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# Au delà du bonheur: Comment les adolescents trouvent du sens en aidant les autres

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## Résumé

### Background:

Theoretical reflection on well-being has long distinguished between subjective well-being or "happiness" on the one hand, and activities involved in a life well-lived or "meaning" on the other. Research-actions and interventions have largely focused on the former, perhaps because they are viewed as more accessible, particularly with young people in an educational context. Recent research, however, has underlined the importance of examining meaning as well (e.g., Baumeister et al, 2013). The present research describes a pilot study designed to increase well-being in adolescents through student-led projects which yield a sense of connection and contribution to something larger than oneself.

### Method:

The MAAC program (Massively Accessible Actions for Change) is a ten week teacher-facilitated program designed to encourage students to start individual small-scale socially-oriented projects. The ideas for the projects come from the students themselves, and can include anything from writing a blog, creating a "de-stress" pack for classmates, or starting a non-profit association. The program is based on empirical research from multiple domains showing the importance of social connection and the positive emotions and increased self-esteem that come from helping others (e.g., Lieberman, 2013).

This pilot study was done in collaboration with a public lycée in Lyon, with a class of 30 students in Première. Each week for ten weeks, one of the authors (ER) accompanied the teacher in delivering the program, which guides students towards creating, planning, and executing the project through several key steps including:

- introduction to the program, planting the seed that they can make a difference
- brainstorming ideas, working from their strengths and interests
- breaking down the big ideas into manageable projects
- setting SMART goals and project management
- communication
- executing the project and reflection of future directions

### Results:

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We have yet to collect final data regarding feasibility and efficacy, but preliminary results are promising in at least two respects. First, students exhibited an unexpected lack of autonomy, and accompanying sense of disempowerment, at the beginning of the program, often lamenting that the problems facing the world were beyond their control. Yet, once this obstacle was overcome by breaking down the problems into manageable parts, the second reason for optimism was apparent in their motivation to engage in "actions for change." Examples, to be completed in May 2017, include doing a walk through the main axe of the city while giving crepes to people in need, creating "un arbre à vœux" in an urban square, distributing care packages to homeless people, and putting together "des boîtes à bonheur" for hospitalized children. Through his pilot study, we hope to gather qualitative data to further refine the program to distribute as free downloadable material to educators by September 2017.

NB: Although this abstract is in English, the oral presentation of this pilot study can be in French or English.

References:

Baumeister, R. F., Vohs, K. D., Aaker, J. L., & Garbinsky, E. N. (2013). Some key differences between a happy life and a meaningful life. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 8, 505-516.

Lieberman, M. D. (2013). *Social: why our brains are wired to connect*. New York: Crown.

**Mots-Clés:** empowerment, eudamonia, meaning, adolescents, pouvoir d'agir, eudamonia, lycée, sens