

# *positive activity lab* newsletter

Vol 2, issue 1, Summer 2025

## *About us*

*The Positive Activity Lab (PAL for short), a part of the Centre for Positive Health Sciences, is founded and led by Prof Jolanta Burke, CPsychol. Our team of researchers are passionate about advancing the field of Positive Health, with the mission of helping people live longer, healthier, and more fulfilling lives. We explore strategies that enhance health and wellbeing, using psychological assessments and physiological measures, offering subjective and objective data from which we can draw conclusions about Positive Health. Our work has attracted over €6 million in funding from sources such as the EU Interreg, Erasmus+ KA220, Science Foundation Ireland, the Irish Research Council (Research Ireland), Enterprise Ireland, the Health Research Board, and other organisations.*

## *Find Us*

Follow us for project updates:  
@RCSI\_PosHealth and  
@JolantaBurke

For more research at the Centre: [click here](#)

For VNiC Health in Nature Project: [click here](#)

For PsyTales Project: [click here](#)

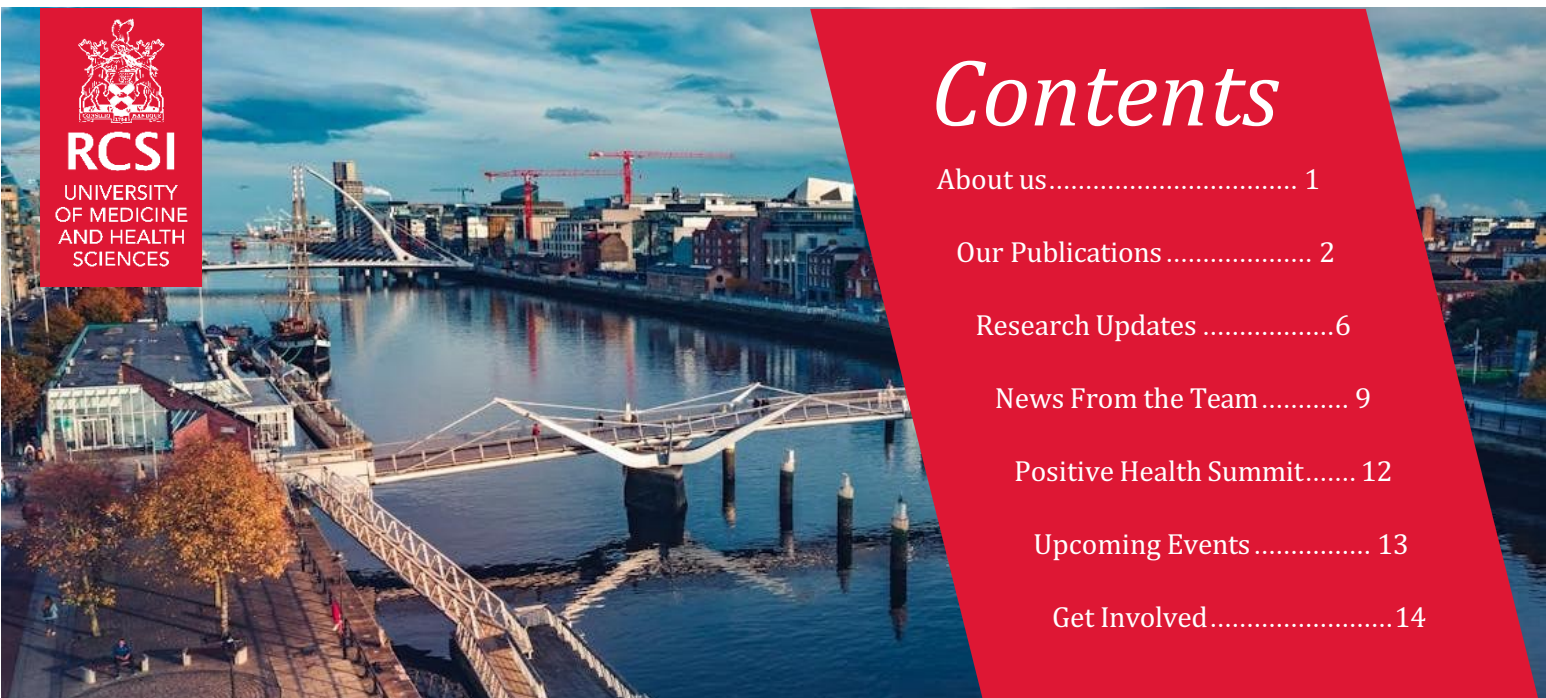
For Forest4Youth: [click here](#)

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SCIENCES





# Our Publications

For the most up to date dive into our exciting research, take a look at our most recent publications:

Burke, J., Scott, C., & Corrigan, S. (2025). From bees to community bliss: Exploring the effects of a beekeeping intervention on a rural community's wellbeing.  
[https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/dy6uf\\_v1](https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/dy6uf_v1)

Participating in a pro-enviro intervention resulted in community's improvement in PERMA elements of wellbeing, increased autonomy, a sense of purpose, and opportunities for meaningful contribution, and transitioning from self-focused concerns to a collective mindset.

Irmischer, K., Cans, M. I., Burke, J., & Sweeney, A. (2024). Self-compassion enhances intuitive eating patterns in middle-aged adults. *Journal of Happiness and Health*, 63-70.  
<https://doi.org/10.47602/johah.v4i2.72>

The article explored self-compassion and intuitive eating patterns. Our unique research showed that practising compassion towards self could help people improve their BMI by engaging in more intuitive eating practice.

Kelly, R., & Burke, J. (2025). Coaching for heart health and recovery. In J. Passmore, B. Bajaj, L.G. Oades (eds.), *The health and wellbeing coaches' handbook: A practitioner's guide for clinicians, coaches and health professionals*. Routledge.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003319016>

In this chapter we the international coaching practice of individuals who have suffered a heart attack or with cardiovascular disease. We then proposed a Positive Health Coaching model as a potential for helping patients.

Scott, C., Burke, J., & Collins, M.E. (2025). Coaching for oral health. In J. Passmore, B. Bajaj, L.G. Oades (eds.), *The health and wellbeing coaches' handbook: A practitioner's guide for clinicians, coaches and health professionals*. Routledge.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003319016>

This chapter explored a range of approaches used in coaching individuals for oral health. It identified circumstances when such coaching can prove beneficial and it explored positive health models as a foundation for engaging in oral health.

Garvey, A. (2025). The wellbeing benefits of Solution Focused Practice for helping professionals. In Routledge eBooks (pp. 124-132).  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003519225-14>

This chapter describes some wellbeing benefits that Solution Focused Practice (SFP) has for healthcare workers who adopt this approach, using examples from research and practice.



## Our Publications

Dunne, P. J., Byrne, E., Author & Duggan, A. (2025). Meliotropism: A new concept in positive health sciences and human flourishing [Preprint]. PsyArXiv.

This article introduces a new concept called “Meliotropism” which indicates an individual’s orientation towards wellness. Our centre has conceptualised it in the context of Positive Health.

Burke, J. & Campbell, S., & Kaleta, B. (in press). Greening the mind: A systematic scoping review of literature exploring the impact of environmental education on wellbeing through the positive psychological lens. *Frontiers in Education*.

The literature search included 285, out of which 10 studies were included. Environmental education showed to enhance emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing, although the extent of these effects varies.

Al Ghanim, S., Kaleta, B., Burke, J., Campbell, S., & O’Keeffe, J., & Burke, J. (in press). Nature’s Heart: A Scoping Review of the Impact of Nature-Based Interventions for Cardiovascular and Metabolic Disease. *Journal of Public Health*

The literature search included 255 articles, out of which 22 studies were included. The results showed that NBIs positively impact indicators of cardiovascular and cardiometabolic diseases such as blood pressure or blood glucose

Loughnane, C., Burke, J., Byrne, E., Iglesias-Cans, M., Scott, C., Collins, M., Bretherton, R., O’Donovan, R., van Nieuwerburgh, C., & Dunne, P.J. (in press). Positive Health Coaching: A conceptual analysis. *Frontiers in Public Health*.

This article explores the theories and frameworks upon which the concept of Positive Health Coaching practiced at RCSI is based.

Kaleta, J. & Campbell, S., O’Keeffe, J., & Burke, J. (in press). Nature-Based Interventions: A Systematic Review of Reviews. *Frontiers in Psychology - Environmental Psychology*

The review included a total of 61 reviews of NBIs and it identified 11 types of nature-based interventions, e.g. horticulture, nature exposure, nature play. They were either passive or active; nature was their primary or secondary focus.

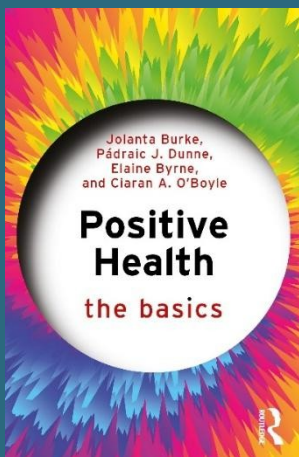
# Our Books

We like to keep busy here at PAL, which is why we are working on two new books!

We have signed a Routledge book deal with Prof. Aaron Jarden from the University of Melbourne, Tayyab Rashid from Harvard University, and Dr. Roger Bretherton from RCSI. This book, titled '**Frontiers in Wellbeing Sciences**', will be available in Spring 2026.

Additionally, we are collaborating with Dr. Liana Lianov to write another book for Routledge titled '**Positive Health from A to Z**'. This will be a comprehensive guide to positive health terminology, and will be available in early 2026.

Since our last newsletter (Autumn 2024) we have published 2 books. Please click on the books for details.



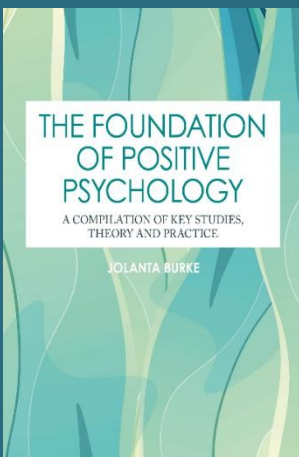
This is our Centre for Positive Health Sciences team's latest book which explores all you need to know about Positive Health.

"First, this is a great book, easy to read and important."

- **Kathi Norman, PhD, creator of Positive Medicine**

"If you are involved in healthcare, education, training or simply are curious to learn how to add more life to your years, then this book is for YOU!"

- **Mark Rowe, PhD, author of The Vitality Mark**



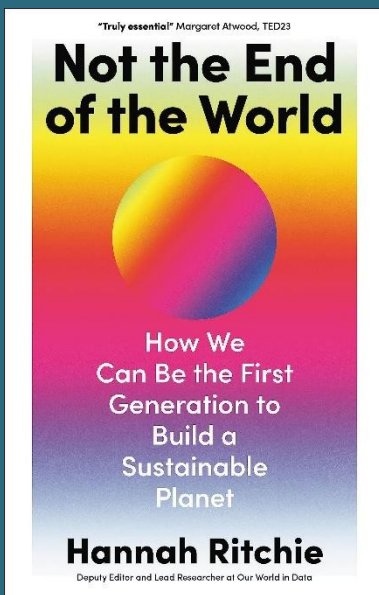
This is the first book in the world which describes all the key studies in Positive Psychology. It is a must-have for all students and anyone interested in learning all you need to know about Positive Psychology.

"A keystone resource and delightfully written guide for those new to the field of positive psychology, but also for those experienced as it uncovers hidden gems."

- **Dr Aaron Jarden, University of Melbourne, Australia**

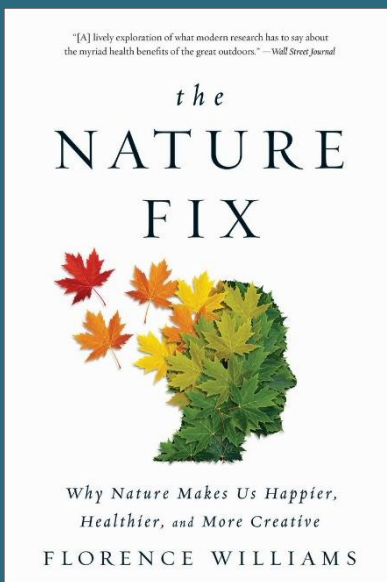


# Book Recommendations



“Not the End of the World by Dr Hannah Ritchie (a UK data scientist) offers an optimistic, data-driven perspective on global environmental challenges and potential solutions. She argues that prevailing negativity bias often fuels eco-despair, which especially impacts young people. Instead, she challenges alarmist narratives by analysing big data through the lens of WHO global public health indicators, giving counter arguments such as how deaths from air pollution are falling; why global life expectancy is actually rising; and the impact of worldwide declines in maternal mortality (to name a few). This myth-busting approach is full of energy and optimism. She reframes the climate crisis as a human (and therefore solvable) challenge. Her emphasis on resilience, systemic change, and human adaptability aligns with our field’s belief in growth, meaning, hope, and action.”

- Kate Brassington



“The Nature Fix is the perfect introduction to the science of how and why nature benefits us. Florence Williams, a science journalist, travels the world to talk to leading nature researchers and, by participating in the experiments, provides a digestible blend of science and storytelling. The book is now 8 years old, so it discusses the core assumptions and the early history of the field. It only made me wish someone wrote another one in 2025, as there are many more things we’ve learned since!”

- Branislav Kaleta



# *Current Research Updates*



## *Forest4Youth*

We been awarded €5.5 million by Interreg Europe (co-funded by the European Union) to play a leading role in Project Forest4Youth. This large-scale research project will bring the forest into mental health care for young people. It is the first of its kind, bringing together foresters, mental health professionals, adolescents in psychiatric care, and their families.

Over the next 4 years, we will create a wide range of nature-based tools that adolescents, their families, mental health professionals, and foresters can use to improve young people's health and wellbeing. RCSI joins CNP St-Martin and other partner organisations across five countries: Ireland, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, & Germany.

**Funded by EU Interreg**

## *Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder*

*What is the wellbeing of those living with FASD, and how can Ireland support them?*

Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder which occurs when a foetus is exposed to alcohol. This includes if either parent drinks during the 6 weeks before conception. Ireland has the third highest prevalence of FASD in the world, and yet very little is known about it. This is why we are very excited to announce our research in collaboration with FASD Ireland. Dr Jolanta Burke and Angel Harper have been working closely with Tristan Casson-Rennie and his team to assess how Ireland manages FASD, and the wellbeing of

We are currently conducting a survey to assess mental health and wellbeing in people living with FASD. If you are interested in the project, or in taking part, contact Angel Harper at: [angelharper@rcsi.com](mailto:angelharper@rcsi.com).

Furthermore, we had an amazing time at the FASD Ireland conference on the 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2025. We had the opportunity to discuss our research, along with other professionals in the field such as Professor Raja Mukherjee and Professor Farhana Sharif.

**Funded by FASD Ireland**

# *PsyTales Project*

*How can storytelling improve health and wellbeing attitudes and behaviours?*

We are delighted to share that as part of our project, we have developed the first batch of tales. Please go to our [Tales Library](#) to read them with your students. PsyTales team has also released a [Pedagogical Booklet](#) for educators and parents; this comprehensive guide supporting educators and young people in primary schools across Europe. how they can use our psychology-informed tales. These tales can be used to help children not only practice their reading skills, but also explore aspects of their personal and social development. For any aspiring writers, we have also released a [free online course](#) for anyone interested in learning about how to write your own tales. The course is complete with a certificate of completion and consists of five modules.

We will soon begin testing our tales in schools in Ireland, Belgium, France, Lithuania and Greece. If you would like your school to participate in this project, please reach out to us via email at [branislavkaleta@rcsi.com](mailto:branislavkaleta@rcsi.com).

**Funded by Erasmus+ KA220**



## *Greening the Mind*

*What positive activities can enhance societal wellbeing while also helping to protect the planet?*

We conducted experimental study and collected both qualitative and quantitative data, as well as a systematic review of existing interventions that aimed to achieve similar results. Our research found that not all pro-environmental interventions lead to positive wellbeing incomes. A more generic intervention that encourages participants to action is more effective in improving their wellbeing than an intervention that encourages them to reflect on what they can do to boost the wellbeing of the planet and individuals. This research adds value to the fourth wave of positive psychology.

**Funded by Irish Research Council**

# VNiC Health Project

*This project aimed to explore the impact of quality natural space on the physiological health and wellbeing.*

For the last 2 years, we have been working on this amazing project and explored ways in which we can enhance individuals' wellbeing through access to quality nature. We explored how simple walk across a high- and low-quality space improves our physiological health, reduces our stress and enhances our wellbeing. We are in the middle of publishing a series of ten academic papers relating to this project and as soon as the publications are confirmed, we will share with you all our findings. We wish to extend our sincere gratitude to the Ballymun (Dublin) community, who have been involved in our data collection.

**Funded by the Science Foundation Ireland**

## Flourishing Nurses and Midwives

*What are the multigenerational leadership tools for enhancing the retention, health, and wellbeing of nurses and midwives?*

Having conducted interviews with nurses and midwives, we have seen the passion and pride that goes into this profession. Many express a deep desire to improve the HSE services, but they acknowledge some of the challenges of working with different age groups: different cultural attitudes and work ethics have led to miscommunications and misunderstandings. We have been working closely with HSE hospitals across the country in order to distribute a survey to nurses and midwives across Ireland. This will assess their intent to leave, job crafting, psychological safety, and professional identity. We aim to identify generational differences in these factors to offer insight into how leaders can adapt their leadership style to suit the needs of a multigenerational workforce.

**Funded by the National Clinical Leadership Centre**

## Prudence

*This project involves a design of a 4-week educational programme the aim of which is to adolescents' character strength of prudence to reduce cyberbullying and improve wellbeing.*

This research is a collaboration of Prof. Burke with Joan Finley from the University of Limerick. Joan has designed a programme for students in post-primary schools which includes learning about what prudence is, learning a song about how cool prudence is and a range of tools that encourage young people to develop their strength of prudence. We are in the middle of collecting data for this project and as soon as it is available, we will share the results.

The study is based on Prof Burke's research with almost 2,799 adolescents from Ireland, which has shown that one character strength that predicts all non-aggressive behaviour (as a target and perpetrator) online and offline was Prudence. [Click here](#) to read the article.

**Funded by the Irish Teachers' Council**



# *News From the Team*

## *PhD Students*

We are excited to announce the addition of three new PhD students to our team!



Kate Brassington is a Coaching Psychologist (GMBPsS) and PCC ICF-certified Trauma-Informed Coach. From her attic in Luxembourg, she works worldwide with non-traditional leaders, solo entrepreneurs, and couples, helping people face major life changes. She believes differences — whether from adversity, neurodivergence, or identity — are strengths, not deficits. Her research on resilience training in high-risk occupations was published in JPP (2020), and her current independent project explores first-time coaching experiences for people with past adversity.



Branislav Kaleta is a researcher studying nature using neuroscience and positive psychology. He holds a Master's degree in Psychology with a focus on Neuroscience and Neuroimaging, and applies neuroscience in exploring nature's benefits on our psychological, physical, and emotional health. His favourite research area is the emotion of awe, which is closely tied to people's experiences of nature and provides countless benefits for people's health and wellbeing. Hiking through the mountains of his home country, Slovakia, is his favourite way of experiencing awe.



Sara Hirschorn holds a Master's degree in Applied Positive Psychology, and her research areas of interest are personal growth and authenticity. Sara's PhD at RCSI will focus on exploring the role of early relational trauma, the nervous system and a polyvagal-informed somatic intervention in authenticity and wellbeing. This will draw on interdisciplinary evidence from somatic therapies and include an exploration of how early relational trauma and nervous system dysregulation may unknowingly affect more of the population than traditionally understood, and unconsciously stand in the way of authenticity and personal growth.



### *Our Team is Expanding!*

We have four new positions opening up, and we cannot wait to welcome new members to our team. We have new vacancies for:

- Two research assistants (2 years)
- One research assistant (1 year)
- Two Post-Doctoral Researchers (2 years)

### *Medical Students*

Our centre hosted two medical students over the course of six weeks, Ana Roberson and Nicole Ekendilichuwu. During this short time, Ana and Nicole did fantastic work conducting literature reviews on nature prescribing.

### *Research Funding Won*

We are delighted to announce that our team, in collaboration with St Martin Psychiatric Hospital in Belgium and other partners across 5 EU countries, won EU Interreg Funding worth 5.5 million over 4 years.

### *Prof. Jolanta Burke*

- Prof Jolanta Burke has been promoted to a new position of Associate Professor at RCSI.
- Prof. Burke and Stephen Campbell, a research assistant at RCSI, were invited to the Houses of Oireachtas to present their research project report on behalf of Variety Charity for Children about the impact of tricycles on the wellbeing of children and their families.
- Want to know how to overcome the 'birthday blues'? Read Prof. Burke's new article in the [Conversation today!](#)
- Prof. Burke has chaired an episode of "RCSI My Health Series" about "Sleep for life: A toolkit for resting deeply at every stage of life", with guest speakers Prof. Annie Curtis, Prof. Richard Costello, and Mr Motty Varghese.
- Click the image to listen to the episode!

**Sleep through the lifecycle:**  
A toolkit for resting deeply  
at every stage of life  
13 May 2025

For more information visit [rcsi.com/MyHealth](https://rcsi.com/MyHealth)

### *FASD Ireland Conference*

Angel Harper and Prof. Jolanta Burke attended the first ever FASD Ireland conference to showcase their research on wellbeing on those living with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. It was fantastic to see over 200 people come together to share their knowledge and life experience.



### *World Conference on Forests and Parks for Public Health (Luxembourg)*

Bran' o Kaleta was a panellist on the topic of Environmental Education, where he talked about the benefits of awe, nature play, and nature-based education.



### *Psychology, Health and Medicine Annual Conference 2025 May 27*

Bran' o Kaleta presented the VNiC-Health project through a presentation about the benefits of urban green spaces on physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing at the Psychology, Health and Medicine Annual Conference 2025 by the British Psychological Society in Belfast.

### *Introducing our brand new MSc in Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP)*

We are introducing a brand-new Master's program in Positive Psychology. Prof. Jolanta Burke will be the programme director, and we cannot wait to enrol our first students.

This transformative, fully online Level 9 programme offers a deep, research-led exploration of advanced topics such as systems-based well-being, the challenges of applying positive psychology in practice, and real-world healthcare applications.

This course is a Level 9 award on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications.

For more information, [click here](#).



# *Positive Health Summit 2025*

The Positive Health Summit took place on the 31<sup>st</sup> January at the grand RCSI 123 building. We were delighted to host over 100 people, having completely sold out of tickets! Funded by the Health Research Board, we brought together researchers and experts to discuss the most recent research on how to best enhance health. Covering a range of topics such as flourishing with disease, nature-based interventions, and a presentation on authenticity by Prof. Stephen Joseph. We hope to see you all again next year!



At PAL, we were able to show-off our exciting research in the VNIC project. Prof. Jolanta Burke and Branislav Kaleta presented our research findings on improving wellbeing in urban green spaces.

To access the summit presentations and resources, you can [click here](#).



# *Upcoming Events*

## *ECPP 2026*

Want to showcase your ground-breaking research to experts from across Europe? Early bird registration and abstract submission is now open! Don't miss out on the chance to listen to renowned keynote speakers – sign up [here](#)!

Our theme is “Body Meets Mind: Positive Psychology and Health for Everyone”, a fantastic opportunity to showcase health approaches from both a psychological and biological perspective. If you'd like to get involved, put a date in the diary for the applications for abstract submissions on 1st June 2025. We look forward to seeing you there! To keep up to date, check out our website: <https://www.ecpp2026.com>

The president of the European Network for Positive Psychology, Prof Charles Martin-Krumm, visited our Centre for Positive Health Sciences with his wife Marie to discuss the progress of our preparation for the EU conference in 2026. Having toured the Convention Centre Dublin and the Aviva Stadium in preparation for our conference, we cannot wait to see the final product in July next year. We were delighted to share with Charles all the research we do by our PAL research team and look forward to collaborating with him in the future.



We are also excited to announce our Scientific Committee, who will be working hard to select our speakers and workshops for the conference; Prof Jolanta Burke, Dr Pa'draic Dunne, Dr Aaron Jarden, Dr Roger Bretherton, Dr Claudia Harzer, Helena Agueda Marujo, Svala Sigurðardo'ttir, and Branislav Kaleta. Look out on social media for more information coming soon!



## *Get Involved*

### *Academic Programmes*

- [MSc in Applied Positive Psychology Well-being and Health](#)
- [Introduction to Lifestyle Medicine](#)
- [Leading Workplace Health and Wellbeing](#)
- [Professional Diploma in Positive Health](#)
- [Positive Health Coaching MSc](#)

### *Free Online Courses*

We have three free online courses, curated by professionals in the field to provide an overview of various topics:

[The Science of Health and Happiness](#)

[The Science of Health and Happiness as We Age](#)

[The Science of Health and Happiness for Young People](#)

### *Design a Beautiful Day*

We all need a day for ourselves, dedicated time to relax and to look after your mind and body. We can practice this by having a Beautiful Day – a day designed by and for us. You can consider it a Mental Health Day or a Holiday, as it is designed to make you feel happy and rested. Here are the steps you can follow to design your own:

1. What activities give rise to positive emotions? Focus on things that are realistic and achievable, such as spending time with a friend, reading a book, or enjoying your favourite meal.
2. Plan out your day, focusing on doing things that make you happy, but are feasible for you to do.
3. Enjoy your beautiful day!
4. Reflect – savour your positive memories and feelings, perhaps document them in a journal or scrapbook. And get ready to plan your next one!