

INNER COMPASS

Mental Wellbeing Survey in Ivybridge and Surrounding Areas

Executive Summary

How might Ivybridge (and surrounding parishes) best weather the impending mental-health storm that is brewing around COVID-19?

The questions in this survey were answered prior to the Corona Virus. Annotations have been added explaining the importance of mental wellbeing in the current climate. It also suggests practical ideas on sharing wellbeing in the wider community during this crisis.

Introduction

Ivybridge is one of the many communities around the world facing a turbulent future of uncertainty (with the COVID-19 pandemic). This questionnaire about mental wellbeing points towards a robust and simple philosophy on mental health that is relevant, especially in light of the current COVID-19.

Medical advice is constantly being updated with regards to the physical implications of the virus (as of March 16th 2020). There are also concerns being voiced about the mental health issues associated with the heightened worry, anxiety and fear. (Here is a link to WHO report on mental wellbeing https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf?sfvrsn=6d3578af_2)

The original questionnaire asked general questions about wellbeing and stress (this was prior to COVID-19). I have annotated the report with notes that highlight the relevance to supporting the community through the next few weeks and months in the light of COVID-19.

Creating a thriving community in uncertain times

The questionnaire showed that many people realise that worry and anxiety is caused by excessive thinking. At some level people are aware that their mental distress is caused by over-thinking.

However, the questionnaire also highlights a misunderstanding around wellbeing. People believe that mental wellbeing is dependent on certain circumstances and outcomes. This is an area that the Inner Compass can best support people.

It will be easy (in the fast-paced changing news and advice) to excessively worry and feel anxious about the future and what may or may not happen. If the following two areas are better understood then this can be transformational for people in their lives:

1. Wellbeing and resilience are inbuilt – these qualities are the default setting of humans

INNER COMPASS

Mental Wellbeing Survey in Ivybridge and Surrounding Areas

2. Excessive over-thinking can cloud wellbeing (but never obliterate it). Our thinking is not to be believed.

Next steps:

**** In light of COVID-19 these steps are adapted to suit the current situation – but are likely to change as new and evolving information comes in:**

- To start a Wellbeing Facebook group for Ivybridge and surrounding area
- To offer a free pilot introduction to Wellbeing Listeners online programme for the community
- If pilot is successful to roll out free introduction programmes over coming weeks (intention to provide a safe online space for the community to engage and support whilst educating them about wellbeing)
- To continue sending out the #Ivybridgewellbeing weekly email offering positive stories from around Ivybridge and surrounding parishes.

INNER COMPASS

Mental Wellbeing Survey in Ivybridge and Surrounding Areas

OVERVIEW OF IVYBRIDGE TOWN

Ivybridge has a population of around 12,000 people. It is at the meeting point for 4 parishes, Cornwood, Ermington, Ugborough and Harford.

There are various sports facilities including Ivybridge Rugby Club, Football Club, Leisure Centre (and pool) and Indoor Tennis club.

There are four primary schools (Manor Park, Stowford, The Erme and Woodlands) and a secondary school come sixth form – Ivybridge Community College.

It is about 10 miles from the city of Plymouth. There is a train station (with links to London and Penzance) and is on a bus route to Exeter, Plymouth, Newton Abbot and Totnes and Paignton.

There are various shops within the town, Hardware, Supermarkets, Bakeries, Coffee shops, Clothes shops, Charity shops, Pet shop, Shoe shops, Hairdressers, Estate agents, health food shop plus a variety of take-aways. The town also has a variety of pubs, a bank and a library and venue hub (including cinema and entertainment) at the Watermark.

The town is just outside the Dartmoor National Park, on the Southern edge of the moor. According to Wikipedia:

“Although occasionally referred to as a dormitory town, many people work in the town itself, and agriculture continues to play an economic role for Ivybridge's hinterland. The area surrounding Ivybridge is almost completely farmland.”

What was the purpose of the questionnaire?

The #Ivybridgewellbeing questionnaire had three intentions:

- 1) Intention: To reach out and better understand what people think about wellbeing in the town:
 - a. Has this been achieved? Yes, this has been fulfilled with valuable ideas about what people see around stressful thinking and wellbeing
- 2) Intention: To engage in conversations:
 - a. Has this been achieved? Yes in two ways. Firstly, the questionnaire helped me reach out to the community and continue to engage in different conversations in the town. Secondly, a spin off from the questionnaire has been an exploration into some of the groups/societies that meet in the town. I've been meeting and recording podcast interviews with different 'unsung heroes'/group leaders.
- 3) Intention: To discover whether participants are aware of the 'Inner Compass' metaphor around wellbeing. In other words, do people see that wellbeing is a constant and resilience is inbuilt? Do they understand that the only thing taking

INNER COMPASS

Mental Wellbeing Survey in Ivybridge and Surrounding Areas

them away from wellbeing is their thinking (which is transient) and not circumstances?

- a. Has this been achieved? The questionnaire answers have given an indication that people see wellbeing very differently than the way I see it. Whilst there are some intuitive ideas about stress and wellbeing that coincide with mine – in the main people aren't talking about stress and wellbeing in the ways that I see it. If people were to see the nature of wellbeing and resilience as inbuilt and constant, then I believe this could make a real difference in developing the town as a thriving community founded on wellbeing. In each section I reflect on this further.

What questions were asked?

The three questions that were asked were:

- 1) Have you experienced stressful, anxious or worried thinking? If yes – what in your view causes that thinking?
- 2) When you feel good about yourself and you experience mental wellbeing – what is going on for you?
- 3) What would you like to see in Ivybridge to support a community with thriving wellbeing?

The context of the survey

29 people took part. There were a variety of way answers were sent in. Via online survey tool (21 people responded online), email and messenger. Some answers were just 3 words – some were 300+ words. The majority gave a short sentence in response.

What do people see as stressful, anxious or worried thinking?

Question 1: Have you experienced stressful, anxious or worried thinking? If yes – what in your view causes that thinking?

Everyone had experienced stressful and worried thinking and they went on to explain what they thought caused that thinking. The answers broadly fell in to two categories:

- 1) People saw that stressful thinking is caused by circumstances ie external events or activities
- 2) People saw that stressful thinking is caused by excessive mental activity (worry/overthinking).

1.External circumstances causes stress:

Let's first look at the answers given to those who see stressful thinking is caused by external circumstances. There were various ideas about the causes of stress. The two highest areas identified by people as a cause of stress included:

- Work: 1 in 5 people blamed work as a cause of stress.
- Family/Relationships: 1 in 5 cited their family or relationship as a cause of stress.

INNER COMPASS

Mental Wellbeing Survey in Ivybridge and Surrounding Areas

Other areas that were mentioned were people getting concerned about future events, the past, health, money, aging and lack of control of their circumstances.

2.Excessive mental activity causes stress

Many respondents saw that their internal mental activity as the cause of stress. 55% of people specifically mentioned things like overwhelm, mental health, anxiety or over-thinking as the causes. This was the answer that saw the most consensus. There is an intuitive understanding that *unnecessary* over-thinking is the cause of stressful and anxious thinking.

Inner Compass reflections on Question 1

The responses around excessive mental activity have been of particularly of interest to me. The work around the Inner Compass (and listening for wellbeing) helps people better understand the dynamic of what is going on around their thinking. The cultural assumption is that we need to rev up our thinking in order to overcome challenging situations. The opposite is true.

****In light of COVID-19 this understanding about thinking and stress could be extremely helpful. Many people have excessive thinking about loved ones, jobs, money, isolation – this can lead to a sense of helplessness and overwhelm. If people engage in more revved-up thinking to try and ‘solve’ their worries, they are likely to find themselves more deeply mired in overwhelm and stress.****

The work of the Inner Compass is to point people to their deeper intelligence, their source of wellbeing and resilience, which then naturally negates the perceived need to over-think.

What do people understand about wellbeing?

When you feel good about yourself and you experience mental wellbeing – what is going on for you?

There were two areas that were seen as important for wellbeing.

- Nature/exercise: Just over 1 in 3 people knew that walking/nature and exercise was key to wellbeing.
- Social connection: Just under 1 in 3 people cited the importance of social interaction and connection.

Words used to describe the experience of wellbeing included feeling lighter, a sense of freedom, being creative, feeling productive and being in the present moment.

Other areas that people attributed wellbeing to were diet, time, family and sleep.

INNER COMPASS

Mental Wellbeing Survey in Ivybridge and Surrounding Areas

Inner Compass reflections on Question 2

Wellbeing and resilience are central areas in the work of the Inner Compass. We enable people to realise that wellbeing and resilience are innate and inbuilt.

When people start to see how over-thinking can cloud over innate wellbeing, they also start to realise that wellbeing naturally flows when they aren't in a revved-up state of mind.

The two areas that the respondents highlighted (nature/exercise and social connection) are actually examples of people experiencing their innate wellbeing. Their wellbeing isn't *caused* by nature/exercise or social connection, it naturally flows when we aren't clouded in our minds and over-thinking.

Nature/exercise and social connection are catalysts that enable people to trust their deeper intuitive wellbeing and *rest* their minds. In the absence of an over-active mind their natural wellbeing is present.

It's important for people to realise that they don't need to do anything in particular to achieve wellbeing as an outcome – mental wellbeing is in-built.

If wellbeing is seen as something to achieve by doing an activity, then we often beat ourselves up when we don't do this.

It is much more helpful to realise that wellbeing (and resilience) is our natural default.

****In the light of COVID-19 this fundamental understanding that mental wellbeing is innate can be life-changing. When people understand that their wellbeing can never be destroyed (only temporarily covered by thinking) then they are able to navigate challenging circumstances with more ease****

What would people like in Ivybridge around wellbeing opportunities

What would you like to see in Ivybridge to support a community with thriving wellbeing?

The majority of people (just over 80%) thought that further groups or drop-ins or events might be helpful towards supporting wellbeing. Ideas varied from arts and crafts, social groups, cafes, choir, family events, drop in centre and mental health support. There was a real sense that additional groups or activities might be helpful.

INNER COMPASS

Mental Wellbeing Survey in Ivybridge and Surrounding Areas

Other ideas that people raised looked towards areas like collaboration between community groups, better transport links and engaging with Timebank (an organisation promoting volunteer opportunities).

Inner Compass Reflections on Question 3

Many people seem to think that an answer to wellbeing is to develop further groups and societies to provide opportunities of social engagement/connection. Do we actually need further groups?

Ivybridge has a great number of existing groups providing opportunities to connect around coffee, toddlers, church, arts and crafts, gardening, weight-watching, karate, tai-chi, judo, scouting a local cinema, library and event hub (and many more). My assertion is that we don't need further groups. The question then is:

- a) Why aren't people aren't engaging in what's already there?

It's easy to speculate about this. There are ideas like lack of information, time, energy and financial restraints: but what if there was something else going on? What if wellbeing wasn't dependent on a group or activity, what if people saw wellbeing was inbuilt?

Here at the Inner Compass we are very curious about Ivybridge residents starting to understand the nature of wellbeing (as a constant in their lives). We also see a great power in them listening out for their wellbeing and the wellbeing in others. What if people started to understand the impact of revved up thinking? What if they realised they didn't need to trust their thinking to be true? What if they saw that wellbeing wasn't the outcome of going to a group or engaging in an activity? What if they saw that wellbeing and resilience is inbuilt? These are the questions that the Inner Compass sees at the heart of community engagement and wellbeing.

The aspiration of the Inner Compass is to provide opportunities and a space in the community for people to get in touch with their wellbeing. Once people understand the nature of wellbeing and thinking – that wellbeing is inbuilt and over-thinking can temporarily cloud your wellbeing – they find it more easeful to navigate through life.

****In light of COVID-19 we see that online training and conversations around mental wellbeing could be key. When people start to realise that they have pre-existing wellbeing and that mental wellbeing is built into the psychological system – then they will be able to better navigate the uncharted and unprecedented situation that we find ourselves in globally****

Summary

INNER COMPASS

Mental Wellbeing Survey in Ivybridge and Surrounding Areas

The #Ivybridgewellbeing survey has shown a variety of different ideas around stressful thinking and wellbeing. In essence respondents showed that they saw a mixture of life circumstances and over-thinking as the cause of worried and anxious thinking.

When it came to wellbeing they believed that exercise/nature and social connection was often present when they experienced wellbeing.

When it came to suggesting wellbeing opportunities in Ivybridge, ideas mainly included further clubs, activities or events to engage in.

The Inner Compass is keen to develop a community founded on wellbeing and sees that the next step is to explore ways to share two key areas that appear to be overlooked by respondents:

3. Wellbeing and resilience are inbuilt – these qualities are the default setting of humans
4. Excessive over-thinking can cloud wellbeing (but never obliterate it). Our thinking is not to be believed.

Next steps:

**** In light of COVID-19 these steps are adapted to suit the current situation – but are likely to change as new and evolving information comes in:**

- **To start a Wellbeing Facebook group for Ivybridge and surrounding area**
- **To offer a free pilot introduction to Wellbeing Listeners online programme for the community**
- **If pilot is successful to roll out free introduction programmes over coming weeks**
- **To continue sending out the #Ivybridgewellbeing weekly email offering positive stories from around Ivybridge and surrounding parishes.**