourishing at school and in life” (<https://www.khda.gov.ae/en/dswc>).*

### **Developing a Positive Education School**

It was within this setting that Sunmarke School, a private, all-through school following the National Curriculum of England, opened in September 2016 in Dubai with an aim to become the model Positive Education school in the Middle East region. The purpose statement of the school reads as “empowering students with a high quality value-based education that inspires students to achieve their fullest potential and flourish in a changing world.” To live up to this statement, the school’s Board of Directors and Senior Leadership team devised a plan to bring together the science of positive psychology with best teaching practice to enable students and the community to experience the benefit of a unique school eco-system where wellbeing is at the heart of education. Further, because of the large expatriate population of Dubai, the plan needed to consider not only the local culture, but the more than 80 nationalities represented across the school’s enrollment. While this multicultural climate may pose many challenges, Positive Education successfully rides the wave of multiculturalism as the very moral characteristics it promotes are known to be universally expressed and valued across cultures and time. Drawing upon the fertile ground of Dubai, existing frameworks of positive education models and a budding relationship with Geelong Grammar School, Sunmarke began its unique journey of a whole-school comprehensive approach to joining the worldwide community of successful positive education schools.

### **A Three-Tiered Implementation Model**

Although the aspiration to become a positive education school had been with the school management team from the start, the process of becoming one required a careful transformation plan and change management procedure. It could not be simply a matter of teaching wellbeing classes within the timetable. In addition to tracking the progress of this implementation through the *Learn it, Live it, Teach it, Embed it* approach presented by Hoare, Bott and Robinson (2017), the leadership team also created a three-tiered integration of the Positive Education ethos: Organizational, Proactive, and Responsive.

#### ***Organizational Tier***

This tier is responsible for embedding Positive Education and Wellbeing across the organization and shaping policies, HR practises, and community links. The components of this tier include:

Staff wellbeing. The school is not only a place for learning, it is also a workplace for professionals, staff, and teachers. Taking care of our employee’s physical and mental health “protects school staff, and by doing so, helps to support students’ health and academic success” (Lewallen, Hunt, Potts-Datema, Zaza, & Giles, 2015). Sunmarke’s comprehensive approach to staff wellbeing has evolved over time into a set of educational program, HR policies and practises, benefits and day-to-day interactional practices built on respect, fun, and professional excellence. We continuously strive to develop a safe, supportive environment that encourages both staff to develop a growth mindset, one that focuses on what is possible rather than what is not.



Recruiting staff with character strengths of the applicant in mind ensures a good organizational fit between members of staff and the school. Hiring for character and a good fit with the strengths of all members of staff improves the likelihood of personnel feeling a sense of belonging in the school, that what they do is meaningful and has a purpose in the bigger scheme of things, and contributes to their own sense of professional and personal wellbeing by doing what they like and are good at each and every day. Good hires are not left to chance and we take recruitment very seriously for this purpose.

Finally, we have many policies and procedures in place for students and staff devised with wellbeing in mind, such as our Restorative Justice Behaviour Policy, which restructures transgressions with positive behaviors. This program ensures that good behaviors have a chance to flourish, are modeled for all to see, and transgressions can be redeemed so that not only are relationships restored, but the dignity and safety of all individuals is preserved. Our Restorative Justice Programme was described in the Dubai School Inspection Bureau (DSIB) Report 2017-2018: *“The newly introduced restorative justice programme is succeeding in enabling students to take greater responsibility for the wider school community. It encourages and enables students to be empathetic towards one another and resolve any difficulties in a supportive manner.”*

### ***The Proactive Tier***

A strength of the positive education model is its focus on opportunities and growth and not merely on problems once they have happened. Thus, our proactive preventative tier rests on the capabilities and skills that can be taught to all individuals, such as the PERMA components (i.e., positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment), Character strengths, such as persistence, tolerance, kindness, and self-regulation, as well as a growth mindset (believing that one can change with effort and support), and skills for greater resilience. These are demonstrated and expressed throughout the school day via our Science of Wellbeing lessons for students aged 5 to age 18, teaching of such positive education concepts embedded within classroom subject and curriculum, as well as demonstrated throughout assemblies and events. As no child is an island unto themselves, we also offer parental education in positive psychology through the delivery of workshops, emailers, and parent advisory committees. We also offer a number of avenues for the practise and exercise of the strengths and skills noted earlier through student run committees (e.g., Positivity Patrol) and community involvement, such as the Sports Heroes Academy, which generates a sense of compassion, empathy, and purpose for students.

### ***The Responsive Tier***

Due to the complexity of human behavior and environmental influences on wellbeing, there are inevitably times when proactive, preventative measures such as the offer of the Science of Wellbeing classes, are insufficient in helping students overcome emotional challenges. To ensure that we provide the best possible care, the responsive tier consists of interventions provided by dedicated counselors for each phase (Primary and Secondary), as well as the delivery of group therapy, peer counseling, and Flourish Clubs. Finally, we collect ongoing wellbeing data through



the Pupil's Attitude towards Self and School (PASS) survey and the Dubai Student Wellbeing Census. We regularly use this data to guide our proactive and responsive interventions.

We are proud to receive such comments from the DSIB Inspection report (2016-2017):

- What the school does best: *Emphasizes students' wellbeing and promotes effectively their personal and social development.*
- Personal development: *This is a school in which students are respectful and considerate to others, including those who may express a sense of feeling lonely or who have recently joined the school. They are aware of the importance of supporting, mentoring and encouraging others. Students work well in attempting to ensure that everyone is valued as part of the new school family.*

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## **Doing Well, Being Well: Wellbeing and Positive Education in Dubai** *Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), Dubai (UAE)*

Dubai's private education sector is unique. With 209 schools offering 17 different curricula to 290,000 students from 182 different nationalities, it would be easy to focus on the sector's disparity rather than its diversity; on its challenges rather than its successes.

As a government regulator that oversees the private education sector, the KHDA is responsible for the growth and quality of private schools, but not what schools teach, how they teach or who is teaching. One of the first questions we asked ourselves when we were established in 2007 was, 'What then, is the role of a government regulator if it does not regulate curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, or teacher development?' We found the answers to this question in collaboration, in focusing on successes rather than challenges, and in bringing people together to share their knowledge and skills. More recently, our questions have revolved around the purpose of education: For what are we preparing our children? Which skills would best help them live a happy and meaningful life, not just at school, but for the rest of their lives? We realised that the answers to these questions had their roots in wellbeing, and that if we wanted to inspire the education sector to make positive change, we had to start with ourselves.

We gravitated to the ideas and people that spoke of hope, passion and positive change; who were led by the generosity of their hearts rather than the pragmatism of their strategies. One of these people was Nic Marks, a happiness researcher and fellow of the New Economics Foundation (NEF) in the UK. In his role with the NEF, Nic developed the 5 Ways of Wellbeing - an evidence-based approach to improving people's happiness.

The 5 Ways of Wellbeing - Take Notice, Connect, Be Active, Give and Keep Learning - transformed our view of happiness from an abstract concept into an achievable state. They became the blueprint for our processes, policies, and organizational culture. We looked at the strengths of our organisation - our people's relationships with each other, their sense of control over their own



work, their freedom to be creative, the feedback they receive from others around them - and aligned those with the 5 Ways. Then, we looked at the policies that were stifling those strengths and promptly removed them. Processes that were designed to serve the organisation were replaced with those that served our people instead.

We understood the futility of using headcount to determine the size of our organisation and the impact of our work. It was not the heads, but the hearts of KHDA that would make positive change. It was the team members who approached their work with purpose, passion and positivity who would change the face of KHDA and education in Dubai.

We were eager to share our learning with our school community, and give them the tools they needed to improve their own wellbeing. Partnering with the Department for Education of the Government of South Australia - which had many years of experience of conducting a similar census in their own schools and other school systems around the world - we embarked on a five-year project to measure and improve student wellbeing in Dubai. Conducted for the first time in November 2017, the Dubai Student Wellbeing Census was completed by almost 65,000 middle-school students across 168 schools, answering questions about their happiness, relationships at home and school, and lifestyle, among others. Each participating school received a summary report on what their students thought about their wellbeing and educators attended workshops to help them interpret the data and formulate plans to improve their students' wellbeing over the next 12 months.

The results of the Census told us that 84% of students are happy most of the time, 77% feel safe at school, and 76% enjoy close relationships with their friends at school. It also told us that three main contributing factors to wellbeing include a good breakfast, a good night's sleep, and good relationships with adults. These results make it clear that wellbeing is not just the responsibility of schools, or of parents, teachers, and regulators, but of all of us working together so that our children can thrive and be happy.

The second year of the Census began in November this year and has been expanded to include students in Grades 10 to 12. Due to be released in February 2019, the results will give us deeper insights into student wellbeing, enabling us to track a good proportion of the school journey and giving schools comprehensive data about the effectiveness of their wellbeing strategies and culture over time.

Our engagement with our community, and their engagement with each other, is crucial if we hope to improve wellbeing in Dubai and together build a future in which we all flourish. We have been humbled and heartened to see schools and teachers begin and continue to make real and meaningful changes to bring wellbeing into the heart of their curriculum and pedagogy.

One new school in Dubai - committed to the tenets of positive education - provides intensive training to each of its teachers before they start work. As well as an in-house positive education team responsible for embedding positive education into the school, the school has set up a wellbeing department with trained counsellors. It teaches positive education implicitly and explicitly, and regularly invites parents to attend positive education workshops. Another school has renovated a classroom into a mindfulness and wellbeing room, adding smart tablets loaded with guided meditation routines, a gratitude tree for students to display what they are thankful for, a



sensory room with a range of stimuli and a positive affirmation space to maintain good mental health. A number of schools have also incorporated mindfulness into the curriculum, as well as reassessed their student discipline policies to focus not on punishment, but on empathy and kindness. Others have appointed non-teaching Heads of Positive Education at primary and secondary school levels to adapt the curriculum towards wellbeing and support greater wellbeing for students and teachers.

Approximately 30% of Dubai private schools now have dedicated full-time staff, who focus on positive education and wellbeing - a figure echoing the 30% of students who attended good or better quality schools ten years ago. As a community, we are at the beginning of our positive education journey. As we progress, we must be mindful to not confuse inputs with outcomes, and be diligent in providing our community with the data it needs to form evidence-based policies that truly improve wellbeing. For additional information, feel free to contact Fida Slayman at [Fida.Slayman@khda.gov.ae](mailto:Fida.Slayman@khda.gov.ae) or Nada Salha at [Nada.Salha@khda.gov.ae](mailto:Nada.Salha@khda.gov.ae)