

Hannah Hutchison

Happiness consultancy

MACS325, “Happiness: investigating its causes and conditions”

Autumn session, 2010

Media and Cultural Studies, University of Wollongong

Subject coordinators: Chris Barker and Brian Martin

The happiness consultancy assignment had two parts. For details of the assignment see http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/MACS325_10outline.pdf

1. A report for an organisation, prepared by a team of students.

Hannah Hutchison, Miriam Hutchison and Brooke Mead, working as a team, prepared a report for the Kiama Men’s Probus Choir, in the form of a slide show. The slide show is a separate file.

2. Reflections on doing the consultancy, written separately by each member of the team as an individual task.

Hannah Hutchison’s reflections — selected arbitrarily by Brian Martin from those written by the three team members — start on the next page. (Student numbers were used so that the marker, Brian Martin, would not know the identity of student authors.)

This document is located at http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/MACS325_10tops/.

Kiama Men's PROBUS Choir

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Happiness Consultancy Report:

The happiness consultancy our group conducted was with the Kiama Men's PROBUS Choir. I chose this group as I had relatively easy access to this group via my uncle who is the pianist for the choir and I also thought this group would be a great group to do because they are a well-known group within the Kiama area for their fantastic performances and inspiring attitude. I made contact with my uncle by email who then contacted the three organisers of the group who expressed that they were more than happy for our group to conduct our consultancy on the PROBUS choir. I also obtained information about the Kiama PROBUS choir through my uncle who explained a little about the group. The Kiama Men's PROBUS Choir is made up of about 30 men who are all retired, ranging in ages from their mid 70's to mid 90's from a range of different backgrounds. The choir usually has two performances a month at retirement villages and schools around the Illawarra area and rehearse every Monday at the CWA hall in Kiama from 11am-1pm. I also obtained information about the choir through newspaper articles on the internet and also through my interviewees. The interviewees explained that in order to be a member of the Men's PROBUS Choir, you must first be a member of the Kiama Men's PROBUS and then you are free to join the choir. I also discovered through my interviewees that there are in excess of 12 PROBUS clubs within the Kiama/Gerringong/Jamberoo area and you must be a member of the Kiama PROBUS to join the choir as being a member of other clubs does not count towards being a member of the choir.

We attended two rehearsals to observe the group and their dynamics and interactions. We then explained to the group that we were conducting a happiness consultancy and asked the group for their permission to conduct the research and also if we could have eight volunteers to conduct interviews with. The group were more than happy for us to observe their rehearsal and eight eager volunteers gave us their names and numbers to carry out an interview. Each member of our group contacted our assigned interviewees and arranged interviews at times which best suited us. I contacted my interviewees by phone and arranged with them to conduct my interviews before rehearsals on a Monday morning at the Kiama Library. Both interviews were a success and really reflected how the PROBUS choir makes them happy.

We also attended one of the choir's performances at the Mayflower Retirement Village in Gerringong. Walking into the auditorium at the Retirement Village for the performance, the choir members faces demonstrated pure delight to see that we were attending the concert. All members were so excited to see us attending their performance as it was a great opportunity to see the group in a public arena and the different ways they interacted from the rehearsal space to the performance space. The performance was fantastic and it was truly amazing to see how the choir emotionally connected with the residents of Mayflower. Many of the residents recognised the songs and sang along with the choir, while others tapped a finger or a toe to show their appreciation for the music. It seemed evident that the music was changing their state of mind creating an overall positive and happy mood in the retirement village.

We got to know most members of the choir fairly well and built up a rapport and respect with them as they really appreciated the fact that we chose to do our assignment on them because in a sense they all felt like they were helping us (which they were indeed) and they also marvelled at the fact that we really took the time to get to know them and chat to them all individually. Similarly, we appreciated the fact that they allowed us to observe them and carry out interviews with them and as a thank you we put on morning tea for the group when we attended the last rehearsal to present our report to them. This was a great success and it was a real treat for them. Each and every one of the group thanked us with such sincerity for supplying the group with morning tea. We really felt as though this was the least we could do for the group for their amazing contributions to our research and their inspirational attitudes towards life really did impact me personally and I am so grateful for this.

The two theme areas we chose to focus on in relation to the choir and happiness were music and friendship and it is clear through our observations and interviews that these two theme areas are certainly contributing to the overall happiness of the choir. Surprisingly the level of happiness within the choir was much higher than I had anticipated and I learnt that all members of the choir really appreciate all aspects of life and do not take anything for granted which really does add to their overall sense of happiness. When sitting down with my interviewees it was evident how much the choir contributes to their sense of happiness as each of them had really thought about

the way it has made them happy. When rating the choir in relation to their happiness all interviewees expressed that the choir rated as a 9 or a 10 and the main reason for this was the joy the music and the singing brings to them and also the friendships they have formed during their membership of the choir. One of the interviewees expressed that “I am very encouraging to my fellow choir members and the sense of comradery we share as a group is like nothing I have ever experienced before” and this comradery was really quite evident to me as the researcher as the way the whole group made us feel as the researchers was really quite remarkable. They all made us feel so welcome and comfortable, and it was almost as if for the 3 weeks in which we conducted our research we were a part of the choir.

Friendship is certainly one of the most important aspects of joining the choir as most members join to meet new people or perhaps meet new friends and establish a support network after a loved one may have passed. Another interviewee stated that “PROBUS has given me the opportunity to make a lot more friendship and replace the one's you've lost, that's what happens when you get to our age” and it is evident that all members use these friendships to enrich their lives. M Demir suggests in his article *Friendship, Need Satisfaction and Happiness* (2009) that friendship quality is associated with happiness and friendship provides experiences where basic needs and happiness are satisfied. Demir proposes that friendships involve spending time together, developing trust and a strong bond which in turn predict happiness (p.256) and this idea is very apparent within the interactions in the PROBUS choir. I could relate these reactions from the choir to my own life and also learn from the member's attitude towards friendship as it is an aspect of their lives that they truly treasure. As we discussed in class friendships last longer than most objects and all of my friendships, especially my longest ones have really contributed to my own happiness over time.

Music was also one of the most important aspects of joining the choir as the joy and happiness that music has brought to the members is really quite clear, especially in the responses to the interview questions. One of the interviewees expressed that “I am always touched when we go to nursing homes and very elderly people watch our concerts. They can hardly move yet their eyes light up or they might tap a finger or a toe and you feel like you are reaching them through the

music and this just makes me feel so happy” and this demonstrates that the music is affecting not only their personal happiness, but also the happiness of others and this is the reason why the members participate in the choir because it feels as though they are doing something positive and giving back to the community. Koelsch, Offermanns and Franzke suggest in their article *Music in the treatment of affective disorders: An exploratory investigation of a new method for music-therapeutic research* (2010) that engagement in social functions such as music fulfils our basic human needs (like friendship) and is an important source for happiness and pleasure in our lives. The study referred to in this article also suggests that “music making increased the mood of individuals” (Koelsch, Offermanns and Franzke, 2010) and this was expressed by the interviewees as they all stated that making the music and singing the songs increases their moods. I learnt that this also related to my own life because when I sing it increases my mood and I also reflected back to my primary school days of being in the school choir and the fun and happiness I used to have in this environment. A very interesting article which explores this idea of the choir contributing to our sense of happiness is by Mary Cohen titled *Choral Singing and Prison Inmates: Influences of performing in a Prison Choir* (2009) which studies a particular prison and concludes with the idea that the inmates who were a member of the prison choir were much more happier than those that were not which really reflects again that singing, and in particular choral singing is something which can improve and contribute to ones sense of happiness.

We did not encounter any difficulties with the group as they were all easy to contact and easy to talk to and were more than happy for us to observe their rehearsals and also present our final report. All choir members were interested to note what we had included in our report and the recommendation they enjoyed the most was the suggestion of providing all members with sheet music to the songs and not just the lyrics to the songs as this would really aid in the preparation all members make for the songs. The organisers of the choir expressed that they will try and implement this recommendation along with the idea of giving choir members more of the decision in song choices- and this is something which was already present within the choir, with some of the members requesting songs to sing. We also presented the choir with bookmarks to use in their folders with all the lyrics of the songs in them and they really did love this idea too.

The book mark says 'Friendship, Comradery, Inspiration' and this really does sum up the whole choir and what they are about. The music director Wendy stated that "friendship and comradeship, we are all inspirational collectives from different aspects of life but have come together, music has brought us together" and this really is what the choir is about. The level of happiness they display as a group is really quite phenomenal and has definitely changed my life. They have taught me that it's the little things in life that really can make you happy and nothing should be taken for granted. The Kiama Men's PROBUS Choir really knows how to enjoy life and make the most of everyday and their level of happiness both individually and as a group and positive attitudes are truly inspirational.

References:

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