

Hello, this is the Global News podcast from the BBC World Service with reports and analysis from across the world, the latest news seven days a week. BBC World Service podcasts are supported by advertising.

This is Andrew Peach with The Happy Pod talking to the people at the heart of the world's positive news stories and sharing the sounds our listeners love to hear, like Matthias in Sweden.

I've been listening for a while to the podcast, but I started to think like, what does make me happy? And then I realized, and yes, this is the sound that does it.

It is a surprising choice from Matthias. Stay with us to find out.

Also this week, we'll hear from St. Petersburg, Shenzhen, Bangalore and Seattle. We'll hear how Alex from New Zealand tracked down his birth father.

I just remember that exact moment, getting out of the taxi and seeing him over by the building waving to me and seeing somebody that looks a lot like you is a very strange thing for me because I've never met anybody like that before.

Why Bobby in the US became a living organ donor.

I had something that someone else could use to help improve his or her life. I didn't have anyone in mind. I was just going to donate to a stranger.

And who let the dogs in to a Greek museum?

The dogs couldn't care less about the art. The dogs are actually very happy to be with their owners.

Those stories on the way in the happy pot.

Now I was on the BBC World Service when the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan in August 2021. One of the worries people had on that dramatic Sunday was whether girls would be banned from school again. We were told the Taliban had changed since the 1990s, but within weeks, a temporary ban was introduced and stands to this day.

A few days ago, the BBC launched a new education program called DARS for 11 to 16 year old children in Afghanistan. The reaction has been overwhelming.

Hi, my name is Sadaf and I'm 12 years old. It has been about two years since we were banned from school. We hope to return to school this year. Only boys went back to school.

Our future is very unclear, but the new program the BBC has launched give us hope. The fact that we can study again and progress, it's like light in a very dark tunnel.

I am from Gandahar. I was very happy watching the program. It feels like I am in an educational environment where I can learn new things. It feels like being in a new school. So I am sending you this voice note to say I am very happy.

Good to hear those voice notes. I've been talking to Georgina Pierce, one of the producers, and first Alia Faizan, one of the presenters.

We had tons of positive reactions from parents to teachers to students themselves.

They really liked the program and the fact they like it. It was on radio. Most of people, they do not have access to electricity and also to the internet. So they were very excited about hearing it in radio, especially the parents. When a man from north of the country called us on our live program and said that I am really excited for this show and I will definitely let my daughters to hear the show and listen to the show and learn something out of this.

The enthusiasm that we heard then from people who have been in touch for wanting to access education is really startling, isn't it, for children of that age.

Because in many parts of the world where education is more of a given, children will be trying to avoid it, right?

So actually the fact is that they really liked it was, it was multi-platform.

And whenever they go, they can watch here and listen to this program.

Georgina, getting reaction from real young people in Afghanistan to an idea that you guys have had as a team and you've been working on for absolutely ages, must be emotional.

It is incredibly emotional. We actually only had eight weeks to put this show together, so it's been a labour of love, jumping out of bed every morning to try and make this happen in time. And what's so beautiful is so many parts of the BBC have come together to make it happen.

And we've used lots of resources made for children who couldn't go to school in the UK during the pandemic. So there's this beautiful synergy of being able to use those resources now for the children in Afghanistan who were deprived of school. So there's nothing better than hearing that it's reaching them and that it's serving that purpose that we set out to do.

And Ali, I know you were born in 1996 and the significance of that is when the Taliban first took over in Afghanistan. So that might give you a bit of a personal stake in this story.

How does it feel to be making such a difference to young women growing up in your home country now?

Yeah, back in 1996, Taliban took the country and later on, when I was four years old, I had the opportunity to go to school. I was too young, but I had that opportunity, but lots of other girls did not have the opportunity to go to school. And now, when we see that this is happening again and girls cannot go to school, so I think that this is very important for me that I'm able to help those girls, especially those who are banned from school. And as I have just been evacuated from the country, most of those girls know me in person and they text me sometime and ask me that we cannot go to school. What can you do for us? And at that time, I wasn't able to help them, but I wanted to help them. And I think that this program gives me the opportunity to help those girls and kind of fulfill my dream.

Alia Fouzan and Georgina Pierce on the first few days of the BBC's education program for children in Afghanistan. Now to a voice note sent in by Alex, who listens in New Zealand.

The sound quality here isn't great, but this is the moment that Alex first met his biological father and extended family, who he tracked down in St Petersburg.

Alex was adopted from an orphanage in Arkhangelsk in northwestern Russia when he was two years old.

All he knew about his birth parents was his mother's name. When he was 21, he decided to find out more. He contacted his birth mother Tatiana through social media. She revealed the identity of Alex's birth father Misha. I should say all this happened a decade ago, but to Alex, it feels like yesterday. I just remember that exact moment getting out of the taxi and seeing him over by the building waving to me and seeing somebody that looks a lot like you is a very strange thing for me because I've never met anybody like that before. So having somebody with your blood and seeing them waving at you and you can tell they are definitely related to you, that was quite a surreal moment for me. I really didn't know how to react with actually walking over there. The nerves and everything kicked in as soon as I started walking towards my birth father to say hello, but I could see that he was so excited to meet me. He picked me up and he wouldn't

let me down. He was rustling my hair. He was trying to look at me. I was trying to look at him

and we're trying to work each other out, but the excitement and all the anxiousness just went over me as soon as I saw him and it was just constant smiling and I remember, I know inside both of us, my birth father and I, we kept our tears inside, but I know that outside of everything he was very emotional and he told his wife later that day after I left. This was one of the most incredible days of my life, especially with meeting my son.

And Alex says his bond with Misha, his birth father is now very strong.

Always in touch with him and you know, our countries are very different of course and you know, I keep in touch with him all the time. He remembers my birthdays and he sends messages to my parents as well for their birthdays and our relationship has grown so much since the first day that I met him because he had no idea I existed until I reached out to him trying to find my birth father. And so for him to accept me until his life like that has been one of the most incredible things and I really don't know how to thank him so much for that because my relationship with my birth mother is a little bit harder and more difficult, but I always put myself in the birth parents shoes. I always do. Alex Gilbert's experience has led him to help others in the same situation. Alex has set up an organization called I'mAdopted.org. You can find out more on his YouTube channel. Now from New Zealand to Cape Town in South Africa

and Gary. While the sound of private electricity generators occupy much of the soundscape at the moment in South Africa, the Atlantic Ocean is a powerful welcome source of white noise.

To take our minds off our current troubles, please excuse my rudimentary recording equipment as the sounds are more nuanced than the hiss I've recorded of the cold Atlantic swell rolling in and breaking on the shores of misty cliffs near Scarborough on the Cape Peninsula.

Taking a good deep breath of fresh air every morning, I behold the great abundance before me each day and energizing, uplifting energy of nature's many gifts.

My name's Chan Le and I'm a student from Shenzhen, a city in South China. My favorite sound is from

a typewriter. I've been a proud owner of a typewriter for three years. I love writing, and I think typewriters are not only a revolutionary instrument for writing, but also elegant pieces of machinery. A typewriter is like any other machines, like a car or a piano. It requires proper maintenance and care to keep running. Whenever I hear the tapping sound of a typewriter, the feeling of satisfaction of bringing a typewriter back to life as well as the joy of writing is brought to my heart. It is the sound that brings me peace and love. Hi, I'm Deepa Vishwanath from Bengaluru, India. Nothing can make my day more beautiful and happier than waking up in the lap of Mother Nature.

Listening to the singing of cuckoo and chirping of the birds, I take this opportunity to wish all the listeners of Happy Pod a happier day. Thanks to Deepa in India, Chandler in China and Gary in South Africa. Do send us the sound you'd love to hear. As a voice note, if you can, email globalpodcast@bbc.co.uk. For Bobby in Seattle, an accident on his bike in 2016 changed the course of his life. When Bobby woke up from surgery, a doctor told him his wrist had been reconstructed with donor tissue and bone, and that led him to become a living organ

donor. I needed that donor bone and tissue to get my wrist kind of back to normal, if you will, and it just opened my eyes to the entire world of donation and kind of one thing came after another and before I knew it, I had grown from that bike wreck to learning about kidney donation and

moving

down the line of getting approved to become a living kidney donor myself. I can understand why it made you interested and you went to research donation and what sort of donors might be required,

but it's a huge decision to decide to go for it and to think you're going to give up part of your body when you don't need to, no one's going to make you. It taught me through that process of deciding that was the right thing for you. It really wasn't a big decision. It was some awareness that through the preliminary testing when I was deemed healthy, I had something that someone else could use to help improve his or her life. I didn't have anyone in mind, I was just going to donate to a stranger and for me it actually was pretty simple. I have this beautiful thing that someone else needs to improve their life and why wouldn't I do it?

Do you know who that person is? Do you know who's got your kidney?

Devin is the man who received my kidney. He got three beautiful years with his wife and two kids, but in his passing, he paid it forward as well and donated different body parts that he was able to do in his passing. I can tell just in the way you describe it that having made the call that this was the right thing for you, it doesn't sound like you had any doubts even when it became very real and you have to go to surgery and there's no turning back. It sounds like you were very sure that giving your kidney to Devin was something you wanted to happen.

Yeah, most definitely. I was actually super excited about it, just knowing that someone was going to benefit and the transplant center here in Seattle had told me it was going to start a chain of other donations, so four different transplants would take place because of this.

I was thrilled to be of such fortunate physical condition that I'd be able to make this contribution and start impacting lives on this kind of level.

Tell me about your trip to Kilimanjaro because this is an incredible experience that a small handful of people listening to the happy pod would have had to go to Tanzania and climb the mountain.

Tell me about your version of doing that with other like-minded people.

A party of 32 of us just went to do this climb with the common goal of raising more awareness to help more people, people feeling compelled to do more even though they had already done some organ donation or had been connected to it in some part. It's very beautiful.

What was it like at the top? The sunrise comes up in the east and it's this beautiful glow.

They call it the rooftop of Africa, so those who make the summit have that feel of standing on the highest point on the African continent and just this collective energy of what those in our group felt about what we were doing and what we were accomplishing. That's the real power in it.

And thanks to Bobby in Seattle for sharing his story.

This is Andrew Peach, still to come. We're off to India, Greece and Finland, where we'll meet Salma, who's a taekwondo black belt.

My body has become more powerful and my memory has become better.

I should probably mention Salma is 82. She's on the way.

This is the sound of newly born cheetahs.

Not only are they cute, they're very welcome in India as the first cubs born there in about 70 years. Our South Asia regional editor and Barrison Ethirajan told me more.

It's an important moment in terms of conservation efforts by the Indian government because they wanted to reintroduce cheetahs. They disappeared from India in the 1940s and early 50s because of

hunting, loss of habitat at that time. So there have been a lot of talk about a lot of work on reintroducing them. The Indian government tried getting it from Iran because these are the Asian cheetahs and they did not succeed. Now they brought these eight cheetahs from Namibia last year and they were released into the national park. It's again, it is a guarded national park in Konoh National Park in Madhya Pradesh. And then the environment minister has issued a video showing

these four little cubs, very cute looking cubs of this cheetah, one of them given birth.

So they describe this as the momentous time for India's conservation history.

And it generated a lot of buzz around social media.

Animal videos always going to be a hit on social media, aren't they?

So I mean, first of all, you've got to find a type of cheetah that can survive in the environment and they found them in Namibia. And then you've got to protect them so that they're not hunted or victim to predators, those kind of things. Many conservationists were expressing their own doubts about this whole exercise of reintroducing African cheetahs into the wild in India because

they belong to different climatic conditions. We still do not know whether any of the cheetahs which gave birth to four cubs, which was in a bigger enclosure or in the wild. And some of them have been released into the wild and they're also being tracked. So this has come as a good news for the whole conservation effort, even for those involved in this project.

I'm Bharatan Ethirajan reporting. Let's meet 82-year-old Salma Numela from Finland.

Salma started Taekwondo when she was 75. She's now a black belt.

Seven years ago, I was driving my grandchildren to Taekwondo trainings. I was sitting, watching what children were doing. Arya, who was teacher, she came and asked if I was interesting to start Taekwondo. And I said, never, no. Next time she asked again and I started.

My body has become more powerful and my memory has become better. When you see something what is interesting, go there and throw yourself in new things.

It makes your life more happy. I'm very astonished when I look mirror. I don't know why there is that old woman in that mirror. It's not me.

Salma in Finland, role model to us all. Now, dogs have been enjoying some modern art at the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Athens. The gallery opened its doors to dogs to allow owners to bond with their pets and to promote the idea of adopting strays. The museum's director Katerina Greggos told me more. Well, it always seemed very, very strange to me that there's still a large degree of discrimination against domestic animals. And even though so many of us actually have them. And I think a museum is a perfect place to take your dog because you normally want to go to a museum in your free time. And I think there's nothing more sad than leaving your dog alone or your cat at home. And so to me, it seems actually rather normal when I started in my position as the artistic director of EMST, the National Museum of Contemporary

Art in Athens, if we actually want to say that we are ahead of the times as a contemporary art museum should be, that we should also take into account not only our human public, but also our animal, well, potential animal public. So one of the first things I did is I actually made the museum pet friendly. Do you get any sense of the dogs that come can appreciate the art? The dogs couldn't care less about the art. The dogs are actually very happy to be with their owners. And I think that so many people work very hard today, and very often they cannot take their pets with them to

work. It means that animals spend a lot of their time being alone. And I think, you know, the well being of four legged friends is not only about feeding and watering, you know, giving them cuddles and hugs, it's actually making sure that their emotional well being is taken care of. What about noise, Katerina? Because even if the dogs pick up on the calmness of the museum and they're not attacking all the dogs they don't like, you'd think there'd be a bit of noise about them, which perhaps some people who are going to enjoy the artwork wouldn't wouldn't appreciate. Well, luckily enough, our museum is big enough so that sort of, you know, visitors can be spread out. But I think, you know, a couple of barks here and there is it shouldn't bother anyone. I mean, in Greece, even though we have a relatively bad reputation, because there are so many stray animals on the street, this initiative very much is aiming to encourage people rather than buying a dog or a pet to adopt from one of the shelters. And this shelter that we are working with, the Socrates Shelter, is funded by the municipality of Athens. And so we want to draw attention to the fact that strays are in fact actually the best animals you can have. They're unbelievable companions. And, you know, it's not unknown in Greece, a lot of people, you know, who come as tourists, end up bringing home a Greek stray. We call them Greekies.

Katharina Greggos from the National Museum of Contemporary Art with me from Athens. Back to a cell that makes one of our listeners happy now. Matthias got in touch from Sweden. I've been listening for a while to the podcast and it was the thing about the sounds made me really happy. I wasn't supposed to send something at first, but I started to think like, if I were to send something, what does make me happy? And then I started to think about it. And then I realized, and yes, this is the sound that does it.

One of the reasons that we picked yours out particularly is it's such an unusual idea. So you'd clearly given it a lot of thought and you came up with the sound of a vitamin D tablet. It's the whole sound, really, from when you drop it into the glass, you get the clinking sound and then the fizzling afterwards. It's like very soothing.

It's like also, in a way, the expectation. What does it mean to you when you're going to take a vitamin D tablet? It's like a little piece of the sun that you drink.

For me, you can have a day where you're feeling very tired and it's a gloomy day and you feel like, nah, the sun isn't showing, it's just rain and mud and it's a long way to summer.

This takes us right to the heart of what it's like to be living in Sweden where, during the winter, the darkness periods are really long.

Yeah, for me, not much is really happening. It's just a long stretching, like dark period until the spring final arrives. We're at that moment where, first of all, there's more daylight, there's more sunshine and somehow as humans that gives us more hope.

Yes, indeed. And also now it's the Easter time and that is like a starting point for like high spring and summer. It's like that. So the D vitamin is like the final stretch to take me through the final dark hours. Many people listening elsewhere in the world will have that the same kind of idea, but in northern Europe, in Scandinavian countries like Sweden, it's an extreme thing, isn't it? Yes, it's like almost melancholy, tiredness, that's like, yeah, it's like a big mantle over your head, like through the winter. The roughly translation would be winter depression, but in Sweden we call it winter depression. It's one of my favorite places in the world, Sweden, I have to say. There's an awful lot that's fantastic about it. So tell me what you love about it. What I do love about it, actually, the summer period is so beautiful, but I think for me, because there are scarcely populated Sweden, relatively, so you can really go by

yourself for a long period of time sometimes when you're out walking, just you and the nature and the quietness, it's a beautiful thing. One of the best things about the sounds you send into us is they give us a whole new appreciation of things that used to seem quite ordinary.

Thanks to Matias, to Bobby, to Gary, to Chandler, to Deeper and to Alex for getting involved in this edition, and to Rex, who sent us this from the Philippines. Hello to all the listeners of the Global News Podcast, especially to the newly launched Happy Pod. Wow, what can I say? This is just a great thing to end the week. So to the team behind this wonderful podcast, to Andrew Peach, and to Karen Martin, the editor of the Global News Podcast, keep it up, maintain the content, give good happiness to our listeners, especially in these trying times.

Rex, thank you so much for your voice note, which is timely, because the Happy Pod has now reached

the end of what's been a six-week trial responding to your feedback that you wanted to hear more of the world's positive news stories. So now, we'd like to know what you think of the podcast and whether you'd like us to carry on with it. The email address is globalpodcastatbbc.co.uk, globalpodcastatbbc.co.uk. Now, I've just been told we've got space for one more voice note about surprises. Hi, Dad. I love it when we go to watch Reddin at the football, and I also love playing ball games with you. Hi, Dad. I love singing to musicals with you in the car and always beating you at

the minigame. Hi, Andrew. Nobody can make me laugh like you can, much to the bemusement of our children.

Not only are you funny, but you're kind, calm, and just the best husband and dad there is. We hope you have a wonderful day. Happy birthday. Oh, thank you to the Peach family, Colleen, Isaac, and Martha. Our studio director is Sam Dickinson. The producers are Tracy Gordon and Olivia Noon. And from all of us, thanks for listening.