



‘59 Ways to Wellbeing’: enhancing personal resilience in students

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Presentation abstract

In higher education, students often face uncertainties in defining their academic and future pathways. Success requires not only academic skills but also resilience and a sense of belonging. Learning development (LD) can address these evolving needs by combining academic skill-building with strategies that enhance personal resilience and wellbeing, ensuring inclusivity and equity in the student experience.

Wellbeing, which is closely linked to resilience, improves when personal resources are expanded (Fredrickson, 2001; Roepke and Seligman, 2014). Practical strategies that integrate resilience and wellbeing into daily life empower students to manage challenges effectively (Leppin et al., 2014). Despite rising concerns about stress and mental health, many higher education curricula lack wellbeing-focused activities.

This presentation introduced the ‘59 Ways to Wellbeing’ resource, developed at the University of Surrey to address these gaps. Co-created with students, this calendar-style tool combines positive psychology and learning development strategies to promote resilience and wellbeing during two key academic periods: October, when students settle into university; and February, post-inter-semester break.

The resource offers 59 accessible and inclusive strategies that blend resilience-building with academic skill development. By incorporating these practices into their routines, students can better navigate challenges, foster resourcefulness, and enhance their sense of belonging.

The presentation showcased how educators can use this resource to design curricula and support systems tailored to students' needs. Early evaluation findings highlight its impact on student wellbeing and resilience. Ultimately, this work seeks to inspire learning developers to create innovative, equity-driven resources and curricula that support both academic and personal development, empowering students to thrive in a rapidly changing educational landscape.

Keywords: wellbeing; resilience; academic skills; belonging.

Community response

This session resonated with participants acutely aware of the wellbeing challenges experienced by students during their studies. The involvement of students (including those in foundation and final year Psychology) as part of the creation of the calendar tool and the extension of wellbeing activities beyond semester one was commended. Quite often, the start of study block is where activities of this nature are concentrated and it was appreciated that this work reflected the real needs of students. Approaching this project through the lenses of learning development and positive psychology also promoted the building of connections between students and the university.

Figure 1. '59 Ways to Wellbeing' October calendar.

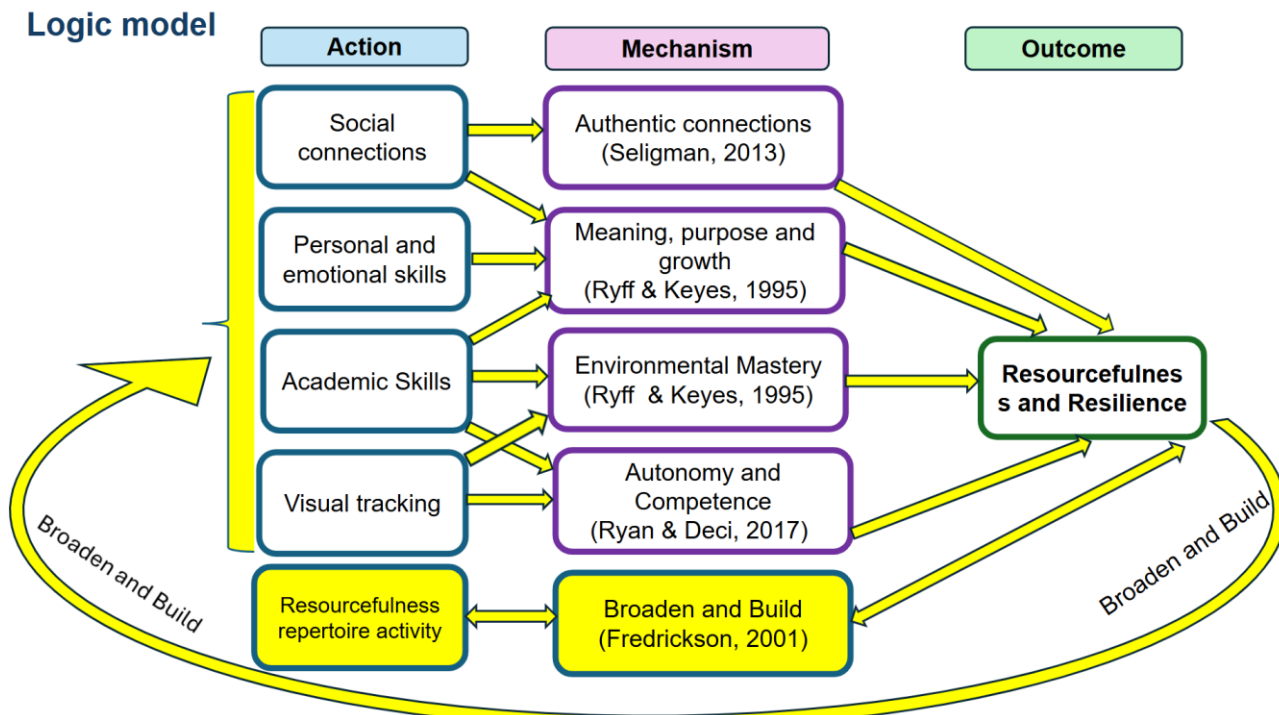


Figure 2. Presenters' slide: examples from the two calendars.

Categories	Example activity	Calendar date
Social connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore club & societies to join 	Oct 1 st
Personal & emotional skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a vision board. Write down a list of goals or things you want to achieve then make a board using images and words. Be creative https://jackcanfield.com/blog/vision-board/ 	Oct 5 th
Academic skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work on time management and develop a schedule for studying. https://welcome.surrey.ac.uk/preparing-university/planning-and-organising-your-time https://www.mindtools.com/arb6j5a/what-is-time-management 	Oct 8 th
'Visual tracking'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a gratitude list (write down one or more things you are grateful for today). 	Feb 8 th
Resourcefulness & resilience)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review any setbacks you have experienced and reflect on how you can proceed https://personalexcellence.co/blog/daily-setbacks/ 	Feb 10 th

The project used a logic model to help plan the wellbeing calendar, where **action** represented what students do as a result of interacting with the resource. The **mechanism** was the process of change, leading to an **outcome** that promoted resilience. This then cycled to broaden and build as students engaged again with an action.

Figure 3. Presenters' slide: logic model.



Presenters looked deeper into the social connections action to illustrate how this works in practice to help support wellbeing.

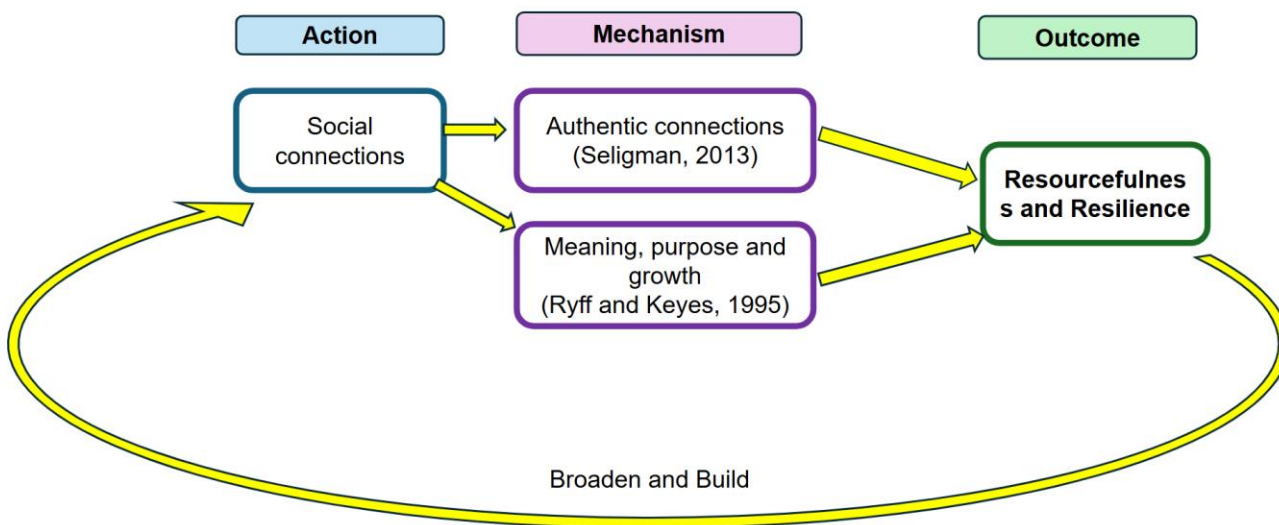
Social connections are especially important for young adults, and exposing oneself to new social situations leads to more social opportunities. By joining a society, you have more chances of authentic connections with like-minded people who are also open to making new connections.

Engagement in interesting social activities and learning new social or other skills can facilitate meaningful opportunities, perhaps in the form of responsibility, leadership, or specialist skills, purposeful activity, and connections and personal growth/development.

Resourcefulness and resilience lead to more opportunity to notice and appreciate positive experiences as well as more appealing 'approach' behaviours. 'Broaden and Build Theory' (Fredrickson, 2001) posits increased exposure to such positive experiences leads to an enhanced ability to recognise and facilitate more connections, as well as enhancing one's personal 'approach' behaviours and making one resilient to other factors which undermine wellbeing.

Image 4. Example of social connection action.

Example of Social Connection Action: Look at clubs or societies to join, try to talk to new people (EG a book club or the pet society) <https://surreyunion.org/activity/clubs-societies/>



Participants to this session enjoyed that suggestions within the calendar were concrete, providing links to activities or tools that can be used to manage challenges and support wellbeing.

AS: I love an ALDcon session that provides such tangible inspiration and tools to make new, interesting things happen. I wasn't familiar with Xerte and given much of my role involves the production of asynchronous resources for skills development, I'm going to explore that platform ASAP! I think it's common (and I'd argue detrimental) for the development of various skills at uni to be treated in a silo fashion: a wellbeing team does wellbeing stuff, an academic skills team talks writing/stats/etc., a students' union supports the social side, and so on. Given that strange norm, I loved that the calendar tools upend that silo vision to instead blend little 'challenges' and tips across an array of dimensions: the personal, the social, the academic. Additionally, I appreciated the thought given to 'transition' as it relates to semester two. We see the bulk of transition attention paid to the start of the year, but it seems valuable and logical to support students who need to recharge and refocus on returning from winter break.

FF: I really loved the holistic approach taken in this session as it highlights the ever-evolving role that we play as LDers in our student interactions and support mechanisms. Students often need to be reminded to pay attention to their wellbeing and social development and not get lost or burned out in the purely academic.

The template calendar is such a well thought out and affirming tool that all students could benefit from, especially given their input in its design and development. Looking at transition points from arrival and into the second semester demonstrates the thought behind the project in acknowledging that transition is a process and isn't 'complete' after one semester – I would be interested to trial the calendar with different year groups to continue to build on the successes of previous transition points. Thank you for such a positive session!

Next steps and additional questions

Participants enjoyed the template version of the calendars and would like to use it within their own practice, will this be made available through LearnHigher?

The idea of a physical calendar is an interesting one, do you think this activity could translate to an artifact that is more tactile?

Authors' reflection

Nayiri Keshishi

I felt the presentation was well received, and the feedback on the resource was very positive. Several attendees expressed interest in having a version they could embed within their university or online learning platforms, as well as one that could be customised to reflect their institutional context and include university-specific links.

We also received some useful suggestions around how to market the resource and broaden its reach. These included partnering with Welcome Week teams, collaborating with the Students' Union, and incorporating a QR code linked to the resource on library PC screensavers. These ideas offer promising avenues for enhancing visibility and engagement moving forward.

Sarah Hack

Like Nayiri, I felt the presentation was well-received and thank those who attended for their thoughtful engagement. Similarly, I am grateful for the community reflections which have provided interesting insight. It was good to see our intention to develop this resource

drawing on the combined areas of learning development and positive psychology was valued, and that the development of the resource reflected a need in the current student population. Since the session, we have evaluated feedback on the resource obtained through a focus group and will draw on this and the community reflections to inform the development of our next iteration of the '59 Ways to Wellbeing' calendar.

Addressing the two specific questions raised: we like the suggestion of a physical calendar, with one idea being to produce a traditional cardboard advent-style version that could be handed out to students. Unfortunately, cost is likely to be prohibitive, but if anyone has suggestions on how we might do this in a cost-effective way, then please do get in contact. Regarding a resource that can be shared more widely, we are currently working on producing a version of the calendar that might be shared through LearnHigher – watch this space!

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Sarah Hack is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology and Director of the Psychology Foundation Year. Sarah's academic interests focus on enhancing student resilience and wellbeing, acknowledging the emotional and psychological challenges many learners face. She is particularly committed to developing practical, evidence-informed strategies to support student learning and engagement. More recently, her work has explored the potential of generative AI tools to enhance rather than undermine student learning. Sarah is an active member of the University's Artificial Intelligence Educational Innovation Operations (AIEIO) group and co-convenor of the Surrey Reflections on Generative AI in Education (SURGE) Community of Practice.

Nayiri Keshishi is a Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences and Programme Lead for Social Sciences Foundation Year. Nayiri specialises in education with a focus on legal studies, alongside expertise in professional and academic skills development. Their research explores effective teaching methodologies in legal education and strategies to enhance student engagement and success, aiming to equip learners with the critical skills necessary for both academic and professional growth.

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Laura Hamilton is a Lecturer in Learning Development at the University of Surrey, working chiefly with the Psychology foundation year programme. Laura has worked in the field of learning development since 2017 at various HEI's across the country. Her interests include working in partnership with lecturers to integrate learning development opportunities into the curriculum, and learning from one-to-one work with students to improve her practice and empower learners to develop their academic confidence during their time at university.

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