**34 HAPPINESS IS CONTAGIOUS TOO: CARING FOR EACH OTHER MAKES US FEEL BETTER**

The coronavirus crisis is giving the planet opportunities for positive change that it cannot afford to waste, according to experts involved in the eighth annual World Happiness Report.

Finland remains number one for the third year running, while the UK has edged up the table, rising from 15th place to 13th. The report – compiled by a group of independent experts and produced by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network – uses six variables to measure the quality of life in more than 150 countries worldwide: GDP per capita; social support; healthy life expectancy; freedom; generosity and absence of corruption.

Research has long shown that co-operation and social support are fundamental to happiness; the coronavirus crisis will speed up changes. To get through this we’re going to have to develop a much higher level of social responsibility. Some people are going to have to stay in quarantine, and others are going to have to support them to do that. It will encourage a move from an atomised society to a much more caring one.

Vanessa King, lead psychologist for Action for Happiness which is the UK partner organisation to the World Happiness Report, said: “What we know is that social factors and trust are at least as important as income and being healthy – and also they’re particularly buffering to the psychological welfare of those who are hardest hit. In this crisis, the more we can create social trust and support and connect with others, despite being isolated, the better we will be – and the rosier a future we’ll build.”

So looking out for others is key, not only to their welfare but also to our own, said King. “You might think you’re doing it for others but you’re also doing it for yourself: it’s win-win.”

Powerlessness doesn’t make people happy, but taking control – even in chaotic circumstances like a pandemic – goes a long way to help us cope. “People are finding it hard to focus and that’s entirely understandable. What I’d suggest is that you try to be really clear about your intentions. Don’t get sucked into a continual stream of news: decide at what points in the day you’re going to update yourself. Think about who you need to support – both in your immediate family, and the community around you.”

Active coping is vital. “Trying to do something rather than doing nothing is extremely important for resilience. This is a real opportunity, and we need to recognise it as such. And don’t forget that coronavirus isn’t the only thing that’s contagious: happiness is contagious too, as well as fear. If you go outside, smile at people. It can and will make a huge difference.”

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