

New trial improved well-being of working adults

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With workplace stress on the increase and high workloads, rapid delivery targets and lack of job security damaging the health of working adults, academics at Royal Holloway, University of London, decided to trial a new well-being initiative.

Dr. Jeremy Oliver and Professor Andrew MacLeod from Royal Holloway, trialled a short online training programme for working adults to help them set and pursue personal life goals.

By setting aside 30 minutes a week, for five weeks, they were asked to identify goals linked to their personal values, develop action steps to move towards selected goals, anticipate and deal with obstacles, and maintain motivation. This could be anything from going to the gym, finally decorating their bedroom to spending more time with their family.

Across the UK, 330 employees, mainly from the civil service industry, took part in the trial. Participants reported improved well-being (greater life satisfaction, more positive emotions, less negative emotions, and a greater sense of purpose) five weeks after starting the programme and three months later.

The programme had several key design features:

- clinical expertise brought into the workplace – the training programme was adapted from a successful goal and action planning treatment programme used in mental health service and community settings.
- widely accessible – an online resource that could be accessed at home or work.
- designed to fit around work and life commitments – the training was designed to be accessed in short bites, to fit around high workloads and other life commitments.

Wellbeing measures (Positive and Negative Affect Schedule, Satisfaction with Life Scale, Flourishing Scale) were taken before and after the intervention period, and again three months later.

Dr. Jeremy Oliver, a clinical psychologist, Royal Holloway, said: "I work with families in front-line NHS services in a busy clinic near the City of London. Every day, I see parents who are stressed and overwhelmed, juggling their work and family life.

"It was great to be able to trial a successful well-being programme to help working adults focus their time and efforts on what is most important to them, to improve their well-being and engagement with life and hence being happier and healthier."

In response to the publication, Nancy Hey, Director of the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, added: "I love this example of taking a proven group [mental health](#) approach online and into the workplace. Only 1 in 5 HR practitioners evaluate wellbeing interventions in their organisations. This is an example of how it can be done."

Dr. Oliver added: "The next step would be trialling the programme within a range of workplace sectors, including the private sector. Any organisations interested in using our programme are welcome to contact us for further information."

A working adult who took part in the study said "I found the programme really easy to use and fit in around other commitments. It really helped me to focus on goals for myself after returning to work following maternity leave. The step by step process helped to maintain my momentum and contributed to a greater sense of achievement for me. I will definitely be returning to the programme materials at regular intervals when I need to refresh my life goals".

More information: Jeremy J. Oliver et al. Working adults' well-being: An online self-help goal-based intervention, *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* (2018). [DOI: 10.1111/joop.12212](https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12212)

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