The Culture of Wellbeing
According to several dictionaries, the true definition of culture is the collective manifestation of human intellectual accomplishments regarded by a group people often attributed to a specific region or location. Culture is an umbrella term which encompasses civil and community behavior, as well as institutions and norms found in human societies. Culture is also the assortment of customs, arts, social institutions, and achievements of a particular nation, people, or other social group. Culture includes: knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, capabilities, and habits of the collective individuals in a civilization.

Well-being, or wellbeing, also known as wellness, is a quality of life that is personally valuable to someone. So the well-being of a person is what makes a person’s mind, body and spirit feel good. In general, happiness, health, financial security, self-acceptance, and love are a few measures of wellbeing.

Challenges we face to our wellbeing include: poor aging, unhealthy lifestyle, substance abuse, violence, materialism, educational disparities, racism, sexism, religionism, extremism, mental health issues and much, much more including urban and career stress.

I primarily studied the Santa Monica Project for its Holistic definition of health and well-being. The process of looking at an individual’s health and lifestyle, and considering all four factors - physical, intellectual, emotional and social can be done anywhere. The Santa Monica Project focused on the whole body and mind, not just a part of the body and the symptoms of any wellness problems. They looked at the lifestyle of the individuals involved, such as nutritional deficiencies, causes of stress and why there might be a lack of good health and well-being. Their holistic approach involved the individual taking responsibility for their own health and well-being. Individuals can do this by educating themselves and being active in maintaining and improving their health and well-being.

I believe that a person’s mental health quality is the defining factor for a state of well-being. Every individual must be able to realize his or her own wellness potential, they must be able to cope with the normal stresses and stressors of life; individuals must be able to work productively to earn a liveable wage, and we must be able to make some kind of contribution to the communities we live in so that we matter and have a value measure for being alive.

According to the Santa Monica Project’s Community-wide Well-being Findings: many in the community lacked strong social connections and a sense of neighborhood cohesion.

- The Well-being Project’s analysis of three key measures of the community dimension included: strong local networks, civic engagement, and community identity.

They found that a surprisingly large percentage of Santa Monica residents reported feeling that they have very little influence on local decision-making, even though these residents vote and volunteer at higher-than-average rates. Many act to improve their community, but there remains a sense of detachment and distrust between many residents and their neighbors. Research shows strong and trusting community relationships are important drivers of individual and community resilience, particularly in times of need.
The project examined changing patterns of health, causes and effects of urban stress, and approaches to the management of stress. First, they highlighted focus on areas for well-being awareness and education. Then they looked at the data to identify possible priorities and policies, resource allocation, research and the use of well-being science needed to move wellness forward. Aging and lifestyle also played a huge role in wellbeing, especially when looking at solutions to combat wellness challenges that young people face. Think of age as wisdom that we learn from people of all ages and walks of life. What we do with our time is important. We often develop our lifestyles based off of our environmental and social constructs. There is a critical need for overcoming these obstacles and challenges. They must be met with wellness solutions.

Healthy eating was also a wellness measure and in this project they found that the healthiest eating population was strongest in their downtown area where individuals were getting enough food as well as healthy portions of vegetables in daily diets. The lowest healthy eating population was by those who had to travel to work by bus or who lived in neighborhoods outside of downtown which did not have farmers markets or access to fresh produce.

The project found that mobility and development changes has the potential to boost or decrease well-being. For instance, how people get around the city (bike, bus, scooter, car), factors in whether they feel they have access to the things they want in their neighborhoods. Further earning a livable wage factors into how concerned they are about being able to afford to stay in the city they reside in, which impacts their need for security, an important factor in having culture of wellbeing. What was most difficult to study, but easy to understand, was well-being strengths and needs differ significantly by zip code. Of course, those in the middle class and upper income zip codes had a far stronger sense of wellbeing than those in the low income and low employment zip codes.

Overall, the presence of higher levels of wellbeing noted an absence of detractors such as crime, vacant or crowded housing, etc. Residents generally reported higher well-being than people in lower income zip codes in side-by-side comparisons across age groups. My take on this is safe neighborhoods, better street lighting, walkable communities come with higher levels of income. On the other hand actions to improve well-being in low income zip codes must address strengths and needs in many ways with individuals and institutions alike. Some ideas include: doing local research and presenting the findings to the City Council; analyze findings to develop city policy and programs; communicating to community, neighborhood, business and civic groups; refining the data collection process to further develop the Well-being Index.

Resource:

www.smgov.net/wellbeing

For more watch Darnel's video free at www.eworkstle.org.