



# **Understanding children's perspectives on wellbeing**

## **The Australian Child Wellbeing Project: Phase One Report**

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A Project Steering Group provides strategic direction for the Project. The Steering Group is chaired by Professor George Patton, University of Melbourne, and includes as members the Chief Investigators (Gerry Redmond, Jen Skattebol and Peter Saunders), Partner Investigators (Sabine Andresen, Jonathan Bradshaw and Sue Thomson), representatives of the Partner Organisations, and independent advisers: Dr Ben Edwards (AIFS); Dr Lance Emerson (ARACY) and Ms Margaret Raven (social Policy Research Centre, University of NSW).

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## Executive Summary

*The Australian Child Wellbeing Project* is a child-centred study in which young people's perspectives are being used to design a major nationally representative survey of wellbeing among 8-14 year olds, and to interpret findings from that survey. The survey will benchmark child wellbeing in Australia and provide information that contributes to the development of effective services for young people's healthy development. For the purposes of this project, wellbeing is broadly understood as comprising a young person's material and environmental circumstances, his or her relationships, and how he or she thinks about themselves in the context of those circumstances and relationships.

This project aims to further our understanding of how young people in general, and disadvantaged young people in particular, understand their own wellbeing. Particular attention is given to understanding the perspectives of young people in six groups who are often seen as experiencing high levels of marginalisation or as having particular experiences and needs: young people living in out of home care, young people living with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, economically disadvantaged young people, culturally and linguistically diverse young people, and young people living in regional and remote Australia. .

The overall project is divided into six major phases which include the development and conduct of a nationally representative school based survey among young people in school years 4, 6 and 8, to be carried out in school term three, 2014. This document reports on Phase One of the project: focus groups and in-depth interviews with young people in the six groups identified above, as well as with a group drawn from young people in the 'mainstream'. The purpose of this phase of the research is firstly to explore in an open-ended way the dimensions of wellbeing viewed as important by young people from the six marginalised groups as well as those considered to be from the 'mainstream'. This approach asks: "What things do children from each of the target groups think are important to 'having a good life'?" Secondly, to extend the knowledge of how different groups of Australian children conceptualise their wellbeing; how they facilitate cultural, social, and economically-specific concepts of well-being.

We have utilised in Phase One a range of in-depth qualitative methods that allowed us to explore complex life-stories, experiences and individual circumstances of participants. In this, we have provided many opportunities for participants in the different target groups to explore shared understandings of wellbeing, enabling us to better understand the perceptions and interpretations of each group. The guiding principle in this work was that young people are the experts in their own lives and cultures and need to be provided opportunities to help share that 'expertise'.

Young people from each of the six identified groups and from the 'mainstream' were contacted as potential participants in the research through personal contacts of the researchers (in the case of the project pilot), through recruitment partners – organisations and voluntary groups that cater to young people in the 8 to 14 years age group – and also some schools. The recruitment partners were located in both metropolitan and regional areas of New South Wales, South Australia, Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory. The researchers worked closely with

recruitment partners to ensure that methods and materials were appropriate to each particular group and to satisfy all parental/guardian and young person consents. The research process and method was approved by the ethics committees of the Flinders University (South Australia) and the University of New South Wales. Where required, ethics approval was also sought through specific processes of some recruitment partners.

Research was primarily conducted with young people in group situations. In addition to ten young people (broadly described as ‘mainstream’) who partook in the project pilot, 97 young people across the specified target groups have participated in the workshops. Of these, 29 participated in in-depth follow-up interviews, and two young people (who did not participate in the group workshops) were also interviewed. Group workshops involved ice-breaker games on i-pads, brainstorm exercises including the composition of pictures through which young people could communicate what they considered to be important in their lives. In most workshops, a cartoonist was employed to work alongside 2-3 researchers in order to facilitate creative engagement and stimulate a sense of fun for the brainstorms.

The workshops served to corroborate key themes from existing research on young people in their middle years, while also allowing new themes to emerge. Among all groups, family was considered the most important domain in their lives; however the definition of family varied somewhat among groups, with some thinking of family only in terms of the nuclear family, and others in terms of an extended family or as two families where the parents had separated. Overwhelmingly, positive aspects of family were generally described by young people, and these included love, support and having fun. However, some negative aspects were also recorded and included fighting, disparity of rules, and bullying. Apart from family, friends were also seen as a tremendous source of wellbeing, especially ‘best friends’ with whom young people felt they could confide and share trust. Young people in several groups also discussed having ‘good friends’ and ‘bad friends’, the latter being a source of considerable stress. Respondents in a number of groups chose also to describe their pets as friends, as pets provided affection and a sense of wellbeing. Some respondents (especially in the Aboriginal group) did not distinguish greatly between friends and relatives. A number of respondents across several groups also emphasised the active aspect to both family and friendship— that it was good to care for or look after others. This sentiment was notable where respondents lived with a sick or disabled family member.

School was viewed in very mixed terms by respondents. Some viewed school as a place of learning, while others viewed school primarily as a place to meet friends. Most were in agreement regarding the benefits of school – mainly gaining an education, and negotiating friendships. However, young people in some groups (for example the Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse groups) also greatly valued learning outside of school. Young people had very mixed views on rules at school (some expressed suspicion of ‘strange’ rules), and on teachers – where some talked about good or engaging teachers, others ‘bad’ or ‘lazy’ teachers, and others focused on the difficulties of telling teachers about issues such as bullying.

Young people in the different groups expressed a wide range of views on the meaning of community, although the term often appeared confusing to some. the domain of community appeared to resonate most strongly with culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal young people, while not being rated as very important by young people in some other groups. Health on

the other hand was rated as important in all groups, mainly physical health (diet and exercise were much discussed) but also mental health, albeit to a lesser extent. While health was usually seen in individual terms, for some it encompassed a collective dimension, where the health of each family member was seen as important to the wellbeing of all family members. Money was seen as one of the least important domains in all groups. However, necessity of money, and the consequences of not having money were well understood, especially among Aboriginal young people, some of whom gave examples from experience of the effects on them and their families of lack of money. On the other hand, some young people from the mainstream group in particular saw money as a means of enacting an ethical code, through redistribution to those who were less well off.

Apart from these main themes, a number of interconnected themes were also identified by young people in the different groups. Bullying was one such theme, which was mostly found to occur at school, but was also mentioned in the contexts of family and community. Young people had mixed views on guidance and rules, both at home and at school, and several young people mentioned having stress in their lives, either from homework, bullying, or from concern for the wellbeing of other family members.

These perspectives have a number of implications for survey design that can be summarised in five points:

- First, young people expressed a range of ideas of the meanings of domains such as ‘family’ and ‘friends’. Therefore, when they are surveyed about these domains, it is important to record the concepts that they themselves have in mind.
- Second, the young people clearly prioritise the domain of family as more important than any other domain in their lives. This suggests that a survey should devote appropriate effort to understanding family relationships, pressures and dynamics than it might devote to other key domains. This is important for policy, as family environments, relationships and dynamics can have a strong impact on young people’s outcomes.
- Third, within each domain, the concerns of young people who are marginalised may be different to those in the ‘mainstream’. This is revealed in the relative importance placed on school by the different groups, by the experience/s of bullying, and by the experience/s of health concerns, disability, and even death in the family.
- Fourth, young people tend to understand their lives as a whole, and not necessarily in terms of domains or dimensions. A young person’s actions or relationships in one domain can have spill-over effects on other domains. A survey of young people’s wellbeing could perhaps attempt to measure how young people link the different dimensions— with questions, for example, not only about stress in general, but about sources of stress in different domains; not only about bullying, but about the inter-relationship between friendship and bullying; or about reciprocity as well as dependency in relationships.
- Fifth, it is important to pay attention to the language that young people use in devising questions for a survey. Of note for example was the discussion in several groups of ‘good friends’ and ‘bad friends’.



All these points need further exploration. However, the research described in this report provides the basis for developing a child-centred survey instrument that can be meaningful not only to young people in the mainstream, but also to young people at the margins of Australian society.

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Background to the project

The Australian Child Wellbeing Project is a child-centred study in which children's and young people's perspectives are being used to design, conduct and interpret findings from a major nationally representative survey of wellbeing among young people aged 8-14 years.<sup>1</sup> The survey will benchmark child wellbeing in Australia and provide information that contributes to the development of effective services for young people's healthy development.

The purpose of this project is to further our understanding of how young people in general and especially disadvantaged young people understand their own wellbeing. Particular attention is given to listening to the perspectives of young people in six groups who are often seen as experiencing high levels of marginalisation or as having particular experiences and needs: young people living in out of home care, young people living with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, economically disadvantaged young people, culturally and linguistically diverse young people, and young people living in regional and remote Australia. For more detail on the project, see Redmond, Skattebol and Saunders (2013).

### 1.2 Conceptualising young people's wellbeing

Wellbeing can be broadly understood as comprising a young person's material and environmental circumstances, his or her relationships, and how he or she thinks about themselves in the context of those circumstances and relationships (White, 2008). It is now generally accepted that environments matter for young people's positive development – this is a key insight of Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of child development (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). Research suggests that factors such as supportive relationships with family members and friends tends to reinforce young people's sense of positive wellbeing, and that experiences such as exclusion, bullying and interpersonal conflict can have the opposite effect (Boyden and Mann, 2005). Research also highlights the integrated nature of wellbeing – how wellbeing in one domain can influence wellbeing in other domains (Heckman et al., 2006). Understanding the interconnections between different domains of wellbeing among young people in their middle years, overall; and among young people who are marginalised more specifically, is the central aim of this project and one of the key points by which ACWP findings can link directly to policy. This link is clearly made in the South Australian Department of Education and Child Development's Learner Wellbeing Framework:

*Wellbeing is central to learning and learning is central to wellbeing.*

*Educators make a positive contribution to learner wellbeing.*

*Wellbeing is built on the strengths of individuals, groups and communities working together.*

<http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/learnerwellbeing/pages/frame/principles/?reFlag=1>

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<sup>1</sup> This report uses the terms 'children' and 'young people' (together or interchangeably) to refer to all those aged between 8 and 14 years.

Therefore, while there is little consensus on the definition of wellbeing (O'Hare & Gutierrez, 2012, 616), there is broad agreement on the main dimensions of child wellbeing, encompassing physical, environmental, social and emotional aspects (Hamilton and Redmond 2010). In other words, young people's feelings and relationships are integral to their wellbeing, but so are their physical health and the circumstances in which they live. The *Melbourne Declaration's* 'whole child' framework encompasses the goal that all young Australians "become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens" (MCEETYA, 2008: 9, p.9). A report for DEEWR states that a key element of the wellbeing needed to attain this goal is "satisfaction with self, relationships and experiences" (Erebus International, 2008: 7), or subjective wellbeing. Subjective evaluations of life satisfaction and happiness do not always correlate with more 'objective' assessments of people's circumstances (Camfield and McGregor, 2005). This does not mean that subjective measures are unreliable, just that they capture different phenomena to those reflected in objective assessments. The research in this project will draw on a concept of wellbeing that acknowledges not only its subjectivity, but that also reflects its social and cultural influences, the contexts in which young people live, and the world views associated with life in adverse circumstances (Nussbaum, 2012; White, 2008). Teasing out the differences between social and cultural influences on the one hand, and adaptation to lived experience on the other, requires a detailed understanding of how different groups of young people translate that lived experience into conceptualisations of wellbeing.

To this end, the project aims to examine the conceptualisation and attainment of wellbeing in aggregate and across diverse groups of Australian young people in their middle years, with a particular focus on wellbeing among the six groups identified above. While these groups are known to experience considerable disadvantage in comparison with the 'mainstream', there may also be significant differences in world views that shape their conceptualisation of wellbeing, and their self-appraisal of their wellbeing. This has implications for policy, but also for the design of the study – the more immediate focus of this Report (Ungar et al., 2007; Ungar and Liebenberg, 2011).

The focus of the ACWP is on 'the whole child' as she is situated in particular environmental contexts. This focus is consistent with whole child approaches in Australian policy, as evidenced by the Australian Government's development of 19 headline indicators of children's wellbeing across multiple dimensions (AIHW, 2009). The whole child approach is also consistent with growing recognition of the rights of the child and with trends towards more comprehensive international monitoring of young people's development and wellbeing (Andresen and Fegter, 2011; Ben-Arieh, 2008; Bradshaw et al., 2006; OECD, 2009; UNICEF, 2007, 2010). By taking a grounded approach and starting with children's own perspectives, it is respectful to young people's right to be heard. The grounded approach also recognises that young people are the foremost experts in their own lives; they have important knowledge on what matters to them, and on how they construct and respond to their environments.

Recent years have witnessed an extraordinary growth in interest among governments and researchers in Australia in obtaining young people's own perspectives on their lives, and in obtaining a more comprehensive picture of young people in their middle years (Bahr and Pendergast, 2012; Macdonald et al., 2005). Other initiatives that examine young people's physical and mental health and development in the middle years include both state level initiatives such as the HowRU study

and the Victorian Child Health and Wellbeing Survey (Victoria), and the Middle Years Development Index (South Australia and Western Australia); and national initiatives including the Child and Adolescent Component of the National Survey of Mental Health and Well-being, and the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children. The ACWP team is working closely with research teams conducting the other studies to ensure maximum complementarity, and where possible comparability, among the studies. However, it is important to emphasise the unique contribution that this study is making with its focus on young people's perspectives and in particular, the perspectives of young people who are often seen as marginalised in Australian society.

This document reports on Phase One of the project: focus groups and in-depth interviews with young people in seven groups including young people living in out of home care, young people living with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, economically disadvantaged young people, culturally and linguistically diverse young people, young people living in regional and remote Australia, as well as young people in the 'mainstream'. The qualitative work was designed with five main purposes in the context of the overall project: *first*, to ensure that the quantitative survey covers the dimensions of wellbeing seen as important by young people from the six marginalised groups as well as young people in the 'mainstream' (see McLeod and Yates, 2006, for a discussion of the middle or the 'mainstream'); *second*, to extend knowledge of how different groups of Australian young people conceptualise their wellbeing, and facilitate identification of culturally, socially or economically specific conceptualizations of well-being; *third*, to gain insight into connections between the different dimensions of wellbeing that young people identify; *fourth* through in-depth individual interviews, to explore how young people from different backgrounds interpret and respond to the survey questions; and *fifth*, to explore how they adopt world views and perspectives on their own well-being that accommodate their lived experience. The research discussed in this Report starts to work towards these five purposes with an examination of how young people conceptualise their wellbeing. It is important to note that fieldwork for this phase of the project has for the most part been very recently carried out. Findings reported here are therefore tentative, and subject to revision as existing data are re-interpreted.

### 1.3 Project timelines

The project is being conducted over six phases, set out in Table 1 below. Phase One as discussed in this Report involves qualitative research of young people's perspectives aged 8-14 years. These perspectives will then be used in subsequent project phases to support the design of a wellbeing questionnaire in Phase Two. Phase Three involves the piloting of the new questionnaire in a sample of schools and the refinement of the survey instrument before it is rolled out in schools nationwide. Phase Four will stage the roll-out of the national survey and include in-depth interviews with students to discuss their interpretations of wellbeing, used to inform the analysis. In Phase Five, the data will be cleaned and analysed before the preparation of a final report, which constitutes Phase Six of the project.

**Table 1: Six phases of the project**

<b>Phase 1:</b> Obtaining young people's conceptualisations of wellbeing	Qualitative research with six groups of 'disadvantaged' young people and one group of 'mainstream' young people	Jul 2012-Apr 2013
<b>Phase 2:</b> Developing wellbeing indicators	Developing and testing wellbeing indicators (based on Phase 1 qualitative research), and pilot questionnaire	Mar 2013-Dec 2013
<b>Phase 3:</b> Pilot Survey	Planned and conducted in 20 schools	
	Developing/sampling Pilot/analysis/reporting	Mar 2013-Nov 2013 Feb 2014-Jun 2014
<b>Phase 4:</b> National survey - sampling & preparation	Involving an initial sample of 460 schools with 36,000 targeted students	Jan 2014-Jun 2014
Fieldwork	Expected achieved sample of 322 schools and 17,800 students; complementary in-depth interviews with 80 students	Jul 2014-Nov 2014
<b>Phase 5:</b> Data preparation & analysis	Data cleaning and documentation; analysis of qualitative and survey data	Dec 2014-Aug 2015
<b>Phase 6:</b>	Preparation of final report	Apr 2015-Nov 2015

#### 1.4 Structure of this report

This report presents the findings from Phase One of the Project. Chapter 2 provides a description of the seven broad groups of young people from which the focus groups and individual interviewees were drawn. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the research design for the Phase One research, with a detailed description of data collection techniques. The Chapter sets out the process of designing the qualitative instruments and how they were used, detailing how participants were recruited and describing the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Chapter 4 describes the findings and, sets out the broad themes emerging from the data analysis of each of the seven groups of young people. Chapter 5 then goes on to describe common themes identified by participants as being important to having a 'good life', instances of shared experiences, the relative importance of different domains of wellbeing, and the shared meanings across these different domains. This Chapter teases out differences between the seven groups with respect to conceptualisations of wellbeing and examines how the experience of marginalisation influences young people's perceptions of their well-being. This Chapter also reports on the implications of the Phase One results for the design of the survey questionnaire, leaving Chapter 6 to offer a brief conclusion.

## **2 Groups of Young people**

The first phase of the Project was conducted between July 2012 and April 2013. Using group activities and individual interviews, researchers examined how young people from the six disadvantaged groups and a 'mainstream' group conceptualise wellbeing—their understanding of its different domains and the perceived connections between them. Fieldwork was conducted in New South Wales, the Northern Territory, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory. To ensure broad location as well as geographical coverage, study sites included metropolitan and regional and remote areas.

In Phase One of the research, participants were drawn from six different groups of young people with specific experiences and needs that may have a bearing on their wellbeing, and a group of 'mainstream' young people. The proposed methodology involved a sample of approximately 80 young people based on the inclusion of: about 10 young people living in out of home care, 10 children living with disability, 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, 10 economically disadvantaged children, 10 culturally and linguistically diverse young people, 10 children living in regional and remote Australia; and 20 'mainstream' young people.

An arms-length recruitment approach was employed. To recruit participants, researchers worked with service providers and other organizations (hereafter 'recruitment partners') supporting or working with the seven groups of children, mostly service providers who were known to them from previous research projects, or who were introduced through colleagues. Recruitment partners were asked to provide advice on effective sampling strategies and key sensitivities in working with the particular groups of young people on the issue of wellbeing. They were also consulted about the selection of specific research tools and activity and interview formats and were asked to support the research team in recruiting children from their services. Recruitment partners were asked to circulate information in various forms about the project (such as specially-designed postcards) to clients of their services. In some cases, recruitment partners selected the young people who participated in the study. Once parents/carers and young people expressed an interest in being involved in the study, the Recruitment Partners worked with the research team to set up an appropriate time and place to conduct group and individual activities.

Careful consideration was given to the way in which each group would be defined and understood for the purposes of this project. Some key characteristics of each group (what demarcates them from other groups and the factors associated with their marginalization) are discussed in the following section.

### **2.1 Young people in out of home care**

Children and young people in out of home care are those living away from their family home, or the home of their birth parents, because their parents are unwilling or unable to provide the care they require (Dunne and Kettler, 2006, 22). In Australia in 2011, 7.4 in every 1,000 children aged under 18 years were living in out of home care, a number and rate that had doubled since 1997 (ARACY, 2013). Children and young people in this group are more likely than the average to experience

difficulties with their mental health (including depression and behavioral issues) and difficulties in school (for example, attentiveness in class) (Dunne and Kettler, 2006; Tarren-Sweeney and Hazell, 2006; Messing, 2005). These young people are also more likely to experience difficulties in forming and sustaining meaningful relationships (Tarren-Sweeney and Hazell, 2006, 96).

Also important for the wellbeing of this group is their 'pathway' into care or their experiences prior to being placed in care and the reason/s they were placed in care. Research suggests that young people in foster and kinship care are more likely than their peers to have experienced parental incarceration, parental substance misuse, abuse and neglect, homelessness, domestic violence, or parental death (Dunne and Kettler, 2006, 22; Messing, 2005; Tarren-Sweeney and Hazell, 2006, 91). The nature of the placement and its stability/instability will also contribute to children's wellbeing, alongside the age at which a child entered foster care (Tarren-Sweeney and Hazell, 2006, 89) and whether or not young people are placed with their sibling/s (Dunne and Kettler, 2006, 24). Research has found that children in out of home care say that being loved, having boundaries through discipline, stability and security, and improvements to academic performance or ability to learn, are all important to their wellbeing (Altshuler, 1999). Research examining differences in wellbeing and development between boys and girls in care has had mixed results, with some suggesting worse outcomes for boys, some suggesting no difference, and others suggesting worse outcomes for girls (Tarren-Sweeney and Hazell, 2006, 95). The proximity of the research to a transition into care or between care situations needs to be taken into consideration. The child's relationship with his or her birth parents can also be a key factor, with research suggesting a link between the relationship that the young person has with their parents and desires about eventually moving back into their parents' home (Messing, 2005, 13). In Australia, most children who enter into out of home care are subsequently reunited with their birth parents (AIHW, 2009, 89).

There are two groups of children in out of home care: those children who have been placed in statutory out of home care as determined by the Children's Court, and those who are being cared for informally by relatives or others in the community. In the former, the court may determine whether parental responsibility for the child is placed with relatives or kin, foster parents, adoptive parents, in residential care, or in independent living arrangements. In the latter, children may be involved in a range of informal living arrangements. Children may be living in out of home care for a very short time or on an ongoing basis, and some may have experienced multiple placements (Dunne and Kettler, 2006, 24). Children in different out of home care arrangements are likely to have different experiences of care and these differences are likely to be particularly pronounced among children and young people in foster care, kinship care, residential care, and independent living (Leslie et al., 2000). As the young people in the age range for this project would not be placed in independent living arrangements, and residential care is in decline and currently sits at less than five per cent of children placed in out of home care (Smyth and Eardley, 2008), the focus of this project will be on young people in foster care and kinship care. In 2009, 95% of children in formal out of home care arrangements were in home-based care, with about half of these in foster care, and the other half living with relatives or kin (AIHW, 2009, 90).

Children in foster care are those who have been placed in statutory care with a non-kinship carer. Children and young people in kinship care are those who have been placed in statutory care with a relative or member of the kin network, or those children who are living in an informal arrangement

with a relative or member of the kin network (Leslie et al, 2000, 318). In Australia, most kinship care outside of the child protection system is provided by grandparents (AIHW, 2009, 89). Research suggests that the experiences of children in foster care are considerably different from the experiences of those in kinship care. Young people in non-kinship foster care have greater difficulties with their mental health, behaviour, and learning outcomes (Dunne and Kettler, 2006, 22; Messing, 2005; Tarren-Sweeney and Hazell, 2006, 95). Children in kinship and foster care can have different experiences of stigma among their peers (Messing, 2005). Some research suggests that characteristics of a placement with kin, such as placement stability, relationship with the carer, and ongoing connection to family, can mitigate some of the negative impacts of out of home care on young people's social and emotional wellbeing (Dunne and Kettler, 2006, 22; Leslie et al, 2000, 317). However, others suggest that this is not the case in all kin placements and that closeness to family is not necessarily the best outcome for the child (Dunne and Kettler, 2006, 25). Kinship carers are more likely than non-kinship carers to be economically disadvantaged because they are more likely to be single parents or older people on low incomes (Dunne and Kettler, 2006, 26; Messing, 2005). Some research also reveals a higher level of carer-child conflict in kinship carer situations than in foster care situations because kinship carers are more likely to be strict or over-protective. The propensity for family conflict with the child's birth parents is also higher (Dunne and Kettler, 2006, 26).

In spite of similarities in the factors affecting the wellbeing of children in out of home care, the literature also points to the importance of heterogeneity in the experiences and needs of children in out of home care (Leslie et al, 2000). This heterogeneity exists at the levels of socio-demographic factors, reasons for and/or pathways into out of home care, and placement experiences (Leslie et al., 2000, 330). Leslie et al. also identified the individuality of experiences of young people in out of home care. For example, many may have had varying placement experiences, moving between foster, kinship and residential placements (2000, 331).

In order to sample young people in both foster care and kinship care, the researchers approached several organisations that work with children in out of home care across both groups. Two organisations in the Australian Capital Territory agreed to support the research and sent out promotional material to foster and kinship carers associated with their service and the children in their care, advising them of the ACWP and inviting them to participate. These two recruitment partners collaborated with the researchers to organise group activities and follow up interviews with children in both foster and kinship care.

## 2.2 Young people with disability

Both internationally and in Australia, reaching agreement upon a definition and model of 'disability' is contentious (Eide and Ingstad, 2011). Measures of disability commonly used in Australia (by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) define people with disability as being those with a condition that lasts or is expected to last at least six months and who experience limitations in their performance of an activity or participation in society (ABS, 2003, 2009, AIHW, 2009). A second measure defines people who experience a severe core activity limitation as being those who sometimes or always need help with mobility, self-care or communications (AIHS, 2009). However it can be argued that these individual and medical models of disability focus on the health status of the individual which is seen as underlying all outcomes in terms of life situation and social experiences (Ingstad and Whyte, 2007). Therefore these models



have been characterised as disempowering and as reinforcing rather than challenging social exclusion (NDA, 2002). In response, other models (Good, 2003) focus on society and its disabling structures rather than on the person or persons with impairment. Another model (ICF) developed by the WHO in consultation with disability NGOs and other experts during the 1990s conceptualises disability as “a dynamic interaction between health conditions (diseases, disorders, injuries, traumas etc.) and contextual factors” (WHO, 2001, p.8), an experience common to all humans across their life span. This debate has particular relevance for inclusive participatory research with children with disability (McCarthy, 2002).

The voices of children have been largely absent from research on young people with disabilities (Foley et al., 2012, Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2010). While a majority of children with disabilities in the western world live at home with families, attend mainstream schools and have rights to inclusion and equal treatment enshrined in legislation and international conventions, they are often excluded from research, policy decisions and in their everyday lives (Stalker, 2012). While all young people have a wide range of strengths and capabilities, there is recognition that there are also barriers to full participation in society for children with disability (Maguire, 2011). These include lower participation rates in many areas of life considered to be important for wellbeing (AIHW, 2009, Edwards & Higgins, 2009). However in relation to research, new approaches that are empowering, emancipatory and participative are being developed (Fisher and Robinson, 2010). These models, with their emphasis on participation by people with disabilities and the development of more equal partnerships with non-disabled researchers, is what the ACWP strives for here. To this end the ACWP does not attempt to establish a universal definition or model of disability but rather aims to create a working definition that captures adequately the diversity of disability. This constitutes a starting point for the purposes of qualitative participatory research involving young people with disability. The following definition provided by project partner DEEWR was used to inform the recruitment process both in terms of the services approached and the relationships with service providers and their clients.

DEEWR outlines a process for collecting nationally consistent data on schools students with disability. All education providers are required to be aware of and undertake the requirements of the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005) to ensure students with disability receive an education equal to that of any other student. The Standards recognise that not all people with disability are alike. People with disability have specific needs, including the type and level of support required. It is not an ‘agreed definition’ but rather an agreed process to include in the data collection those students who receive an adjustment because there is evidence that the student has a disability under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*. The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* includes the following legal definition of disability (which is also adopted in the Disability Standards for Education 2005): **Disability**, in relation to a person, means

- a) total or partial loss of the person’s bodily or mental functions; or
- b) total or partial loss of a part of the body; or
- c) the presence in the body of organisms causing disease or illness; or
- d) the presence in the body of organisms capable of causing disease or illness; or

- e) the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of the person's body; or
- f) a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction; or
- g) a disorder, illness or disease that affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgment or that result in disturbed behaviour. (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005)

Starting with this definition and framework, and before approaching potential recruitment partners, consultations were made with key experts working in the area of disability practice and research: Karen Fisher (UNSW) who applies participatory methods with people with disability; Dr Sally Robinson (Southern Cross University) who focuses on research and evaluation with people with disability and in particular on inclusive research strategies and methods, and Jane Sherwin who in various capacities has been involved in the lives of people with disabilities since the late 1970s. This consultation was undertaken in order to develop a more detailed working definition of disability that incorporated some of the differences and diversity of experiences which would inform a choice of participants, recruitment partners, fieldwork strategy and appropriate tools. Further consultations were made with Terry Cumming and Eva Strnadova in the School of Education, University of NSW, regarding appropriate multi-media tools for children with cognitive disability. It was decided on the basis of these consultations to take a non-diagnostic and non-condition-specific approach in which a range of participants would be invited to take part in the research. A flexible approach and close consultation with service provider recruitment partners was also adopted.

Recruitment partnerships were sought and established with the following three NSW based organisations:

- A service provider (with a pre-existing link to the SPRC) which provides information and support to children with physical disabilities; and
- An independent disability advocacy organisation which supports the philosophy and practice of inclusion and works with families in which there is a young person or an adult with developmental disability, and
- a not for profit, community based organization funded by both State and Commonwealth governments to offer support and recreational activities to people with a disability and their families.

Relationships were built over time with these service providers who were consulted on the most appropriate form of research including advice around the suitability of focus groups or individual interviews, fulfilling any support requirements, and the content of workshops including duration, appropriate activities and tools. The purpose of the study is to be inclusive of all young people who express interest in participating in order to compare the differential experiences of wellbeing.

### **2.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people**

The 'Commonwealth Definition' of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person as per the High Court judgment in the case of *Commonwealth v Tasmania* (1983) 46 ALR 625 is:

*'An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives' (AIHW 2006)<sup>2</sup>.*

There are three components to the Commonwealth Definition:

- descent
- self-identification, and
- community acceptance (AIHW 2006)

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2010), over half of the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population comprises of children and youths aged up to 24 years. In this regard issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children may have a significant impact on the wellbeing of Indigenous communities as a whole. In 2006, just under half (44%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and youth lived in regional Australia, while almost one-third lived in major cities and a one-quarter lived in remote Australia. While Indigenous children accounted for less than one in twenty of all children in Australia in 2006, they accounted for about four in twenty of all young persons living in remote or very remote areas (ABS, 2006, 2010).

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people live in what are often seen as challenging circumstances. One in seven (16%) are likely to be living in neighbourhoods considered unsafe or even dangerous, due to drug and alcohol problems, fighting, gangs and living too close to a highway or heavy traffic (Footprints in time, 2010). Compared to non-Indigenous children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have higher rates of mortality, injuries and hospitalisation, and they are more likely to come into contact with child protection and juvenile justice systems (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW, 2012). Children and youth in this group are at risk of clinically significant emotional or behavioural difficulties (DeMaio et al., 2005) as well as health conditions such as asthma, kidney disease, hearing loss and diseases of the ear (ABS, 2006, 2010).

Other important factors for the wellbeing of this group of young people are experiences of abuse and neglect. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are more likely than non-Indigenous children to be subject to substantiated child abuse or neglect, to be on child protection orders and to be living in out of home care (AIHW, 2012). This increased risk of abuse and neglect may be linked to domestic violence and excessive use of alcohol by family members (Beryl & Broomfield, 2009). Other data shows that Indigenous students are more likely than non-Indigenous students to have poor school attendance rates and to not achieve minimum numeracy and literacy standards (AIHW, 2012).

While research indicates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are generally disadvantaged compared to mainstream children, empirical evidence to illustrate how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are faring is sparse. In the latest AIHW (2012, p. 4) report, researchers stated that “there are many important areas where, at the national level, there is not sufficiently robust information to show how well Indigenous children are faring, or how they compare with non-Indigenous children”. Furthermore, the complex family structure of Aboriginal

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<sup>2</sup> See: <http://meteor.aihw.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/291036>.

and Torres Strait Islander communities is not well represented in national statistics. Indigenous family structures may extend to aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents and other kinship family systems. This complexity of relationships is difficult to capture and census statistics “may not always fully reflect the richness and complexity of household and family relationships relevant to the Indigenous population” (ABS, 2010, p.26). Some studies of specific Indigenous groups relate the positive effect that family kinship can have on children’s wellbeing (Guilfoyle, et al., 2010; Walker & Shepherd, 2008). One aim of this study is to gather data that will provide further insight into the communal nature of families and how this impacts on the wellbeing of Indigenous children and youth.

Researchers sought involvement of Aboriginal communities in NSW and SA for this study. New South Wales was selected as a research site on the basis of the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children live in communities which are culturally and linguistically diverse; the highest number being resident in NSW. South Australia was selected because it is home to communities of Aboriginal people in both regional and remote areas who have survived as a distinct people and who still occupy their ancestral territory. Though attempts were made to recruit respondents from both sites, it was only in SA that young Aboriginal people became involved with the study.

To involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the study the researchers began by talking with leaders of projects that targeted Aboriginal children as part of a community-based initiative in a regional town in South Australia. Following this initial meeting, the researchers met with the local Aboriginal health advisory committee, and with Aboriginal Elders. At these meetings they introduced the study and talked about working collaboratively with the community and of having someone from the community work with them. The researchers met with the Elders on two other occasions. They also set up a stall at a regional health fair day attended by local Indigenous school students. This provided an opportunity for young people, parents and other family members to meet the researchers and talk with them about the project. After several meetings with various community members and groups, which spanned a period of several months, the researchers worked with members of the local Aboriginal cultural awareness group to invite local Aboriginal young people to be part of the research.

A small group of Aboriginal children, some of whom were brothers and sisters (and some who were cousins), met with researchers at an Aboriginal cultural centre in South Australia to discuss things that are important, according to them, for a ‘good life’. Parents, community workers and Elders chose to be present during the workshop.

## **2.4 Economically disadvantaged young people**

The ACWP uses the term ‘economically disadvantaged’ to describe children and young people who live in households and families that experience material hardship or poverty:

*According to normal usage, poverty is "The state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions." This definition contains two important ideas. First, the definition of poverty will be different at different times and in different societies – what is "socially acceptable" in, say, India may differ from that in the U.S.A. And second, the focus is on the ability to purchase goods and services (money) or on their ownership (material possessions). (Kanbur and Squire, 1999, p.3)*

In keeping with standard practice in Australia (and in the wider poverty literature), the definition of economic disadvantage that the ACWP employs is relative: children and young people are disadvantaged when they do not have the resources, or engage in the activities, that are considered normal in their community.

In practice, economic disadvantage in childhood has been defined for measurement purposes in a number of ways:

- Children living in households with less than half median household income, where household income is adjusted for the size and composition of the household (OECD, 2009);
- Children living in households with low levels of consumption relative to a minimum standard, or to the average (Menchini and Redmond, 2009);
- Children living in jobless households, that is, where no adult member is in paid employment (Whiteford, 2009);
- Children living in households that depend for most of their income on government pensions or income support payments (Pech and McCoull, 1998);
- Children living in households where members receive special concession cards or allowances from Australian or state governments, for example, a Health Care Card, an Educational Maintenance Allowance (Victoria), or a school card (South Australia) (Skattebol et al., 2012);
- Children living in households that lack access to certain goods and services that are considered important for participation in society, for example adequate nutrition and clothing, having friends visit for dinner, dental treatment where needed, access to computer and internet, and children having a birthday party (Saunders, 2011);
- Children living in households where the parents report having difficulty paying rent or other bills, or report other forms of financial hardship (Mullan and Redmond, 2012);
- Children living in households in a suburb or neighbourhood with a low Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA score) as estimated from Census data by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (Vinson, 2007);
- Children who access services that are aimed at supporting children and young people who are economically disadvantaged (for example, the Smith Family's *Learning for Life* program, programs instituted under the *Communities for Children* initiative, or youth clubs in areas that are known to be economically disadvantaged) (Skattebol et al., 2012).

If a key factor in economic disadvantage is seen as the personal experience of material hardship, then it is important to point out that none of the above definitions directly captures this. Rather, they rely on the assumption (not unreasonable, but also problematic) that resources are equitably shared within the household, so that all household members have the same standard of living. Some measures, moreover, do not capture well household experience of economic disadvantage. This may be the case for example with the SEIFA, where the assumption is made that all households in a neighbourhood or suburb (as well as all the people within each household) share a roughly equivalent living standard.

In some cases, attempts have been made to measure economic disadvantage directly with young people, either in qualitative research (Ridge, 2002; Roker, 1998; Skattebol et al., 2012), or through quantitative surveys (Bradshaw and Main, 2010). However, survey research has arguably not yet exploited the possibilities for exploration of economic disadvantage directly with children on matters of importance to them, including missing out on certain electives as well as school and out-of-school activities (especially school camps), being subject to social exclusion because they do not have the correct uniform, and protecting their parents from expenditure.

In order to recruit economically disadvantaged children and young people for the research, the research team worked collaboratively first with the managers of 'Communities for Children' sites in South Australia. The 'Communities for Children' initiative is funded by the Commonwealth Government under the Family Support Program to recruit children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The programs and strategies utilised by Communities for Children are created to meet the needs of all young people aged 0-12 and their families, including vulnerable children and their families in disadvantaged communities, and have a primary focus on those young people at risk of poor outcomes. These Recruitment Partners approached families who were using their services and who were known to be economically disadvantaged, with an invitation to participate in the study. A small group of young people were recruited for participation in this way.

Second, researchers obtained permission from the South Australian Department of Education and Child Development to conduct groupwork and individual interviews with young people in a primary school in a low income suburb. At this site, the senior leader with responsibility for student welfare provided advice and support to the researchers and selected eleven Year 6 and Year 7 students to participate in the groupwork and interviews.

## **2.5 Young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds**

The term 'culturally and linguistically diverse' is commonly used to refer to all of Australia's non-Indigenous ethnic groups other than the English-speaking majority (Sawrikar and Katz, 2008). A related term: 'Language background other than English' (LBOTE) has been replaced by the term 'Non-English Speaking Background' (NESB) by The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the Council of Ministers of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (COMIMA). LBOTE refers to people who are "either born in a non-English speaking country, or in Australia with one or both parents born in a non-English speaking country, or are Indigenous students for whom English is a second or other language" (MCEECYA, 1997, 78). Given that NAPLAN and other measurement tools of academic success record LBOTE statistics it is important to include this as one of the definitions in defining the target group for the study.

In a draft report for the National Education Performance Monitoring Taskforce (Ainley et al., 2000), distinctions are made between language background, culture and ethnicity in order to develop a common definition for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in a school context. The Report argues that given the broad range of culturally and linguistically diverse young Australians, any practical definition needs to address two major issues: "what is to be gained from reporting separately on these students; and which aspects of a student's language background, culture, or ethnicity are both relevant to, and likely to affect their educational outcomes?" (Ainley et al., 2000, p.5). The report argues that ethnicity comes onto the public agenda mainly because of its

association with social inequality and social disadvantage and that it is this association that has motivated much of the existing research into ethnic differences in contemporary Australian society. However LBOTE students are not a homogeneous group. While some are likely to face a number of barriers to schooling, others are more likely to experience positive factors and therefore there exists a great diversity in the educational outcomes of students from ethnic minorities (Marks & McMillan 2000).

Rather than focusing on a body of research identifying Australian children from particular cultural backgrounds who perform less well in school (ACARA, 2011; Cobbold, 2010; Marks & McMillan 2000), researchers used two other vulnerability factors that have been associated with families from a culturally and linguistically diverse background: recent migration (Hertzman, 2002) and low socioeconomic status (Skattebol et al., 2012). Migration is often associated with challenges to the wellbeing of families and young people, most commonly in the early period of resettlement (Sims et al, 2008). Little is known about the channels through which migration affects children's wellbeing (Harttgen and Klasen, 2008), and while there is recognition that many positive characteristics commonly attributed to migrants do play an important role in adaptation and participation (Birrell and Seitz, 1986), there are also negative factors.

Proficiency in English has an obvious impact on young people's interaction with wider Australian society (Sims et al, 2008; Pavri et al, 2001). In addition, the culture of Australian schooling may be challenging for some migrant children. Some young people, moreover, particularly those from refugee backgrounds, may have little or no experience of formal schooling and may also have experienced trauma. Students may have to confront racism in the school and other environments (Poynting & Mason, 2007; Healy et al, 2007), and may struggle to create new identities in the dominant culture whilst trying to maintain identity, beliefs and values in relation to their home culture (Sims et al, 1999 & 2008). This may also cause intergenerational conflict within the family (Schmidt et al, 2006). Among some migrant communities, economic disadvantage can impact on children's wellbeing (Johnson, 1991; Saunders, 1996).

To recruit this category, the ACWP sought a recruitment partner who worked closely with families in an area of Sydney with a low socio economic status and a high rate of recent international migration. That is, the researchers sought out culturally and linguistically diverse young people who were likely to experience a high degree of marginalisation, not only because of their ethnic background, but also because of other disadvantages that they were likely to experience. This neighbourhood was characterised by a large population of migrants (over half the total, including high numbers of people born in China, Afghanistan, The Republic of South Korea, and India) and a large proportion of people from a non-English speaking background (again, half the total population). The dominant language spoken at home (other than English) was Arabic, and the dominant single religion was Islam; practiced by about a quarter of the population. In terms of socio-economic measures, a high percentage of households could be classified as low income (earning less than \$500 per week), a significant proportion of people had no formal qualifications, and many working age people were not in employment (ABS 2008).

The recruitment partner was a community based, non-profit organisation that develops strategies to address the needs of local migrants and focuses on recent arrivals, emerging communities and special needs groups including humanitarian entrants, refugees, women, youth, children, aged and



the unemployed – all of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. A relationship was built with this partner organisation over a period of six months. In addition to assisting with the arms-length recruitment of participants, service staff also advised the researchers on the nature and potential sensitivities of the communities and the research design. On the recommendation of the service provider, the researchers made informal contact with families before they attended family programs and social events organized by the service in order to build rapport and provide information about the project and planned research activities. Researchers also attended a workshop on gender issues and sensitivities when working with culturally and linguistically diverse communities at the invitation of the service.

Researchers were provided with a background overview of potential participants both in terms of the range of nationalities accessing the service, their socio economic status and sensitivities around the stigma of being identified as coming from refugee backgrounds. Providing language specific information for families (in Tamil, Dari, Hindi, Arabic, Mandarin, Korean) was discussed, as was the ideal format: two mixed gender groups for primary and secondary aged children. The most appropriate setting for the research, namely a family friendly event in a familiar room within the service itself with Halal food made available was planned in close consultation with service representatives. Further detailed discussion around appropriate workshop tools – visual materials, vignettes, and rewards (a certificate of appreciation) –was also part of ongoing consultation.

## 2.6 ‘Mainstream’ young people

In 2012, young people aged 8-14 made up 8.6 per cent of Australia’s population (ABS, 2013). A third lives in New South Wales, a quarter in Victoria and a fifth in Queensland. In common with the total population, two in three children live in major metropolitan areas (AIHW, 2009, 6; AIHW, 2012c). Most young people live in couple families (83 per cent in 2007) with a high proportion of these (90 per cent) being in ‘intact’ families rather than blended families. Most children living in lone parent families live with their mother (AIHW, 2009). As the age of the young person increases, the proportion living in intact couple families decreases slightly, to 79 per cent among 10-14 year olds (AIHW, 2009).

In 2009, the primary school attendance rates in Year 5 averaged between 92 and 95 per cent across states and territories with the exception of the Northern Territory where attendance rates were 5-10 per cent lower (AIHW, 2011, 69). Seven in ten children in Year 5 attended government schools, two in ten attended Catholic schools and just over a tenth attended independent schools (AIHW, 2011, 69). Nationally, the proportion of students achieving the national minimum standards for reading and numeracy were 92 and 94 per cent respectively (AIHW, 2011, 13).

As Sydney is the biggest city in Australia, it was chosen as an appropriate site for research with ‘mainstream’ young people. Within Sydney, the ACWP desired the inclusion of children who were economically comfortable but who did not appear to fall into one of the six other groups. This required recruiting young people from areas of Sydney with relatively high levels of income, but not the most affluent areas— as these children would not represent the mainstream. Recruitment partners were therefore targeted based on two factors: the areas of Sydney in which they were based, and the extent to which the activities were likely to attract ‘mainstream’ children, as defined above.



Young people in the ‘mainstream’ group were selected in two groups. The first group was the pilot group, comprising 5 boys and 5 girls, selected from among children of friends of one of the research team, and their friends. All of them lived in a middle income suburb of Sydney. Fieldwork with this group was judged to be successful, and their insights from groupwork and personal interviews were incorporated into the analysis data. In order to select the second group of young people who were economically comfortable, the researchers drew on one of the Socio-Economic Indexes for Area (SEIFA) summary measures developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to describe socio economic conditions by geographical areas— the Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage. This provides a ‘continuum’ of location advantage and disadvantage ranging from 1 to 10 (1 being the most disadvantaged and 10 being the most advantaged) based on a number of 2006 Census variables including income, education and employment (ABS website, 2013). The researchers compiled a list of suburbs in the Sydney metropolitan area that rated ‘7’ on this SEIFA index, and randomly selected a small number of suburbs from this list. In these suburbs, researchers then targeted organisations, associations and local council-run recreational activities for children in the middle years. Since a large proportion of young people in the age range participate in organised sporting activities (70.4 per cent of 11-14 year olds in Mission Australia’s National Survey of Young Australians (2009) reported participating in organised sports) the researchers approached sporting clubs and associations first. However, these clubs and associations were frequently run by parents and volunteers who did not have the time or inclination to support a research project. In addition, the highly structured context of most sporting activities meant that the research was difficult to fit in with the clubs and associations’ existing time schedules. The researchers then approached local council-run recreational activities for children, such as sports programs and local library-based programs. We received interest in the research project from a local library that subsequently supported the researchers to recruit a group of young people for the study.

## **2.7 Young people living in regional and remote areas**

According to the National Rural Health Alliance (2003) children living in rural and remote areas have significantly higher rates of injury, mental illness and ill-health than children in urban areas. Dixon and Welch (2000) also found that the health status of people living in rural areas was inferior to that of people living in cities. This may in part be due to poor availability and access to health-care and associated wellbeing services (AIHW, 2008). Research by AIHW (2011) of children’s wellbeing found that young people living in remote areas were more likely to die as infants due to injury, to be born with a low birth weight, or to be overweight or obese, to be developmentally vulnerable at school entry, and to be less likely to meet national minimum standards for reading and numeracy compared to children living in a major city. In other words, young people living in regional and remote areas of Australia face challenges with respect to their general health and wellbeing and they form another group of young people whose views of what makes a ‘good life’ warrant further investigation.

In Australia there are three major classifications that describe geographical areas, namely the RRMA (Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas) classification (developed in 1994), ARIA

(Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia) classification (developed in 1997) and ASGS (Australian Statistical Geography Standard – Remoteness Areas; developed in 2011; currently being phased in).<sup>3</sup>

A report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW, 2004) found that the methodology underlying the measure of remoteness in the ARIA and ASGC classification was better than the methodology underlying the RRMA classification, although the RRMA is still used for research purposes. To determine a remote location for recruitment of young people, the researchers sought a location that was classified as remote in all three methodologies. The location they identified was classified as remote by RRMA (Rem1), ARIA (R index score = 6) and ASGC-RA (R). To determine the validity and usefulness of a classification, the AIHW (2004) report concluded that:

*The validity of these remoteness classifications in a given application (say, describing statistics or allocating funding) is greatest when the issue of interest is affected only, or mainly, by remoteness. Caution is required when other influences (for example, socioeconomic status, health outcomes, Indigenous status and local town size) are thought to play a role in the issue of interest (this may be the case, for example when analysing death rates, retention of GPs, etc.) (p.1)*

In other words, the classifications could be relied upon as influential in a particular area of interest in cases where other factors associated with the remoteness were not significant, otherwise caution should be exercised.

The ACWP thus approached a school in the Northern Territory which catered for young people in the middle years who, following ethics approval from jurisdictional authorities, agreed to participate in the study. Staff were briefed by the head of school about the ACWP research, resulting in teachers selecting two students each (a girl and boy) from forms 5 to 9 (ages 9 to 14). The selection criteria used by teachers was not recorded, however one teacher explained simply that they had selected students whom they considered organised and most likely to return the consent form in the required time. All but one of the participants who were invited to participate accepted. Ten of the eleven students who attended the workshop also returned to participate in the in-depth interviews.

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<sup>3</sup> See

[http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/Australian+Statistical+Geography+Standard+\(ASGS\)](http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/Australian+Statistical+Geography+Standard+(ASGS))

### **3 Research design**

As noted in Chapter 1, the aim of this phase of the project was to collect and interpret data that addressed the question: “What are the things that children in each of the target groups think are important to having ‘a good life’?”

We utilised a range of in-depth qualitative methods that allowed us to explore complex life-stories, experiences and individual circumstances of participants. In this we provided multiple opportunities for participants in the different target groups to explore shared understandings of wellbeing, and to better understand the perceptions and interpretations of each population group (Liampattong and Ezzy, 2005). The guiding principle in this work was that young people are the experts in their own lives and cultures and needed to be provided opportunities to share that expertise (Tisdall, 2012).

Focus groups with young people combined interactive group activities that used visual prompts to generate discussion about the things that are important for having a good life – including creating artworks and doing activities on i-pads – with interactive follow up interviews with some of the group participants. The follow up interviews were also interactive – working with vignettes and i-pad activities – to talk in more depth about some of the themes that emerged from the group activities and served as prompts for discussion about the things that might get in the way of having a good life. This method is particularly appropriate for young people with language difficulties, and those unfamiliar with talking to strangers.

Phase One of the study was approved by the University of New South Wales Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC) at Flinders University. It was also scrutinised by additional ethics processes required for several of the fieldwork sites, and received ethics approval from relevant jurisdictional authorities and community service organisations. In addition, as noted in Chapter 2, recruitment partners were consulted extensively about approaches and research methods with the different groups of young people. Instruments moreover were continually refined in the field and informed by methodology research that contends visual-based methods should be flexible to the needs of the participants in order to best serve the aims of the research (Pink, 2007; McGuigan, 1997).

#### **3.1 Aims of the phase 1 research and implications for methodology**

Following the assumption that young people are experts in their own lives and cultures, it was considered critical that the design of Phase One should generate open-ended responses so that children were able to share their views on wellbeing even where these views did not correspond to categories and language used in existing policy documents and survey instruments. The workshops were conducted with a very diverse range of young people, both in terms of age and background, and the flexibility of the tool-kit enabled us to refine the procedure at each research site to ensure relevance to all participants. Extensive collaboration and consultation with recruitment partners prior to data collection in each site enabled us to set up social situations familiar to the children and use instruments best suited to their communication styles and interests.

The child wellbeing literature suggests that the ‘good life’ for children is experienced across a number of domains or contexts of everyday experience (Hamilton and Redmond, 2010). There is broad consensus about the domains and indicators used in existing surveys of young people in their middle years (Land et al., 2007). Our goal was to enable young people firstly to propose domains that they thought were important in their lives, and secondly, to respond to and conceptually contest those domains that occur frequently in survey research with children and young people. Following an audit of surveys carried out as part of the preparatory work for this phase of the research, seven broad domain areas were identified as occurring frequently in the research: friends; family; school; community; health; money and the things I have and do; and feeling good about myself.<sup>4</sup> This selection of domains helped give structure to the discussions with young people, and facilitated comparisons between the groups. However, the researchers did not propose dimensions within any of the domains for young people to discuss, unless these dimensions had already been raised by another group.

We sought to address the following questions in relation to both the domains that the children themselves proposed and the seven domains identified in the literature:

- How important are each of these domains?
- How are the domains organised into hierarchies of relative importance?
- How might some domains form prerequisites for others?
- What is the relationship between the domains?

In answering these questions our aim was to generate data that could help us to understand how young people conceptualise wellbeing and its components. We were interested in the weight given to different domains by different groups of children and how they saw them relating to each other. We also sought information from young people on other domains that they might see as important. Exploration of these issues suggested the need to address the following questions:

- What do these domains mean for different groups of children?
- What language do the children use to describe these domains?
- Are there ways young people conceptualise wellbeing that are underplayed by the typical domains included in surveys?

As the discussion in Chapter 4 shows, children did identify other domains that were important to them, as well as a number of domains that cut across the more ‘established’ domains such as family, school, health and community.

We were also interested in what young people see as important *within* each domain. For example, what do children mean by family, friends, or community, where are the lines drawn between these categories, and how does this differ between groups? At the survey design stage, this information could help us to select existing scales, or design new survey questions that resonate with young people and capture what they think is important within each domain. The analysis of language used

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<sup>4</sup> Surveys and other instruments consulted as part of this exercise are listed in Appendix B.

to describe what is meaningful about each of the domains would also support the development of items and questions on the survey. In summary, the data collected at Phase One is intended to inform the broader structure of the survey and the relative emphasis on different domains, as well as providing rich qualitative data to support the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

Child ‘friendly’ methods are characterised by rapport building and establishing the child as expert within the research dynamic. Focus groups with children, especially with those from marginalised populations, have been found to be an effective strategy as the presence of peers can help to minimise stress and provide a forum for participants to brainstorm together (Foley et al, 2012). Considerable effort was invested in working around the tendency of young people to respond in line with the habits of schooling which often requires them to supply the answer expected by the teacher – a phenomenon termed by Hatch (1995) as ‘correct answer phenomenon’. With this aim in mind, instruments were designed to encourage dialogic exchange through involving continuous negotiation of meaning and multiple modes of expression.

Rapport was established through an activity-based framework that employed a range of creative methods including collage, drawing, photography and the use of digital media to engage with children and young people. One of the advantages of using digital media is that young people typically have a level of competence with technologies such as i-pads, and this familiarity enables them to be positioned in the research as experts from the start. This positioning as expert encourages children to share their expertise about their own lives and what wellbeing means to them. Visual methods also circumvent issues with literacy and activity-based formats can be enabling for participants who find face-to-face verbal communication more difficult. Having said this, the contributions produced by participants in each creative activity were discussed by researcher and participant in recognition that meaningful data comes from dialogue around the images and narrative rather than exclusively from the images themselves (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008).

### **3.2 The research team**

The research team comprised both senior and less experienced researchers on the project, and a cartoonist. A cartoonist was commissioned to make drawings of the things respondents suggested were necessary for ‘a good life’ during the brainstorming sessions. A cartoonist, it was thought, would enable illustrations to occur quickly and succinctly, add novelty to the experience and overcome any constraints experienced by young people attempting to illustrate complex concepts themselves. The same facilitator ran all workshops and she was supported by at least one other team member in addition to the cartoonist. Follow-up interviews were undertaken by the workshop facilitator and by the same support person participants had met in the earlier group workshop.

### **3.3 Data collection techniques**

The social dynamics of data collection involved both group workshops and individual interviews. Group work enabled us to see how perspectives were negotiated and what rationales young people might give to other young people. The individual interviews provided more in-depth discussion on some of the barriers to ‘a good life’ and also enabled those who find it difficult to talk in a group and to potentially open up discussion of more personally sensitive issues. The use of vignettes was also designed to enable participation in a non-threatening context.

Research with each group consisted of a two hour workshop with follow up interviews offered to a number of participants in each group. In some cases (notably in the case of some children living with disability) individual interviews were offered instead of a group activity. Group workshops were conducted after school, on the weekend or in the summer school. Each group consisted of five to ten participants with two researchers facilitating and one cartoonist. The workshops took place in a venue which provided both a familiar space and the presence of familiar adults nearby. In some instances (in the Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse group work), some family members remained present in the room by request. Follow up interviews took place at a venue of the family's choice and included recruitment partner venue, public library and private homes. Food and drink breaks were provided during the sessions.

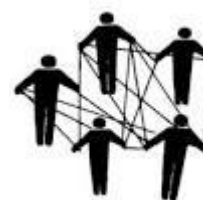
### 3.4 Part 1: Activity based workshop

The range of activities included in the workshops included physical and i-pad warm ups and ice-breakers, group brainstorming, and producing visual representations of wellbeing using group and individual tools. Moving between group and individual activities, the young people could opt out of any activity or discussion if they wished. The design of the workshops followed a spiral curriculum process that enables students and teachers to revisit the basic ideas repeatedly, building upon them until the student has grasped the full formal apparatus that goes with them (Bruner, 2009). In this case, the line between researchers (not teachers) and students was somewhat blurred as the expertise in 'what children think' lay with the participants, with the role of the adult researchers seen as supporting them to develop, articulate and refine these ideas as fully as possible.

#### ***Warm ups***

Upon arrival, each participant was given an i-pad pre-loaded with Apps and relevant material to work with during the session. While they were waiting for other participants to arrive, each participant was invited to play with *Talking Tom* App (<http://outfit7.com/apps/talking-tom-cat-1/>). Talking Tom is an application where the user talks to an animated cat and the App records whatever the user says so the animated character can then repeat it. The purpose of this activity was to introduce participants to each other in an entertaining way, and put them at ease before exploring ideas about living a good life. It also allowed participants who had never used an i-pad before to familiarise themselves with it.

Once all participants were present, the group was engaged in an ice breaker exercise that involved throwing balls of wool, saying their names and then navigating the maze created by the wool.



After these warm ups, the workshop proceedings and research protocols were explained to participants and their consent for recording the session sought.

#### ***Data collection activity 1: Brainstorm***

The first data collection activity involved a brainstorm about wellbeing where participant contributions were recorded on a wall of paper by the cartoonist. The purpose of this activity was to identify the things that young people think are important to living 'a good life' through a non-prescriptive, visual exploration of important domains from the young person's point of view. This

activity was modelled on a graphic planning tool, PATH, used primarily with people with disability to visualise a 'good life' (Forest et al, 1993).

**Figure 1: Cartoonist's representation of brainstorm**



A large piece of paper with the words ‘A Good Life’ was placed on a wall with all participants sitting on the floor in a semi-circle. The participants were asked to call out the things that they thought are important to having a good life. As they did so the cartoonist drew the items on the sheet of paper. The brainstorm was facilitated by a researcher, who asked for more detail or clarification about items as they were raised by the participants. Figure 1 shows one example of ‘a good life’ picture, with representations by the cartoonist (supplemented by children).

### Figure 2: refining images



This process of refinement was then followed throughout the workshop until the representations at the end of the activity were a rich collaboration between cartoonist and all children in the group. Occasionally in this process a participant would add a thought late in the process that all participants agreed was important.

The cartoonist occasionally asked the participants for image suggestions in terms of how to best represent their ideas, or what they would like to amend in the way he had depicted their suggestions. For example, at one session the cartoonist originally drew a

house to represent participants' idea that people needed a house to live in. After being asked whether this image conveyed their ideas accurately one of the participants asked that the cartoonist add something to show that each person in the home needed their own bedroom. This was then added in graphic and text (Figure 2).

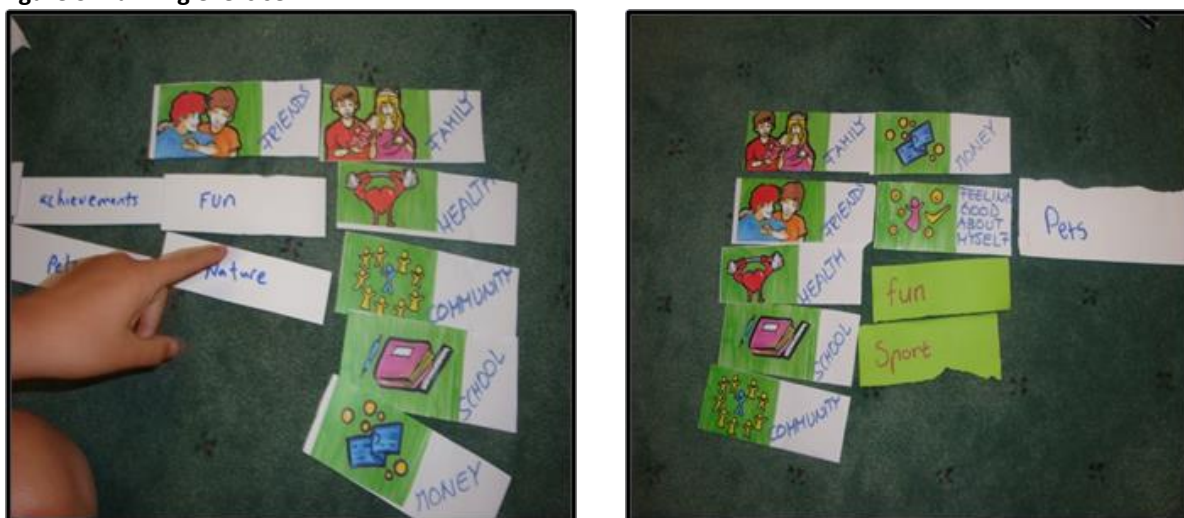
### ***Data Collection Activity 2: Domain hierarchy activity***

The second data collection activity was a ranking exercise to explore the relative importance of the different domains identified in the brainstorm activity. The purpose of this activity was to encourage participants to share their views on how important the overarching domains were in relation to each other and whether there were any missing. This activity was adapted from a tool used in the television series 'Life at 7' (ABC TV, 2012) made in conjunction with The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (AIFS, 2012). Young people were presented with seven illustrated cards of the



most common domains that have emerged in studies about children's wellbeing (feeling good about myself; family; friends; school; community; health; and money). The participants were then asked to nominate any other domains that they felt were important and missing from the group. Participants then made cards for these additional domains before they individually ranked them from the most to the least important. Figure 3 shows two children's rankings of the domains. Some participants in the group that included these children discussed nature as well as pets. After consideration they settled on the idea that their interactions with pets were critically important to their wellbeing, so this was included as a domain in its own right and one young person positioned it next to friends and feeling good about oneself.

**Figure 3: Ranking exercise**



### **Data Collection Activity 3: Pic Collage**

In the third data collection activity, young people were asked to use a visual storytelling app on the i-pads to make images of the things that they considered to be most important to them for having a good life. The purpose of this activity was to enable participants to individually use open ended materials to enable them to represent the things that were most important to them. Research was conducted to find an appropriate visual story-telling i-pad app for the participant demographic and workshop design. The app used for this purpose was Pic Collage (<https://itunes.apple.com/au/app/pic-collage/id448639966?mt=8>). The Pic Collage app allows users to make a collage, drawing on images from the camera, internet and a customised photo library. For the purposes of this study, each I-pad was fitted with a customised photo library with images participants could use if they wished. The images in this photobank library were developed after consultations with recruitment partners who knew the participants. This ensured the images included in the bank were of significance to participants in each of the research sites. Participants were given about 10 minutes to individually work on completing their Pic Collages<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that many respondents were tech-savvy, and free expression was encouraged, so often personal images and those sourced from commercial sites were used. For this reason, many of these cannot be displayed in this report, and measures to ensure privacy and copyright obligations have been taken in preparing the images used as examples in this report.



**Figure 4: use of customised images**



Figure 4 shows a *Pic Collage* where images recommended by trusted people that were included in the photobank and enabled a participant to 'recognise' their own interests and lifeworld in the activity. This Pic Collage was created by one of the participants in the disability group. He took a photograph of friends he was working with (obscured here to protect anonymity), inserted an image from the Modern Family television series to represent family and included an image of a hospital. His enthusiasm at being able to make his own images and find things in the picture bank that were meaningful to him is evidenced in his excited comment.

*"Look at mine – look at mine.....I've taken family, friends..."*

After the domain hierarchy activity, participants discussed their pic collages with a researcher for about ten minutes, either singly or in groups of two or three. They were asked to discuss why the domains that they had nominated were the most important, why some were more important than others, and why some were less important than others. This deepened the data about the hierarchy of domains but also provided rich data about how each domain was understood. These collages were also used in follow up interviews.

#### ***Data Collection Activity 4: 'Domains of a good life' collage***

The fourth data collection activity involved further development of the initial group mural along the theme of what is needed for a good life. The purpose of this activity was to enable young people another opportunity to interact and collaborate to develop the original group representation made with the cartoonist after having had the opportunity to think 'alone'. This activity involved participants adding to the original cartoon poster drawn at the beginning of the session, using cut out magazine images<sup>6</sup>, discussion prompt cards from St Luke's innovative resources (Espie, 2007) pens, glitter, glue and other materials. As the group worked to produce another visual representation of what is important for the good life, the facilitator asked the following questions: What is it about each of the areas that is important? What's missing? Are there any other things that are important that we haven't discussed? What about any new areas? To this end, participants were encouraged to develop the group mural to represent the most sophisticated understandings they had reached about the domains they felt important for having a good life.

<sup>6</sup> Again selected to represent the particularity of each group as well as popular culture.

**Figure 5: Participant additions of 'fashion for health'**



Figure 5 illustrates the type of substantive contribution that could occur at this stage of the representation process. One of the participants from the economically disadvantaged group added running shoes between fashion and health. On the one hand this represents a highly valued fashion item but its connection to health is made explicit in its placement.

### 3.5 Part 2: Follow-up interviews

The next stage of the research was to conduct follow up face-to-face interviews for 30-45 minutes with workshop participants who agreed to return for an interview. In most cases, the interviews took place in the week after the group activity and again we took a visual and participatory approach to the research. The purpose of the follow up interviews was to further understand how children from different backgrounds and experiences perceive and manage challenges and changes in their lives and how this may impact on their perceptions of future wellbeing. The follow up interviews revisited individual participant contributions to the workshop in order to add depth to the data. We also:

- Explored the meaning of certain words and themes which came up during workshops and that seemed to be particularly relevant (or not relevant) to the group in which the child participated.
- Focussed in particular on the perceived barriers to 'a good life' for children (which participants may not have felt comfortable talking about in a group).
- Explored protective factors with questions designed to explore the concept of resilience-challenges and barriers to wellbeing and how young people overcome them including how they deal with change.
- Encouraged discussion around change and resilience with a past/present/future perspective.

The first line of questioning revisited the domains cards that were used for ranking in the group activity. Young people who were interviewed were asked what each of the domains meant to them, whether the terms and ideas were clear or confusing, and whether there were other words that might better describe these domains. The second line of questioning revisited the *Pic Collage* exercise. The children were presented with a hard copy of their pic collage from the group activity.

The next part of the interview focussed on things that can get in the way of having a good life. This activity was introduced by screening a short animated documentary from ABC television series *My Great Big Adventure* (ABC TV, 2012) which depicts children managing adverse events. The participants were then asked to make a *Pic Collage* of the three most important things that may get

in the way of children living ‘a good life’ and to share their insights. The use of vignettes in research allows the meanings and definitions of young people to be represented (Barter and Renold, 2000) and are recognised as being particularly useful in the study of potentially difficult subject matter (Hughs & Huby, 2001).

The final two lines of questioning explored two themes that had emerged consistently across the workshops but that the research team felt needed further exploration: change and guidance.

Questions on change invited the young people to describe a time when something in their life changed. These themes were introduced in the following way: *I’m going to ask you some questions now that about how past experiences may have shaped who you are and what you think now. We are also interested to know how children’s experiences influence their hopes and dreams for the future. Have you experienced anything in your life so far which has been a big change from how things used to be?* Children with difficulty selecting a time of change were provided with prompts. Those still having difficulty were presented with several examples of change in short vignettes written by the research team and were asked to comment on the situation as a third person. The following semi-structured questions invited young people to discuss

- how the event/change had an impact on their life?
- what methods they found to cope?
- what other supports helped with coping? and
- whether they learnt anything from this experience/time that they could call upon again in the future?

The set of semi-structured questions focussed on guidance and invited children to discuss

- how they understood the words ‘guidance’ and ‘rules’
- who provides guidance and rules
- the rules in their life across different domains
- whether these rules are a good or a bad thing
- how important it is to have scope for autonomous decision-making, and
- how this is balanced with the existence of guidance and rules.

### **3.6 Variations for specific target groups**

As indicated earlier, the exact selection of tools, questions and terminology was made in consultation with recruitment partners and in some circumstances the families of the participants. As a consequence, the tools were adapted to meet the needs of some of the groups of children. The most significant changes to the tools were for young people with disability. Drawing on the advice of recruitment partners, the group activities with children with intellectual or cognitive disability were shorter, between 45 minutes and an hour. The children were still asked to complete the ranking and the Pic Collage activities but these activities were abbreviated, and the brainstorm and domain activities were merged into one activity.

In addition, some young people in the disability and mainstream groups were not available to participate in the group activities or preferred a one-one-one session. In these circumstances, the group activities were tailored to a one-on-one context. This involved shortening the activities, conducting the brainstorm without the cartoonist, ranking domains and undertaking and discussing the Pic Collage. The domains mural was dropped and instead the researcher asked more detailed questions as the brainstorm was carried out. These interviews were called **independent interviews** and their purpose was to elicit similar data to the group activities. They must therefore be differentiated from the **follow up interviews** that were conducted with some young people who had already participated in the group activities (see Tables 2 and 3).

### 3.7 Participants

The target sample size was approximately 80 young people that included: 10 in each of the targeted marginalised groups, and 20 in the 'mainstream' group. The final sample comprised 97 young people from across four Australian states and territories (including ten young people in the pilot group whose data were also analysed alongside those of the 'mainstream' group). Table 2 shows that half of the 97 participants (48) were from NSW, while 31 were from South Australia, with the remainder from ACT, 8, and Northern Territory, 10. 41 were males, and 56 were females. The majority (64) were aged between 10 and 13 years. Table 3 shows that the biggest groups in terms of numbers were the economically disadvantaged group (21 participants), the culturally and linguistically diverse group (20) and the 'mainstream' group (19). The other groups had 8-10 participants. Therefore the targeted number of participants was met in all groups, and exceeded in some.

**Table 2: Group work and interview participants by age, sex and state/territory**

	NSW	SA	ACT	NT	Total
Males	21	12	6	2	41
Females	27	19	2	8	56
<i>Age</i>					
8-9	14	5	3	0	22
10-11	14	4	2	5	25
12-13	13	19	2	5	39
14	7	3	1	0	11
<i>Activity</i>					
Group	46	31	8	10	95
Follow-up (a)	9	10		10	29
Independent (b)	2				2
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>97</b>

Notes: (a) Follow up interviews with children who had already participated in group activities focused on barriers, protective factors, resilience; (b) One-off one-on-one interviews with young people not participating in group activities. Data collected were equivalent to those in group activities: things children think are important to having a good life; their relative importance; what different domains mean; what language is used to describe domains. A pilot was carried out with 10 young mainstream people in NSW. Data from this mainstream groupwork and interviews were analysed alongside data from other fieldwork.

**Table 3: Group work and interview participants by age, sex and grouping**

	Out of home care	culturally and linguistically diverse	Regional and remote	Children with disabilities	Aboriginal	Economically disadvantaged	Main-stream	Total
Males	6	5	2	6	6	6	10	41
Females	2	15	8	3	4	15	9	56
<i>Age</i>								
8-9	3	6	0	1	2	3	7	22
10-11	2	5	5	5	3	1	4	25
12-13	2	6	5	3	4	15	4	39
14	1	3	0		1	2	4	11
<i>Activity</i>								
Group	8	20	10	8	10	21	18	95
Follow-up (a)		5	10		0	10	4	29
Independent (b)		0		1	0		1	2
<b>Total</b>	8	20	10	9	10	21	19	97

See Notes to Table 2.

## 4 Findings

This chapter provides a detailed description of how young people who participated in Phase One of the ACWP conceptualised wellbeing. In order to enhance comparability between the groups, description of discussions in each group is for the most part organised according to the seven dimensions discussed in Chapter 3 that reflect broader themes in the literature on children's wellbeing: friends, family, school, community, health, money and materiality, and feeling good about yourself. However, not all of these dimensions were discussed in all of the groups (even if they were raised by the researchers). In most of the groups moreover, young people highlighted other dimensions too, which are also discussed below.

### 4.1 Young people in out of home care

A total of eight young people (2 girls and 6 boys) aged between 8 and 14 years took part in one workshop in a small urban centre. The participants, including three sets of siblings, were all in stable placements with foster carers or in kinship care (living with a grandparent). This group of young people did not know each other before the workshop session which took place in a community hall during the school holidays. Some participants were hesitant to take part in group activities and were distracted and therefore distracting to others. The group included individuals with behavioural and literacy issues and there was a high noise level overall. The program coordinator from the recruitment partner was present throughout the session. Approximately five carers and case workers stayed at the beginning of the session in order to make sure that the children in their care felt comfortable in the activity. Two researchers and the cartoonist were present. A joint follow up interview was conducted with two siblings (in long term foster care) at their home after school. These participants had requested that they be interviewed together and researchers were warned (prior to group activity) that the subject of 'family' was a sensitive area and not to ask direct questions around this. Care was taken to respect young people's silences around this domain and to permit them to participate in exercises without having to share personal information about their family circumstances.

#### **Key concepts**

Like all other groups, young people in out of home care proposed that family was the most important influence on wellbeing. Participants conceptualised family, firstly in terms of a traditional nuclear model of parents and siblings, and then inclusive of extended family members such as grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins. It is useful to note that they did not include carers or other people who were not biologically related. The domain ranking within the out of home care group was more fragmented than in other groups which potentially reflected the diversity of experiences within the group and the stresses young people in this group faced in their everyday lives. While money was ranked as least important, participants spent considerably more time than children in other groups imagining that the goods and services they wanted were more affordable. The most striking feature of the interviews and group work among children in this group was their propensity to imagine and engage in prospective narratives that empowered them with greater agency in their lives.

## **Family**

While 'family' was ranked as the most important domain for a good life for children from out of home care, it was clearly a difficult topic for them. They offered very little about what makes families important for wellbeing. They offered traditional family structures in terms of a definition of family.

*Mum and Dad and then our grandparents and my aunty.*

*Mum and Dad.*

*My parents.*

Participants in the out of home care group spoke very little about the relational qualities of their family life. Indeed, in stark contrast to the other groups, little information was volunteered about the structure of families, views on normative family functioning, or the relational dimensions of family life in group activities. The only strong comment was offered within the context of a discussion about bullying which predominantly centred on school. This paucity of shared discussion about family may reflect that these children are used to offering fairly normative pictures of family life with unfamiliar (and indeed perhaps with familiar) peers.

In contrast to the more unified concepts of family generated in the group brainstorm exercise, two siblings in long term foster care who had participated in the group work appeared more forthcoming when they were interviewed separately.

One participant said:

*Family is always there for you. You can tell them pretty much anything but then again there are things that you don't want to tell them, like maybe you were caught hanging around someone that was doing a bad thing and then the blame was put on you and you don't want to tell your parents, and you can tell your friends.*

This statement infers that parents or carers might not always offer an ideal environment for young people to discuss worrisome incidences of the day. A further reference to the dynamics of family life was expressed as part of a query about bullying and what kind of behaviours constituted bullying:

*Yeah. Well, there's name calling that's really mean, like saying someone's fat even though they're not just so that you can get all the attention and saying that you told them or something, like there's the - you just got [owned] or something. At home there might be parents fighting with each other or parents hitting the children.*

The reticence of these young people to talk about family in ways that reflect their experience outside of a very safe environment underscores the tendency for young people to normalise experiences that undercut wellbeing.

## **Friends**

Strong, supportive and safe friendships were stressed as important by children in out of home care. While young people in other groups often mentioned the activities they did with friends, this was hardly mentioned by young people in this cohort. They were focussed on friendship dynamics and

the qualities they wanted in their friends. Friends were named as peers who could be trusted, who they could help, who would listen, with whom they could share secrets and personal information, and who would, if there were fights, “get over them quick”.

*People you can trust and that are close to you and that you can tell nearly everything, like a best friend, maybe.*

The young people in out-of-home care were enmeshed in wide range of friendship dynamics: some had just a best friend; some a small group of ‘three or four’, and some quite large groups.

*At school my group of friends is 23. We’ve got a group of 23 people and we just hang around. Yeah, we just hang around at recess and lunch and talk. And then [we all] split off and go and do our own stuff.*

When asked about managing peer dynamics this girl emphasised the need to be resilient to destructive social behaviours from people within the group who were struggling to belong:

*There’s always at least one bad person in your group of friends that will spread rumours about you. So they spread rumours, then everyone else turns against you...Say if that [bullying] person always - is always the one who does that and you know that's typical of them, you just don't worry about it because we know that's what they're - they're trying to break up the group of friends because they're jealous that we're - we're all such a big group and they're not so much a part of it.*

In addition, like many of the other groups, young people in out of home care spoke of the importance of pets for them as friends and confidantes.

*Sometimes if I don’t want to tell my friends or Mum or Dad or anyone else I talk to the dogs...Pets are like you can play with them whenever – well, especially dogs, maybe cats, sometimes birds.*

### **School**

Young people in out of home care had some mixed feelings about school. Like some of the other groups, young people in out of home care tended to emphasise school as a place to establish and maintain their friendships, and for general socialising.

*School is like – you know how they got all those places like Facebook and things and then you’ve got friends and that but school’s more a place where you know your friends and you learn with them instead of talking to complete strangers.*

*Like, when we go on holidays and you don’t want to go back to school but you do because you want to see your friends again...where we can talk and hang out and everything.*





While school was generally discussed as a place where positive relationships were enacted, the discussion on friendships segued into a discussion on bullying. Bullying was discussed along a rotating continuum of teasing and social exclusion.

*I was bullied a year ago and I told Mum – well, no, my teacher told Mum and she did a big thing about it and I didn't like it because then everyone who was bullying me at that time gave me more stuff about it. So then I got bullied a lot more...They found someone else to pick on, and they just keep on doing it and eventually they'll come back to you and start bullying you again.*

One girl discussed at length the existence of a social hierarchy at her school, and acts of social exclusion that targeted the

way she dressed:

*There are these girls at my school that are all up themselves and they think that the whole world revolves around them...It's because my skirt isn't nearly up to my bum and I don't wear my hair out so that it looks scruffy, and I wear black shoes maybe, and so they say stuff and that's what makes you feel bad.*

It was her view that this group of girls tried to actively exclude and diminish her and her friends through teasing because they were “smart”. She felt that these other students could not see how fun her group was and could not see they shared the behaviours and activities of the other excluding group.

*They think they have the right to tease me because I'm lower than them, I'm just that little bit lower...we're silly too, we make jokes, but the people who bully don't see that because they don't hang out with us and they can't see that we're also fun as well.*

Her comments speak to the complex emotional work involved in securing wellbeing in an environment where some friendship groups establish their status through belittling others.

The social dynamics of schooling dominated discussion, and homework was discussed as a burden with no great emphasis placed on its educational value, which contrasted with a general respect for education shown by many of the other groups. Discussion of school rules and behaviour management systems was, however, more nuanced. The participants appreciated gaining recognition at school for their achievements, which made them feel good, and there was a long discussion of prizes, “good effort cards”, and “table points” that reflected this. At the same time, some children also expressed frustration with what they perceived to be petty rules at school.

## **Health**

Participants in out of home care demonstrated a clear and consistent understanding of the concept of ‘health’—participating in sports, eating healthy food, and refraining from unhealthy activities such as smoking.

*To exercise every day, eat healthy things and maybe do a little bit of unhealthy things every now and then.*

*Also alcohol is another thing because it's everywhere and so is smoking, and they say that it's not good for you yet it's all over the shelves, at even chemists, and that's supposed to be health foods.*

### **Community**

When speaking about 'community', which ranked as a moderately important domain, the out of home care respondents included families, schools, and neighbourhoods. The out of home care group also tended to emphasise the relational aspects of community, as consisting of people not only familiar to them, but also people they could trust.

*[Community includes] our school.*

*Family community.*

*They're people that you can rely on and you can trust them because you know most of the – well, some of the community.*

*I think community is good because community is a little bit of your family as well.*



### **Money**

This group viewed money as something necessary to meet basic needs: food, clothing, and shelter. Money was additionally seen as something which enabled one to “keep up your health”, as one young person put it – to buy healthy food and participate in sports. Accordingly, children and young people assigned little weight to money as enabling one to buy luxuries, which, for the children, included motorbikes, games, and televisions.

*It's not about who's got the most money, it's what you do with the money that is the thing. Like, there's those billionaires that just spend it all on mansions and really expensive cars instead of thinking about maybe their kids or something.*

This group advanced views on how to make goods more affordable and within their reach. A recurring theme that came up repeatedly at different points in the discussion from different participants was the desire for goods to be more affordable and for them to thus have opportunities to exercise consumer choice. It may be useful to consider consumer choice as an arena where children can exercise agency if they have money and if things are affordable.

*Make everything from the canteen \$1... Actually five cents.*

*Cheaper shops*

*Cheaper video games.*

*You can buy a jumbo jet for \$1.*

### ***Fantasy***

Such discussions about affordability were embedded in ‘what if’ scenarios that involved fantasy. Flights into imagined worlds were a clear feature of the discussion of these young people in both group and individual situations. Here it is important to note that they were not a friendship group who may have influenced each other’s cognitive styles.

In group work, some participants generated an alternative version of school which they likened to a “fun park”, with swimming pools, water slides and roller-coasters, and “no smokes”. At different times in the data collection participants mentioned robots who could do things for you (including household chores), or had super powers that could transport “you anywhere, anytime”, powers that were useful:

*If we get into trouble and they’re chasing us we can just turn invisible and they can’t kill us.*

*You could never die.*

*You can choose anything to be.*

The world of the imagination was clearly an important space for these young people, which was also a theme shared to some extent by individuals from the mainstream group. Imagination clearly enabled these young people to generate preferred experiences involving greater agency, albeit in an imagined landscape and community. This perhaps correlates the empowerment of family (so often taken for granted, even when non-nuclear) and a young person’s intuition of their own participation in future-making; where policymakers may need to understand more about how to create opportunities in the lives of children who, it seems, express an ultimate disenfranchisement.

## **4.2 Young people with disability**

Research with young people with disability was conducted through two group workshops (of one hour duration), one located in the city and one in a rural location, and one individual interview. There were no follow up interviews.

In the first group there were five participants (three boys and two girls) aged between 9 and 12. The workshop took place after school during a regular group program run by the recruitment partner which is situated in a large city. All five participants were identified as being on the autism spectrum. Some had additional diagnoses of ‘Global Developmental Delay, Intellectual Disability, Speech and Language Delays and Fine and Gross Motor Impairments.’ Two service representatives (coordinator and facilitator) attended. Two researchers, one of whom had previously worked with the service and knew staff and children, and the cartoonist, facilitated the workshop. The brainstorm was the most successful activity after which energy levels and individual participation varied. Domain ranking was not included and the Pic-collage activity was less successful than had been the case in other contexts. One worker helped to facilitate communication and participation but it would have been helpful to have the one to one ratio between researchers and participants that was normally part of the afternoon activities.

The second workshop took place in the private home of one of the participants in a rural area. Three children (two boys and one girl) all in early years of high school attended. One young person (and his

sibling) was home schooled while the other two participants attended mainstream school. The researcher was not provided with an official diagnosis but the children and parents talked about the autism spectrum and ADD. This was a noisy home environment with parents and younger siblings nearby but not in the same room. The young people did not know each other well but seemed comfortable and all participated fully and were excited to be part of a select group of children all around Australia invited to give their opinions and influence a national survey. The individual interview (regional) took place in a private home with the young person's mother present throughout (and the family pets which played an important part in the interview). The participant was diagnosed as having 'mild Aspergers' and was home schooled.

It should be noted that, despite attempts to recruit children with physical disabilities, all the children with disability canvassed for this research presented with an intellectual disability. This is a limitation of the current study, given that children and young people with physical disabilities are likely to have particular support needs and experiences stemming from their physical disabilities which may impact on their experiences and views on wellbeing. Renewed attempts to recruit young people with physical disabilities for this project will be made during the next round of qualitative data collection.

### **Key themes**

Children with disability felt that family was the strongest source of wellbeing. They felt this domain was safe, comfortable and supportive. Friends also ranked highly. However young people with disability often felt that they stood out from their peers, and this self-consciousness affected many of their experiences and views regarding 'a good life'. Money ranked fairly low with this group. In contrast to the other groups, 'guidance and rules' was not a strong consideration for young people with disability. Issues of agency and autonomy, similarly, did not emerge as a critical theme. Rather issues and themes of belonging and acceptance strongly shaped the respondents' notions of wellbeing and their conception of 'a good life'.

### **Family**

Family was typically understood as a mother, father and siblings, with an outer ring of extended biological family such as cousins and grandparents. Family was consistently identified as the most important element in contributing to wellbeing and helping children live 'a good life'. Young people with disability valued their families as providing support for them. They enjoyed spending time with their families, relaxing, and having fun. Family was also seen as the nexus of self-esteem and growth, a sphere where the participants could feel comfortable and "just be yourself", and where they could talk over issues and problems safely.

*Family is everything. Family is everything you need in the world. That is the most thing that you need in your heart.*

Some children mentioned their cousins as their friends who they could play with, indicating their emotional responsiveness to friendships where differences could take a back seat.

### **Friends**

Friendship was also an important domain for young people within this group. Friends were defined in terms of what you did with them –playing and making fun – as well as in terms of the quality of the relationships. However, in comparison with the other groups, friendship was problematic for

young people with disability. Because many of these respondents struggled with issues of belonging and acceptance, friends took on particular importance for them. Many talked about struggling to establish and maintain friendships. Accordingly young people tended to value their friendships higher than that of other groups. As one young person put it, “friends are important for making you not feel lonely...you stick together.” As support and friendship could not be taken for granted, young people with disability also valued their pets as friends and confidantes.

*When you feel like you're getting roused on all the time or something, you can just go and talk to them, or pat them, or hug them, sit down. I like doing that.*

### **Health**

Health also emerged as an important concern during group discussion. Most children spoke about the importance of physical health, seeing it as “having a healthy body”. Much of the discussion about health revolved around the resources which they saw as necessary for obtaining and maintaining their health. Such resources were wide ranging and could include good food – as one respondent noted, “if you don’t eat food your muscles won’t get strong and you would have bad health” – dental hygiene; drinking “heaps of water”; eating healthy food like “fruits and veggies”; and doing exercise.

Of note in these discussions was that maintaining good physical health was still often related to belonging and acceptance for some of the respondents. One respondent noted:

*Health is good because if you're not that fit you'll be lazy and fat and yeah, you won't have many friends, and you'll get teased.*

A number of participants talked freely about taking medication on a daily basis to manage their mental, behavioural and health routines. One suggested health was more important than learning because “if you are not very keen on your health, you might get very sick”.

Other young people with disabilities moved beyond a focus on physical health touching on mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. In common with some (but not all) of the other groups, mental health issues appeared to be of considerable concern for the disability group; this may at least partly be a reflection of their problems with ‘fitting in’.

### **Community**

As an aggregate across the disability group, ‘community’ was the fourth most important domain. Young people with disability had a fairly wide conception of community and tended to include schools, clubs, neighbourhoods and whole towns. Consistent with the discussion of other domains, belonging was a key theme in the conceptualisation of community. Beyond this, however, young people with disability also tended to emphasise the relational, reciprocal elements of belonging to a community – helping and supporting others, and caring about their welfare. As one boy summed it up:

*You help your local community and you also make sure and you give stuff to the poor people.*

### ***Feeling good about yourself***

One of the noteworthy findings from this first round of data collection was that young people with disability had a keen sense of activities that brought happiness into their lives. They mentioned drawing, telling jokes with friends, pillow fights, eating good food, swimming, going on holidays. Some young people emphasised doing things with others while other participants discussed the activities themselves and sensory stimulation they got from the activities for example, the sound of fire engine, or the pleasure from eating food such as chocolate.

### ***School***

In marked contrast to some of the other groups, school was often ranked low in the domain ranking exercises for young people with disability and was spoken of in a consistently negative way. As one participant succinctly surmised: “one thing that doesn’t make us happy is school”. Returning to the unifying theme of this group, young people with disability often felt that they didn’t really ‘fit in’ at school. When asked where you make friends, one young boy said

*I don’t really say school’s a good choice.*

*[interviewer] So that’s a hard place to make friends, yeah?*

*Yeah, very hard.*

Safety and bullying were key concerns for this group. Much of this took place at school. It is important to note that bullying was understood to be one of the reasons why three children in this cohort were being home schooled. Bullying appeared to have a deleterious impact on their learning within the schooling environment.

*I know what makes me happy – home time.*

*I’d like to stay at home most of the time because school’s just – oh, it’s not tough or anything, it’s just, well, I don’t like how the other kids act towards me.*

*It’s not dangerous, I just don’t feel comfortable there.*

*Some of the kids throw stuff at my head.*

### ***Bullying and social exclusion***

Safety and bullying could extend beyond school. Young people with disability recounted stories about being stared at in public places. There were a few cases of abuse emanating from strangers on the street. Young people with disability were keenly aware of “standing out”, both at school and in wider public settings, and these incidents caused them considerable distress.

### ***Money***

Money and material assets were of little importance to young people with disability. Like other groups, respondents talked about money as an enabler – allowing them to meet their basic needs.

*And you know the saying money doesn’t buy happiness, actually it does...you need money to buy stuff to not be homeless, so money is good.*

*If you’re poor, you need money...to buy food.*

### 4.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people

Researchers first met with community elders who made it clear that the participation of the community in the project was dependent on our capacity to accommodate parent/guardians and Elders who wanted to be present during the workshop and interview process. Researchers made five preliminary visits to meet with community members. This included meetings with service coordinators for young Aboriginal people, with the local Elders committee and with the Aboriginal health advisory committee, and participation in a fair day where the research team offered activities to children and other interested community members.

The research workshop itself involved nine young people (five boys and four girls) aged between 9 and 14 years. It took place after school in a familiar community centre in a regional town in South Australia. Most of the young people attending were related and there were three sets of siblings. Seven adults including parents, elders and the recruitment partner representative were also present during the workshop. The workshop dynamic was lively with all young people participating fully. At the time of data analysis no follow up interviews had been conducted (these will be carried out in Phase 2). The workshop was conducted by three researchers and the cartoonist.

#### ***Key concepts***

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander group discussed family in ways that referred to immediate and extended family, culture and country. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the depth and breadth of the definition, Aboriginal young people prioritised ‘family’ in their domain rankings. This was followed by the resource domain of ‘health’, with ‘community’ and ‘money’ generally sharing third place. ‘School’ featured as a middle ranked priority, followed by ‘feeling good about yourself’ and ‘friends’, which – although ranked highly by some young people, were each ranked very low by five respondents. It is important to note there were definitional overlaps between family and community in the initial exercises which aimed at thinking through the resources and qualities that contribute to wellbeing. Young people’s initial responses in defining community centred on family relationships, and these were only expanded after prompting by researchers. With this prompting participant responses referred to broader networks and indeed networks facilitated by policy interventions. Concepts of family were heavily imbued with references to health and safety and the pressures of living in low socioeconomic circumstances. In this way, family and community were strongly linked with, and inclusive of, concerns about health and material assets.

#### ***Family***

Young People in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander group expressed very sophisticated and complex understandings of family. The importance of family was underscored from the first set up meeting researchers held with community Elders. As noted in Section 2.3, older family and community members were present in the workshop (a measure also requested by some Culturally and Linguistically Diverse groups). Researchers found that these older community and family members brought a calm presence to the workshop. Their participation also highlighted the cultural sensitivities that exist between some demographic groups and external agents.

It is difficult to separate out notions of family, culture and country in participant’s discussions about family. The first point of definition of family referred to extended family and almost all participants

spoke of members beyond their immediate household – siblings, half-siblings, cousins, grandparents, nephews and nieces.

*[My] cousins and poppa.*

*My dad, and my nanna and all that.*

*[Local Aboriginal language word] means like a relation, well I think it is. Like an auntie or a nanna or something... Well my mum believes in me, my sister believes in me, my whole family believes in me, and I've got [...], don't ask me what they are because I don't know, but I've got [...] and I sing to them.*

These family relationships were characterised by non-mainstream age/obligation relations. Respondents spoke for example of a 25 year old niece, and 41 year old nephew who visited America in a wheelchair, before he passed away. They discussed relationships with older relatives throughout interviews and clearly drew on the life experiences of these people to formulate their world view. They conceptualised family members as people who were important to learn from. One girl said that

*I'm not mean to Elders, because if you're mean to Elders they won't tell you what's going to be coming up for you and how culture is and all that.*

A strong notion of culture was entwined with family. This notion of culture bound family, self and place as inseparable threads of identity. One girl told us that cultural experiences and significant places were especially important to her and something actively sought after in her family. This active desire for cultural knowledge was generated in part because the family had experienced the pain of non-acceptance – of having their Aboriginal culture and identity denied by non-Aboriginal relatives. She stated “we put culture first” and suggested this meant that “if we have any chance to go to culture places we go there”.

The interrelationship between self, family and place is also captured in the following quote from another participant:

*The river is amazing, to me... It symbolises our culture, like where we're from. Because the river goes into the lakes and the lakes go into the [estuary name], and that's where we're all from around this area.*

Participants communicated a strong sense of connection and support that reached from actual relatives to the non-human.

*Because some animals actually help you, like [...]. They're willy wagtails in [the local Aboriginal] language and [...] means one, [...] means heaps of heaps of willy wag tails. So I believe in [...] and all the people that are in my life, unless they're really really mean to me.*

*When mum lived in home and dad lived on a different street, and when we went down to his house, we would always see snakes or spiders and we would be nice to them snakes and spiders.*

These quotes, stressing relational connectivity to the land and animals, can also be read as testaments to the centrality of Indigenous spirituality in their lives.



These broad definitions of family and what constitutes family were also characterised by a strong commitment to caring for family members in ways that expressed resilience and a clear value system based in active contribution.

*Education at home, since I have a dad that had five things in his health that was a problem. I had to get him a cup of tea, I sat in there doing my homework with him, watching TV... and when people would tease me I would ignore them. And then family, I love them, I would not let anything beside them unless – like, I would not put them beside me and think about something else. And like, think about all this – like I've had it and all that, I wouldn't think that up.*

A number of participants in this group expressed concerns about the physical health and wellbeing of family members. Intergenerational connections meant that these young people were familiar with health-related issues that might otherwise be associated with an adult knowledge of health. One young person spoke of her elderly father who had dementia and “five things in his health that was a problem”. Health and family are for this group often considered together. As one boy states – “because family and health are on the same level”. When asked what gets in the way of a good life, one boy said:

*People dying in family, mainly people passing away or people who leave their homes and something like that.*

Significantly, while health was typically understood by participants in other cohorts as an individual resource – one's own health – these children understood it as a family resource, and that poor health put strain on tight family networks.

### **Health**

Health was nominated as an important resource for or component of wellbeing by all participants in this group. When asked directly about what health is, participants discussed a range of understandings including importance of material resources and behaviours for health. This included sharing their knowledge about basic nutrition and hygiene for physical wellbeing, and the benefits of good fitness, obesity-awareness and awareness of mental health concerns. They spoke in ways that conveyed direct experience with the consequences of poor health, and also with collective perspective on health:

*Sometimes when you have someone that's sick or going through hard stuff, you have fun with them.*

The associations made by the group in the brainstorm, when asked to identify things thought to be important to living ‘a good life’, illustrated that the group thought about health in relation to issues of survival that were connected to inadequate provision of basic needs. Nutritionally, food and diet was appreciated because “you will get energy” and “If you don't eat food your muscles won't be able to get strong and you would have bad health”; good food, it was deemed, lets you “stay alive”.

Programs at school were valued by participants because they felt that the information delivered on nutritional matters was useful.

*Food is important to me because at school we're learning about how many meals we have to take...and it means a lot to me because when I eat I know the right food, what to eat.*

Maintaining good levels of fitness was considered beneficial to a healthy lifestyle, from “playing footy” to “Races with friends” and “Dancing”. Being active was understood as a healthy pursuit:

*Because at school we're doing the “Be Active Challenge” thing and I just like being fit and I like doing fun activities that are active.*

Similarly, an awareness of obesity as an obstacle to wellbeing was fundamentally understood as a health issue related to maintaining an active lifestyle:

*Health is good because if you're not that fit you'll be lazy and fat and yeah, you want have many friends and you'll get teased.*

*That one's be active, don't be lazy.*

Basic hygiene was discussed as a means of avoiding greater health issues, such as “Brush[ing] your teeth” so your teeth don’t “go bad”.

Evidence of concern about mental health issues emerged as participants made associations in the brainstorm.

*Chocolate is also important. When you're depressed you eat a lot of chocolate.*

Activities such as listening to music were discussed in a way that connected this pastime to mental health, and were proposed as a good way of relaxing and dealing with one’s moods. Participants also noted safety measures: “Don’t pick up needles”. This is a widely promoted caution, yet one not mentioned by other groups.

Most strikingly, inadequate provision of basic necessities was discussed in terms that suggested a more proximate experience with inadequate provision than many other young people who participated in the study.

*You need food because if you don't have any food you'll be very hungry and you start stealing and you'll be like shoplifting from shops to get food. And you'll go really, really, really skinny.*

Comments such as this may reflect narratives of caution that circulated in the local community rather than direct experience of people with inadequate basic resources. Nonetheless, food security was mentioned more often in this group than in others, and some legal consequences of food insecurity (linked to policing and possible incarceration) were also raised.

### **Money**

Given this group’s concerns with basic needs it is not surprising that they discussed money as an issue at the forefront of their concerns surrounding wellbeing. One girl indicated she regularly attended Aboriginal dance classes across town but was only picked up in the car “when we have petrol”. She also indicated that she was happy just to be with her family on her birthday and did not expect to receive presents.

*And money, we are hard about money, it's hard for us. So me and Jack, we tried not to ask for lots of things, well I do, and since it was my birthday yesterday.*

Having more money was clearly considered beneficial to wellbeing – for “everything”, “having a house”, to “buy stuff”, for “a good car”, for “phones”, and also as cash in hand, “just to look at it”. Money was also viewed as important in everyday life and enabled people to buy “food”, “clothes”, “pay the rent”, and “stuff for school and everywhere else”. Financial security was discussed pragmatically as something to be improved, but not as the most important contributing factor to wellbeing, which was quite clearly family/community and good health.

*Money gets you everywhere but family and health are the main things that you need a lot.*

One boy who first raised “Money” as a relevant issue, later ranked it as “the least important” of the domains. He clearly understood how more money would assist him and his family, but recognised other domains as being more important for sustaining his immediate and long term wellbeing:

*Because, just, family and health there are right up the top. You need to look after yourself, and after you've done that, then you can go back to the money, work on that, and then always know that you can come back, and you can have that good health and a family.*



Owning “a fancy car” was a material ambition for one boy, who explained he hoped to earn sufficient income “when I’m going to go in the mines”. The “fancy car” he chose as part of his pic collage is a symbol of financial security, status and agency. His aspiration to secure income via working in the mines flowed from his brother’s employment in the mines. Social media, particularly Facebook, was considered

an important technology to possess, as were computer games for socialising.

### **School**

School was not ranked highly by the group as an important domain in having a good life. However, school was discussed positively and constructively in terms of how children felt. School was seen as an important resource that could generate choices in later life. School was deemed important as it could help one “to be smart when you’re older”, and as a place where “you get [an] education to get a job”; where an education was “to get what you want in life”. For one respondent, an education was important because it enabled you to avoid being swindled – “Like when you go to the shop, if you get ripped off you can see”. This indicates that participants were aware that people with a lack of basic education were vulnerable to exploitation by others.

School was also acknowledged as a place to socialise with friends:

*School's good because... like you learn stuff that you don't know and friends are good as well.*

A number of respondents were ambivalent about school as a safe environment.

*I'm not sure about school. School would be good because it gives you a good education in life. But sometimes school has its ups and downs, sometimes you get bullied, sometimes you don't. It's a mixed world.*

Compared to other groups, bullying was discussed as a familiar occurrence with the arena of school. One girl had an intricate coping strategy for incidences of bullying, which she had developed from an early age.

*They were bullying me about my dad's age [elderly], so I didn't really take notice of that because he's my dad, so I wouldn't get [visibly] angry, I did get angry inside but I would write it on a paper and rip it up and put it in the bin.*

When asked how she learned this coping strategy, she said she was bullied a lot “in kindy” because she was “light” and her brother was “dark”, and she had learned this as a small girl.

For some, school was a secondary place of learning in their lives and seen as outside of their family networks where the most sustaining and important lessons were learned. A good teacher was deemed beneficial to improving responses to school – usually someone friendly, available, and easy-going – “she lets the class have their phones at school, their iPods... and she also lets us sit anywhere”. “Slack teachers”, on the other hand, and “angry teachers”, were considered obstacles to young people responding well at school. The children felt they did not have a great amount of rules at school. Those rules at school were considered important for behaviour and productivity, “when you're in school you know what to do and you'll be doing the right thing”.

School personnel could enact both positive and negative influences on self-esteem.

*In a bad moment... and you had no one to talk to, you could go to the front office... and talk to... the counsellor, and they could make you feel good or feel bad.*

The place and form of Aboriginal knowledge included in school curriculum was important to these young people. One girl who had a “white mum” and an Aboriginal father was well supported by her mother to learn about Aboriginal culture. She noted that:

*And so mum puts our culture first, and so if we have any chance to go to culture places we go there.*

Her relationship with school was strengthened by the inclusion of some forms of Aboriginal knowledge in the curriculum. She noted:

*Yes, and school, I like school, not absolutely love it like some people love it, but I like it because I learn heaps of things and we get to do art, I love art, and we get to learn about Aboriginal things there.*

Other prized cultural forms were not part of the curriculum.

*And since I'm in a dancing thing called [the local cultural dance school], I get educated a lot. Like, at school we don't really get taught [the local Aboriginal*

*language]. At [the local dance school] we get taught heaps of knowledge and the language.*

Young people in this group considered Aboriginal knowledge as an important component in their wellbeing. Mainstream school knowledge, particularly subjects such as Maths and English, were acknowledged as necessary for future employment, but also considered important for developing basic life skills that would assist in providing for oneself and one's future generations:

*So then when you grow up you know a lot and when you're a mother or a parent or guardian and you have to sign something for a child or anything, then you'll know how to write and sign and all that, and you will also know how to read.*

### **Community**

Like other groups the notion of 'community' was initially a somewhat confused concept. However more than the other groups, prompting and guidance from researchers enabled children to quickly and confidently identify how the word was used around them. Initially, young people associated the term exclusively with their Aboriginal identities – their people, culture, and heritage – and did not appear to reference more universal notions of the township or general community. When participants were asked to clarify if family and community were the same things, young people expanded their definition to include "the government", because they "make money" and "make houses for people to live in", particularly "homeless people". This was then further expanded to include "Police... Safety... [and] Shops". When asked about the limits of community – 'how wide a place' her community was, one girl responded:

*It goes wider [than the town]... It's every single country and state and town... [But it's] The same community.*

The use of 'country' alongside state and town here marks a worldview which recognises that states and towns are incommensurate (Ganesharajah, 2009) with country and that the two ways of thinking about people who come from 'other places' co-exist. It points to acknowledgement of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, and further fleshes out these young people's perceptions of the communities that exist more broadly than kin and family networks. This notion of community as something that extends beyond family was considered to be an asset: "community is good because you can socialise with other people and not just the same old people over and over". Community was also understood to involve ongoing negotiations:

*Sometimes when people decide on one thing and the others decide on the other... it becomes into that we all talk about it, and then that's where you have your ups and downs.*

Community to another respondent meant "Working together as a big group", to another it was a place of fun, "Community, [is a] good way to get out there and just have fun with the community".

It is notable that while for Indigenous young people the word 'community' did not equate well with 'town' or 'neighbourhood', the issue of safety was often seen in terms of the immediate geographical environment. Safety for these children was understood in general terms, where they related safety awareness around safe behaviour when walking to school, crossing the roads with parents or at the crossing, being safe around cars – "stop, look, listen" – and wearing seatbelts and

helmets, not playing with fire (“stop, drop and roll”, being a safety technique apparently remembered from a course), and watching out for bushfires. One girl felt safe by having her mobile phone, “The phones mean to me when I’m stuck and I’ve just got my phone with me, I’ll just ring and tell me parents where I am”.

### **Friends**

Friends was a domain generally regarded as important and rewarding, but was not discussed as a great priority compared to other groups. Discussions of friends may have largely included those familial friends from within the children’s kinship relations, and were not so strongly tied to school or sporting experiences as they were with most other groups. Friends were conceived as important because “they talk about new stuff”, as a trusted filter through which to absorb new trends and technologies. A mischievous regard for friendship was also conveyed – “they do the silly stuff with you”, and they “stick up for you”, and they “take the blame”. One young person included a pet dog as a friend and another discussed “love” as a “relationship” occurring between “one friend or friends”. Another girl, who appeared to enjoy school more than others, discussed a special friendship she held with her teacher, to whom she wrote “friendship notes” and gave a “friendship bracelet”.

### **Feeling Good**

Feeling good about yourself was conceived as having fun, enjoying friendships, and maintaining a positive self-esteem. One aspect that emerged from this group was their expression of a greater understanding of the struggles related to maintaining a positive self-esteem; that this group offered more detailed accounts of particular incidents that troubled them and needed to be overcome. These accounts seemed to be structured through their interactions with adult relatives, indicating both a broader exposure to health and safety issues and exposure to thinking and ideas about how to overcome and avoid adversities. One child expressed the importance of learning from past experience in the following way:

*Because if you don’t remember the past that means you don’t have your past and it gets rid of sad times, fun times, and... experiences.*

The activities nominated for having fun include playing footy, seeing movies, using the playground, chocolate at Easter time, listening to music – “Really funky music, disco type music” — singing in the choir, running around with friends, getting fit, and playing computer games; because “if you had no games that means you wouldn’t have a social life really”. Games could be enjoyed with friends as well as “other people online”, who could be like “fake friends” such as “random as people [from] America”. Positive self-esteem was understood as a constructive and beneficial aspect of wellbeing:

*Feeling good about yourself is important because if you don’t feel good about yourself you’re not going to get anywhere in life.*

*I try not to let bad things get in the way of my day. I just try and be happy.*

*Feeling good about yourself, you need that so you have that positive and high energy.*

Believing in yourself was acknowledged as beneficial for achieving things in life, “Because if you don’t believe in yourself, that means you won’t go on to do good things or big things or anything like that”. These young people believed that they needed to attend to both the fun times and sad times of life as it allowed them to empathise and connect with others, “because then you could have a laugh at someone or cry with someone [too].”

#### **4.4 Economically disadvantaged young people**

Our research with economically disadvantaged young people took place in two rounds. In the first round of data collection, ten young people (six girls and four boys) ranging in age from 8 to 14 years participated in a workshop that took place after school at a community youth centre. Five of the girls were from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and regularly used the facilities and programs offered to youth through the community centre where the workshop took place. The remaining participants were children of staff members and two twin boys who were being home schooled. Fieldworkers felt these young people dominated the conversation and set the tone of the brainstorm and other group activities. The fieldworkers felt that these boys were perhaps not from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The Community Development Officer and one of the centre’s social workers were present throughout the session. The workshop was lively and dynamic. In this first group, the participants chose to work in small group projects divided along gender lines.

Though a range of rich data was obtained from the first group of economically disadvantaged young people, there emerged some key methodological and contextual issues which were also of concern. As noted above, not all participants came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and it was these relatively more well-off young people who tended to lead and dominate group conversations. Research shows that low income children are often alert and sensitive to social stigmas surrounding economic disadvantage and may accordingly seek to hide or downplay the impact of economic disadvantage on their lives (Skattebol et al., 2012). In reflecting on the first round of data analysis, the researchers felt that the group dynamic may have ultimately prevented the children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds from raising and exploring issues, such as material deprivation or social exclusion, which were grounded in their lived experience.

In order to address the issues arising from the first round of data analysis, a second round of data collection with children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds was conducted. To this end, the research team talked with eleven young people in a primary school located in an economically disadvantaged area of South Australia. This group provided a considerable amount of useful information on their lives, and this was combined with findings from the first group.

#### **Key themes**

Economically disadvantaged young people prioritised family and friends as important for a good life. A number also highlighted health: “I’m family, friends and health”. The least important domain for wellbeing in group activities was (perhaps surprisingly) the domain of money, but this did not always prove the case in individual work with young people, some of whom wanted money to buy high status goods such as I-pads and label clothing. In addition, a close analysis of children’s transcripts, particularly those of the second group, revealed a number of issues and concerns relating to material deprivation.

## **Family**

A strong affection for family was conveyed by use of warm images in the pic collages and verbalised in the context of belonging and support: “Having dinner with my family”... “Getting on well with your brothers and sisters”. Family was generally conceived as the immediate family, but this could extend to siblings and step-siblings living in other homes. Sometimes pets were also included as family members or as friends: “I’ve got a pet bird and – it’s connected to me – and I like it”.

Most agreed that rules and guidance were important and that these were rightly determined by parental figures. When asked about whether a good balance existed between choice and rules, responses were generally affirmative with one stating, “it varies slightly for me, like I wouldn’t be able to do most things but some of my friends would be able to” (whether this access to ‘most things’ was related to financial or protective parameters was not defined).

## **Money**

The two groups canvassed diverged in the ways they discussed money and how they framed the role of material deprivation in their lives. Discussions about money among young people in the first group differed from that in individual work suggesting that the group work may have been dominated by the values of the young people who did not experience economic disadvantage. One of these boys included lots of brand images in his pic collage but explained this was not about valuing expensive labels but a form of loyalty:

*I’ve been sponsored by Creative Skateboarding, and they’ll just give me – if I ruin a board they’ll give me a new one.*

This boy was opinionated about money and suggested at one point that society could function without money. He also laid down the terms of normative childhood when he stated

*Yeah it’s like adults have work, money, you need to pay stuff, and kids it’s really – everything is bought for you, yeah that’s about it.*

This disavowal of the importance of money was in direct contrast with a remark much later in the workshop from a boy who said that the mark of a good day would be to “get free food”.

Girls in the first group asserted that internet access was necessary resource for social connections: “the internet equals happiness”. One girl suggested that a good day was a day with the internet, inferring that it was possible to have a day without internet access, due perhaps to a lack of money. Similar to the first group, the second group placed money fairly low in their ranking exercises, usually last or second-last. When queried about whether or not money was important for living a good life, the young people in this group tended to stress that although money was required for basic needs, ‘a house, and your shoes, and your roof’, ‘for all your clothes’, it could not provide access to more relational aspects of wellbeing: ‘money can’t buy you happiness’, ‘you can buy a house but you can’t buy any friends’ As one boy summed it up: ‘if you’re rich and have no friends it’s not as good as not being rich and having lots of friends’. Echoing some of our findings from the other groups, one boy said that he wasn’t concerned about money because he had such limited control over money; he anticipated that when he was responsible for money he would value it more, ‘when I’m older and I’ve got my own house and everything’.



Despite the relatively low emphasis placed on money as a contributor to their wellbeing, the second group several times touched on issues of familial material deprivation and its impacts on their own wellbeing. For instance, this group often spoke about not being able to afford treats from the school canteen, or missing out on getting pocket money, unlike some of their peers.

Many in the second group also appeared to be anxious about a lack of money in the household, indicating that parents' economic stress may have filtered down to them.

*Female: It's like some kids are scared and they leave the lights on, they have to pay more money for, like, the bills when they do that, then they miss out on getting food if they have to pay more money for the bills.*

*Facilitator: So you have to think about the way you use resources at home?*

*Female: Spend the money wisely.*

The material deprivation described by the second group could be seen to be interrelated with many other domains, particularly health and wellbeing. One girl, for instance, spoke at length about her sore back, linking this with the fact that she was sleeping on an older, broken bed (perhaps because her parents were unable to afford a new one).

### **Friends**

Friends were also prioritised as a source of wellbeing, and apart from common notions surrounding mutual respect and having fun, friendships were also discussed in terms of support and sticking up for one another.



The young girls in the first group (8 & 9 years) were preoccupied with romantic love and looking for pop stars they could kiss and identify “he’s the one for me”. They suggested these young men could make them happy. While on one level this preoccupation with sexuality has a developmental basis this preoccupation was exclusive and there were few or no references to the future other than romantic connections, which was not the case in other groups. The conversation involved talk of marriage and some reality checking “You’re not even old enough to get legally married okay”.

The older girls (13 and 14) spent time discussing the perils of romantic love. They indicated that they provided each other a level of emotional protection from the disloyalties of boyfriends. “Oh yeah, her boyfriend liked every single one of her best friends, we don’t like him anymore”. Interestingly the girl who had had the disloyal boyfriend made a pic collage about forgiveness which further underscores the importance of partnering to these young girls.

### Health

Good health was understood as a contributor to wellbeing in general terms: healthy eating and exercise – running, bike riding, gymnastics, netball, swimming. A healthy diet was generally understood – ‘Eating a mandarin and leek soup’ – as was the need to be active, ‘I think technology gets in the way of a good life... it makes people fat’, ‘you need to be healthy or else you can get really fat and ugly’. Often, incidences of what appears to be very misfortunate health issues in the family were frankly conveyed.



*And that's my Pop. He used to eat his vegies. I don't eat them much... but he got some weird bug thing on them. Yeah, he passed away.*

However, one person’s admission that “Healthy food is gross”, sparked a consensus that “Chocolates”, “Lollies”, and “All the good stuff” can be immediate sources of happiness.

A preventative concern for avoiding ill-health was conveyed, particularly towards corrosive forms of addiction often related to young people— smoking, drinking, and drugs. While drugs and drinking seemed to emerge in the context of repeating cautionary slogans, smoking appeared more immediately to impact on these young people’s lives. One respondent referred to an instance where she had to invent an excuse *not* to smoke, in what seemed to be a typical peer group pressure scenario. The excuse used was her step-father’s and her own condition of asthma, as if emphasis was required to strengthen her resolve—which is a complex response to overall health concerns. In many instances, respondents parameterised their own health in relation to that of members of their family, where typical messages about maintaining healthy habits seemed enforced by incidences of poor health in their immediate surrounds.

*“...my grandad he had throat cancer but he didn't smoke or drink or anything and he got over it.”*

*“My Mum used to smoke and drink but she had to give up because she had to get her ovaries taken out and she had a heart attack the day after she had to get her ovaries taken out.”*

*“And my Mum's on a lot of medication for her heart.”*

*“My baby brother he's got asthma and he's been in hospital and he's lungs have collapsed.”*

In the second group of respondents, concerns regarding health were repeatedly expressed with reference to family members. This was in contrast to the first group, in which young people more readily repeated common health warnings, or where concerns regarding the health of their family members emerged incidentally while discussing other domains (such as agency, fun, finances, rules, community, and the like). In one instance, a flurry to communicate health and mortality issues arose.

*Facilitator: Do you know anyone who has those things that you..?*

*Female: My mum has diabetes, she's type three.*

*Female: Yeah, same with my older brother, he has diabetes.*

*Female: My nanna died from cancer like one year ago.*

*Female: I never got to meet my nan because she died from cancer, and my [other] nan's dying from cancer now.*

*Facilitator: How does that make you feel?*

*Female: That actually makes me, like, pretty emotional and depressed.*

Another respondent reported a trend of diabetes in her family (mother and younger brother), and expressed considerable concern as if rehearsing an emergency scenario:

*It actually worries me a lot because I'm afraid that my mum's going to get into like a coma during the night.*

Emotional wellbeing was frankly mentioned in this way several times, as anxiety for the health of loved ones. One respondent expressed emotive behavioral concerns.

*Facilitator 1: Not bottling up anger? Yeah. How do you get rid of anger if you have it?*

*Respondent: Take it out on people I don't like.*

*Facilitator 1: Right.*

*Respondent: My brother has a teddy and if I get angry I just start punching the teddy.*

*Facilitator 1: Okay, your brother's teddy?*

*Respondent: My baby brother's teddy.*

In this instance a 'cool down' room or space was mentioned for the needs of 'privacy', which itself was discussed as a benefit for good (emotional) wellbeing – noting that some respondents came from families with 8-10 siblings. In a similar context, finding recourse to express yourself was deemed a measure of good health.

*Female: Because if you don't show your anger it will get blocked up inside and then one day it will eventually come out on the wrong person and they could probably end up hurting you.*

## **School**

The two groups differed quite a lot in terms of their views on school. In the first group, none of the participants showed much interest in talking about school. There was a resignation to learning both tedious and enjoyable things for self-development. “They’re necessary things”... “You have to get an education”... “So you don’t end up living alone in a caravan with two cats!”. The second group advanced a more positive view of school. Many of this group seemed to demonstrate a strong attachment to the schooling environment. One girl spoke about her love of music and her desire to win a government scholarship through her school to continue her studies.

*So I get to go anywhere when I perform and then the Government pays for lessons and stuff like that and I get to travel everywhere.*

Many of this second group spoke of the importance of school as a place where they could learn and receive a good education. Similar to many of the other groups, their thoughts on school were often framed in the context of being able to secure a good job in the future, ‘school means you can get better jobs in life’, ‘school is about learning to get a better job in the future’.

## **Feeling good about yourself**

Young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds valued their competencies in play activities as a source of self-esteem. They noted you needed to feel good about yourself because “you don’t want to be down on yourself”. Activities that the young people associated with feeling good about themselves included sports such as doing weights, camping, football, netball, cricket, basketball, soccer, volleyball and playing computer games – The Walking Dead and Fighting Zombies, as well as watching TV and accessing Youtube and Facebook. Facebook was seen as a fun networking tool particularly for girls in the group, who at times conveyed internet habits that could, if unsupervised, lead to vulnerable internet scenarios.

*Female: Facebook is good.*

*Female: Facebook is my addiction. [...]*

*Facilitator: What do you do on Facebook?*

*Female: Chat, take pictures, confession videos...*

*Facilitator: What’s a confession video?*

*Female: It’s like you’re actually being honest to them...*

*Facilitator: Is that why it’s anonymous?*

*Female: No, [Respondent’s name] shows her Facebook.*

*Female: Yeah, she just takes ‘selfies’.*

In at least two groups, where most of the girls appeared to know each other, there was discussion of affection for pop idols, boys, and those they were attracted to.

*Female: I usually like pop, the stuff like One Direction, Justice Crew...*

*Female: I like One Direction, New Boyz and Nicki Minaj and Pink and Beyoncé.*

Discussions of 'Sexy guys' and 'cute guys', merged with discussions of physical competitiveness against male counterparts.

*Facilitator: Okay, so... Beating boys in particular?*

*Female: Yes.*

*Facilitator: Okay winning.*

*Female: Mainly with boys though.*

Recognition of wellbeing, by way of entertainment, emerged from feelings associated with empowerment from a burgeoning conception of 'love' and/or physical attraction. A rich imaginary life was, in these ways and others, conveyed as beneficial to these young people's wellbeing.

*I used to have an imaginary friend Milo, and he moved out because I made my own world. Well I used to make cubby houses.*

#### **4.5 Young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds**

Research with young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds took place in a middle ring suburb in a large city. The recruitment partner was a community based, non-profit organisation established to promote multiculturalism, equity and social justice. It catered to a wide range of people of all ages, and from a variety of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Researchers visited the recruitment partner's offices three times before conducting research with young people. In accordance with recruitment partner advice, separate workshops were held with younger and older children. Young people at both workshops came from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. Most were female. Youth workers and some parents were present at both workshops. The researchers felt that the presence of parents at the workshop for older children may have inhibited some discussion. Unlike with other groups, the researchers felt that these young people were more prepared to discuss wellbeing in small groups than they were in the more open 'brainstorming' sessions.

##### **Key themes**

In common with other groups, young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds ranked family as the most important domain for a good life. Community was also ranked as important, and most young people in this group had a clear understanding of what they meant by community. Health and school, while not generally ranking in the top three important domains for a good life, were nonetheless often mentioned by the culturally and linguistically diverse respondents as contributing to a good life. Among this group however, there was notably more emphasis placed on the importance of school and education than was evident in other groups. The domain of friends on the other hand was ranked lower than was the case in most other groups. In common with most other groups, money and material possessions were not highly rated. Additional domains added by young people in this group included safety. Bullying was discussed at some length, mostly in the context of school. Uniquely among the different groups we talked with, some young people also raised global concerns. For example, many of the young people in this group showed considerable awareness of the civil war in Syria.

## Family

Young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds consistently identified ‘family’ as the most important element to living a good life. For many of them, the concept of family included immediate family, as they emphasised the people who give birth to you and raise you, who live with you, who you spend most of your time with, and who meet your basic needs. However, for many children ‘family’ also included extended family both in Australia and abroad.

*And family, your mum and dad raise you. So that’s a family.*

*It [family] means that you live together.*

*Parents, siblings, grandparents....*



Similar to other groups, culturally and linguistically diverse children stressed the relational dimensions of families. Here, the family was seen as a place where they felt safe and supported. Respondents also enjoyed spending time with their other family members, especially parents, even if it was just ‘small things’ like cooking dinner, or

washing the car together.

*They support you and then if something happens, they are good, they support you, they help you.*

*Because you live with your family and you have fun with them.*

A notable finding from the culturally and linguistically diverse group was the fact that issues of fairness and respect figured heavily in the data. Children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds repeatedly spoke about family as a place not only of support and love, they also discussed the importance of respect for their parents. Yet respect was often seen to run both ways. Respondents spoke about the importance of feeling valued, listened to, and ultimately respected, by their parents.

*If you don’t listen to your family or parents they will be sad if you don’t respect them...They all have to listen to each other.*

*You should respect them [your parents].*

*I have done a picture of a family because family is important and they’re the ones who gave you food, they done everything to you so you should respect them.*

*I see love and respect the same, so we have to respect each other and show love.*



Another notable finding was that in comparison to other groups the culturally and linguistically diverse respondents in both workshops had a positive view of guidance and rules, especially those emanating from their parents. The rules that were seen to be best at home were 'respect, respectability, honesty, kindnesses' according to one young man. Children and young people appeared to value their parents' guidance and help in navigating through daily life. They understood rules and guidance as contributing not only to their present wellbeing and safety, but also to their future lives. As such, guidance and rules were connected with the values of respect within the family, a key theme explored above.



*Sometimes it's better you don't get to do what you want to...because some decisions may not be – like, maybe I can't take them because they're big so my parents have to take it.*

*It's good to have rules so when they grow up they don't do bad things, they do good things.*

*It's also good because if you, like, sometimes if there are rules for education or something, it might be safe for you.*

However, while most respondents talked about their family helping them feel supported and safe in a new country, for some young people this was not unproblematic, and issues of intergenerational cultural dissonance were discussed in this context.

*You might have a hard time with your parents, or you don't really understand what your parents mean and they don't understand who you are...They don't really understand what we did because you haven't been through that experience yet and you haven't seen what you've seen in your point of view.*

*I haven't stuck any pictures, but I actually put confusion. It's supposed to be in between friends and family, because sometimes you might not understand your family and sometimes you might not also understand your friend as well, so you're kind of stuck....So it's kind of between – it's actually three things at once; you have to think about yourself, your parents and your friends as well, and your future and everything, so it's kind of confusing about it, and frustrating.*

## **Community**

Many of the children and young people in this group were born overseas; most spoke another language at home. As such, this group of young people was differentiated from the other groups by their considerably more global conception of community, encompassing not just their family in Australia, but indeed friends and family in their home countries. In line with other groups, culturally and linguistically diverse respondents spoke of community as encompassing families (close and extended), neighbourhoods, and shared leisure and religious activities. A community also included relational and reciprocal dimensions. For instance, one child stated that 'community is a group of people that works together'. However, communities also consisted of people from the 'same

culture’ and people from the ‘same country’. As such, the culturally and linguistically diverse respondents identified strongly with people ‘back home’.

*People that go to the church, all them are our community.*

*Neighbours, probably friends too. I would take them as community – just anyone around you.*

*It’s good to know all of the people in the community believe in the same religion as you.*

*The people that are in our country...a village in Thailand*

Many participants demonstrated a strong sense of global community or context and the themes of war and peace, or cultural conflict, were raised by a number of participants. Some young people talked about the civil war in Syria. One young person stated that they were worried about their friends and family in Syria. Others talked about lesser known conflicts:

*Because there is a civil war in my country, it’s near Burma. They want to take our country but we don’t want to, so we just have to fight for it...that’s why I’m too scared to go back to my country.*

Therefore, among this group, young people’s sense of community was strongly interwoven with global concerns, not least because these concerns often appeared to have a real and immediate (rather than an abstract) meaning for them.

While a small number of children talked about their local area, for many, ‘community’ did not correspond clearly with a geographical area. Several explicitly separated their (cultural and familial) communities from their neighbours, counterpoising local neighbourhoods as hostile places and communities as safe ones. ‘Neighbourhood’ was a much clearer term for culturally and linguistically diverse children, referring to their local street, facilities, and services such as police.

### **School and Learning**

There was recognition that ‘learning’ happens across a number of domains including family.

*It’s not generally everything you know, and some people will learn at home and they learn more stuff than what school do...so then it really depends what you’re learning...probably around who you are, what your beliefs are or what happened in the last generation and to your ancestors*

Communication between parents and the school was also seen as important, an aspect not mentioned so much by other groups, except occasionally (and problematically) in the context of problems such as bullying.

*Because [when they communicate with the school] they know what you’re learning and they can help you.*

*They help you do your homework.*

School also emerged as a key component of a good life for culturally and linguistically diverse young people in this first round of data analysis. Compared with other groups of young people, the culturally and linguistically diverse group greatly stressed the educational and learning dimensions of



their schooling experiences. Over and over, the importance of a school education was mentioned in connection with future adult employment and the securing of a ‘good job’.

*Give us education for our jobs and school is the one where you start from the first part of life.*

*You learn new things and you can have an education.*

*[School is important] because of the education, it might help you in the future.*

*To achieve your dream you must get marks because then sooner or later if you don't have good marks as you were expecting your dream may not turn out to be the way you want it to be, because sometimes your boss or the leader or whoever it really is might not accept you in a new job, stuff like that.*

For some, school was a place to culturally acclimatise, and a few respondents mentioned the importance of school for assisting them with their language skills. Again, this was usually set against the backdrop of future employment: ‘Yeah, if you don’t learn you won’t have a job and if you don’t learn English.’

A secondary function of school for culturally and linguistically diverse children and young people was its socialising dimensions, so that the connection between school and friendship, though not as strong as other groups, was evident throughout much of the interview data. Here, school was described as a place for ‘having fun with your friends’, and as a setting in which to ‘make some new friends’, and important for ‘meeting new people’. Similarly to other groups, this group stressed the importance of good teachers.

### **Bullying**

Bullying, especially when at school, was seen as a key concern. Similar to young people with a disability, and to some extent young Aboriginal people, bullying was perceived as having its genesis in a perception of these young people being ‘different’ from others. Culturally and linguistically diverse young people regularly reported that they were bullied due to difficulties with language acquisition, as well as their names, cultural and dietary differences.

*It's like, they tease you by the names, because it happened to one of my friends...they call you like, funny names....it's based on different people and cultures.*

*You pronounce something not correct or when you think that you look weird when you wear something. It's like you don't know what they say and you really want to know why they're laughing at you.*

Similar to other groups of children, bullying was highly distressing for culturally and linguistically diverse respondents and featured heavily in descriptions of what gets in the way of living a good life.

*When you get bullied you feel like really sad and lonely....They might not actually be physically bully to you but they might be mentally bully to you, so they might talk – they pretend they can't hear them but they actually know that you can hear them and they talk about you.*

There was a clear sense of inevitability when discussing the theme of bullying. With some resignation, one young boy astutely noted that:

*You can't really stop bullying, like, whatever you do. I don't know. Teachers can't even stop bullying either. It's not something you can stop.*

### **Friends**

Closely related to school, friendship stood as the fourth most important domain for a good life. Like other groups, friends were seen as the people who supported you, whom you could 'have fun' with, and who could be trusted and confided in.

*They make you happy when you're lonely; they play with you all the time...*

*Best friends are about – they respect you, they all come and help you, like when you're sad they make funny things to you.*

*Someone you can trust.*

*They help you.*

Young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds spoke about enjoying 'spending time' with their friends, about 'playing in the park', having 'computer chats', and telling each other secrets. However, despite the many positives associated with friendship, it was not necessarily a straightforward concept. In common with young people from the other groups, a lot of young people in this group advanced a nuanced view of friendship. In particular, there was a marked differentiation between types of friends, and between 'good' or 'true' friends, and 'bad' friends. The latter, characterised by untrustworthiness, could cause some distress for our respondents:

*Sometimes you get upset because they are being mean to you*

*Friends, when they talk behind your back...It's kind of like bullying and it's more different...Like if they tell your secrets.*

*They might turn their back on you. They might not be what you were hoping they would be and they might turn out to be something great or someone you could imagine. Sometimes it's just confusing to understand your friends.*

### **Health**

Health was considered to be another valuable domain for wellbeing and living a good life. Children valued health:

*If you don't have good health you might die, because if you eat too much oil and drink, that might stop your blood and go into your heart or something to make you die, because you have cholesterol, because if you have too much oil in your body that's not good.*

*If you have good health you'll be healthy and you won't get sick easily.*

*Being fit.*

Resources necessary for health included:

*Eating healthy food. Like, some people want to eat like junk food and their parents say that they have to eat healthy food, like fruits and veggies.*

*Eating breakfast.*

*Doing exercise.*

*Maybe taking a walk or something, having fresh air or something.*

Health tended to be discussed with reference to physical health, yet depression and mental illness was also viewed as a relevant aspect of health concerns, and therefore a major barrier to living a good life. Bullying was intrinsically linked to mental health: ‘bullying and that one [mental health] would be together’, as one boy declared. Given that bullying was viewed as somewhat unavoidable, this group articulated the importance of taking responsibility for one’s mental health:

*Just clear your mind from everything and you can maybe talk to someone about it, teachers, parents, friends, whoever you trust and you’ll feel better, and just don’t care about what people have said to you.*

### **Money**

Though money was not seen as important as family, community, friends or school, it was still seen as an important element for wellbeing for our respondents. Money was seen as a facilitator of basic requirements including clothes, food, and shelter. Generally, however, money was not rated as crucial to wellbeing: ‘you don’t need to have money; you can have a happy life without money.’

## **4.6 Young people in the ‘mainstream’ group**

Researchers talked to young people in the ‘mainstream’ group as part of the pilot and also as a separate group. Workshops with both groups were conducted in inner city areas of a large city. Ten young people of mixed gender, aged between 8 and 14 years participated in the pilot group, which comprised of children invited to participate from one of the researchers’ social network. There were two sets of siblings and one friendship pair but otherwise the participants had not met prior to the activity session. Three researchers facilitated the workshop which took place in one of the researchers’ homes. A cartoonist also participated and lunch and afternoon tea was provided. The methods used for this group were slightly different to those adopted for later groups; the data collected was considered useful for understanding these young people’s perspectives on wellbeing.

For the second mainstream workshop, in order to select children who were economically comfortable but not affluent, the researchers drew on the ABS Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) *Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage* scale, where all suburbs in Australia are assigned a score ranging from 1 (poorest) to 10 (richest), with approximately equal numbers of suburbs in each core range 1-2, 2-3, etc. Researchers compiled a list of suburbs in a large metropolitan area that rated ‘7’ on the SEIFA index and selected a small number of suburbs from this list at random. This workshop was conducted in a library, and eight young people participated. The library continued to support the project through making their community room available for follow up interviews, two of which were carried out.

### **Key concepts**

Young people in the mainstream groups on the whole proposed similar domains to young people in other groups and ranked them somewhat similarly. Family was seen as the most important domain, followed by friends, then school – an important locus for meeting with friends, as well as for learning. In contrast to young people in other groups (for example the culturally and linguistically

diverse group), this group ranked feeling good about yourself relatively high, perhaps underlying a common theme running through discussion in this group – the importance of uniqueness. The domains of health and community were given fairly low priority. And in common with most other groups, the domain of money and material goods was given the lowest rating. It is also worth noting that while pets featured prominently in discussions among the other groups; they did not feature as warmly in this group.

### **Family**

Predominantly conceived as relating to their immediate and extended family, some children also included best friends as part of their concept of ‘family’. Playing with parents and siblings was considered an important aspect of family life:

*Being with your brothers and sisters*

*Love and caring*

*I did ‘love’ because... I wouldn’t have any fun if I didn’t have my family or any love.*

Mainstream children considered their family to be the key source for support and guidance:

*My parents kind of helped me out... gave me support, and... I managed to get all my work done...*

‘Hospitality’ at home was posited as a family activity deemed beneficial for learning ‘your manners and showing care towards others [and] Like respect your elders and stuff’. When asked about things that got in the way of a good life, these obstacles were usually conceived as prospective threats to the family unit.

*Break-up between your parents and stuff*

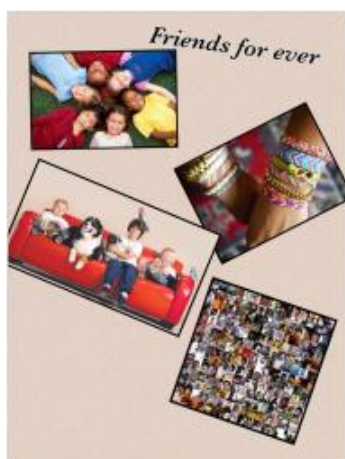
*Fights between your parents and siblings.*

One respondent shared his living arrangements between his father’s and mother’s house. His main complaint regarded a perceived disparity between the number of rules at one house over the other. Echoing a sentiment that some young people in the Aboriginal group expressed, one respondent stated that ‘family members that are not well’ could get in the way of wellbeing, and that this was a situation that could ‘affect a kid’s mental health quite a bit’. Although these children shared different family dynamics and circumstances, they came across as a group that felt supported, loved, and well guided by their families.

### **Friends**

In discussions of friends, the group was quick to celebrate a ‘best friend’ as a person ‘you can always rely on’, while still reserving the inclusive measure of belonging to a wider network of friends. This group repeatedly mentioned the importance of being accepted for your individuality, of being able to be ‘themselves’ amongst their peers instead of trying to follow divergent trends or cliques. This was an ethical consensus subscribed to by the group, the logic of which was neatly summarised:

*Everyone tries to be themselves and who they are instead of not being who they are because then everyone knows them for who they're not.*



In relation to friendships, certain technologies emerged as playing an important role – ‘iPods’, ‘Skype’ and ‘texting’ – were seen as ways of staying in touch and sharing interests. This was particularly valued with friends who had moved away or been distanced. The transition of moving from primary school to high school was an event considered as daunting as it was exciting: a time when existing friendships would be dispersed while opening up the prospect of making new friends.

*All your friends you've known since kindy are all going to go in different directions and... you may not even know them after.*

Mainstream young people's responses to whether family pets could be considered 'friends' was different from other groups. The mainstream group was divided about whether pets could be considered as friends, or more as property. While some seemed intrigued, curious, and cautious about classifying their pets as friends, others admitted to not liking (and even being afraid of) the family's pets (specifically dogs), and were more adamant about classifying the animals as property.

### **School**

School was generally ranked third in place of importance for a good life, yet was strongly connected to family and friends, being the place through which ambition and development was nurtured by supportive families and the meeting place of friendship networks for most of the respondents. Maths and literacy were noted as the main study areas and a 'good education' was considered part of a 'healthy lifestyle', with sports featuring as a productive part of that education along with pursuing hobbies. A prominent concern for this group was the amount of stress they understood themselves to be under, particularly from the pressures of achieving at school and more specifically the amounts of homework ('two to four hours' each night for girl in year nine, 'About an hour' for a boy in year five). Stress was also related to doing extra exams; one boy mentioned the NAPLAN in this context. Other issues associated with stress included bullying. Some respondents felt fearful of being accosted, having recently attended 'anti-bullying' classes. Finally young people in this group also associate stress with relational issues with friends or parents.

*[It] can get very stressful when you're playing - when you're doing all these activities and when you have to sit NAPLAN tests which my dad said he didn't have.*

*When you study it can put a lot of pressure on you. Like I've been studying for my selective test which is tomorrow and I'm like really freaking out and stuff.*

*At least at my school you get a lot of homework... you don't really have that much time to do anything else because you're usually doing homework most nights.*



Stress management strategies offered by this group included an awareness of guidance helplines and websites, as well as relaxation and isolation techniques:

*Usually when I stress I just go away from what I'm stressing about and go lie down and play games on my iPod or do something to take my mind off of it and then later I'll go back to it and we'll organise it.*

*When you're overwhelmed and stuff just go into a corner and calm down or go sit somewhere on your own and just calm down and relax and stuff like that.*

Children were aware that stress could be prolonged and bottled up if not properly managed, and often the opportunity to have more fun was perceived as the ideal antidote. Evident in one boy's comment was a clear indication of the pressures felt by someone who is stressed:

*they might be really busy, they don't really have time for fun and they just keep the stress going. They're not really going to kind of achieve anything; they'll just be like working all the time and won't really feel very happy.*

### **Bullying**

Mainstream children appeared to feel very safe at school, and although they were very articulate and well educated about bullying as a topic – physical, emotional, and cyber bullying – no one in the group was able to recall any particular instance or exposure to incidences of bullying.

*We don't have very many bullies in our school.*

*In my school I haven't really seen anyone being bullied.*

*Cyber bullying? Not really at my school, no one really bullies each other.*

### **Money**

In common with young people in most other groups, mainstream young people's responses towards the domain of money and material assets indicated that this was not considered a crucial component for their wellbeing. Being able to afford the basic necessities such as food, shelter and clothing indicated mainstream children's understanding of basic needs required to sustain a good life compared to more expensive luxury items considered additional to a basic level of wellbeing. A theme of 'money doesn't buy you happiness' was generally subscribed to by the group majority:

*[If] you have heaps of money it's not going to make you happy.*

*Money isn't the most important thing but having some money to buy food and to pay for your rent and stuff is really good.*

*I have loads of money but I don't think I really need it [laughter].*

However, some young people felt compelled to support the notion that there were benefits to be had by possessing a certain amount of wealth, and that these benefits could be observed as contributing to a 'better life'.

*Things that I have is phones, houses, more houses. I was going to draw it like a box to keep things in - a ball, a gun, lots of money, money, money, more money [laughs]... Money means that you have a better life, it does lead to it.*

Also emerging from interview data concerning material assets (as well as from other parts of the interview) was the prospect of young people gaining a sense of wellbeing from enacting an ethical code. In discussions about the relationship between wealth and wellbeing, several young people promoted a sympathetic and charitable approach to matters concerning wealth distribution.

*My siblings... use all their money for things that they don't really need, whereas there's homeless people that need things, not want things.*

*Giving money to the poor...Because the poor people won't have a good life if they ran out of money and they have nothing to buy some.*

*Because if you give away money you'll feel happy that you did that. You'll make other people feel happy and they can do - if someone becomes rich then they give it to everybody somehow.*

While charitable notions may be generally 'schooled' by parents or teachers, this was an unprompted aspect of the interview. The sense of wellbeing these children felt they would receive by enacting an ethical code that assisted the wellbeing of others appeared to be a genuine perception that could be compared to other ethical enactments such as the schoolyard consensus of appreciating diversity and individuality. A similar sense of ethical wellbeing emerged in one boy's repeated prioritisation of spending time with his sibling. When asked the importance of this relationship, he revealed that his sibling had a disability. This respondent clearly understood the wellbeing his sibling received from 'spending time' together in ways others might take for granted. In turn, this duty of care appeared to contribute to his own ethical fulfilment.

### **Rules and Guidance**

In marked contrast to the young people in out of home care in particular, young people in the mainstream group considered the amount of rules and guidance in the lives to be fair – 'about the right amount' – and acknowledged rules as beneficial, particularly for safety. Some young people questioned the validity of some rules they perceived as 'strange' or extraneous, inferring that the sacredness of a rule could be diminished if every behavioural concern was communicated as a rule. Most young people in this group (and in other groups) wished to do the right thing by rules, but wished for the rules to be enforced consistently. For example, one girl expressed frustration at diligently doing her homework while noticing others could get away with doing nothing. One respondent talked about the dynamics of how rules were constructed at his school:

*Strange rules are usually made by the bossy teacher who doesn't teach you... then there's the pretty good rules, which are usually made by the principal or the vice-principal.*

Strange rules also included traditional uniform rules like having to wear blazers when travelling between school buildings (young people in a number of groups queried school rules about aspects of uniform and school dress codes), and one young person questioned the difference between the amount of rules at his mum's house compared to his dad's house:

*At my mum's I have to do way more chores and stuff.*

### **Health**

For this group 'health' was conceived as the prevention of sickness, which would inhibit your ability to play, and mental health was discussed in relation to depression and anxiety, and as an obstacle to feeling good about yourself.

*Because if you don't feel good about yourself you can get really depressed which isn't really good for your health.*

The importance of adequate sports programs was a concern for one young person, and the internet was included in discussing resources needed for good health. The internet was seen as providing accessible information such as forums and helplines, and helped to maintain healthy relationships with friends, particularly those who moved away. This group was particularly concerned with self-development and individuality (although one young person did equate his family's health with his own wellbeing). Playing and having imaginative fun was something they wished they had more opportunity to do. One boy predicted he might become a businessman in the future because he was good at maths, but was far more excited about his imaginary future as a superhero, which he could enact more regularly.

## **4.7 Regional and remote young people**

The research was conducted in a school in a remote town with a high Indigenous population. The research was carried out over two days. On the first day there were two workshops, one involving five students (all female) aged between 10 and 12 another with five participants (three girls and two boys) aged 11 to 13 years. The participants were selected by teachers. It is not known what criteria the teachers used to assist their selection decision. Participants were predominantly of non-Indigenous background. Follow up interviews with 10 participants took place on the following day. Two researchers facilitated all activities.

### **Key concepts**

As with other groups, participants felt that family was the cornerstone to their wellbeing. Family was generally defined in terms of parents, brothers and sisters, with some extension to grandparents. Friends, health and school ranked fairly evenly after family and community and money ranked lowest. A number of issues emerged as important to these young people's wellbeing, including stress, safety and security, bullying, and the importance of guidance and rules for helping children and young people from a regional/remote area live a good life.

### **Family**

Like the other groups, conceptions of 'family' tended to revolve around biological based connections, including parents, siblings, and extended family such as grandparents. Some of our respondents also counted pets as part of their families.



*Well I have my sister and my mum and my dad. So that's my basic family and then adding the pets, Spence and a couple of goldfish.*

*Your mum, your dad, and your siblings, if you have any.*

*It means people who you live with – or extended family as well.*

*Mum and dad, nanny, poppy, aunties, cousins.*

Also similar to the other groups, family was discussed in highly relational terms, seen as a source of support, acceptance and stability in the lives of our young respondents.

*It's like a group of people who you can trust. A group of people can help you in tough times.*

*Well you probably need a good family, like somewhere where they include you in stuff and they won't make you feel like you're not wanted.*

*And they, like, give you a safe home. They feed you, they give you things that you need, your medicine when you're sick and you can always trust them because you always know they're going to be there.*

*Well they're always there to look after you and if you get put down, they'll be there to stand up for you and they'll support you all your life.*

*It means people who care about and respect you for who you are and not who you're not.*

However, there was evidence of some children struggling with some of the relational dynamics of their families.

*All my brothers gang up on me....They did stuff to me and stuff and then my mum would listen to my brother and then she would instantly take sides with him because she heard the story from him first.*

*Parents fighting a lot. So one of my cousins parents fight a lot and a lot but they keep getting back together...he's not sure what's going on because they keep getting back together but breaking up, getting back together...and that affects your life.*

*Sometimes siblings get in the way because sometimes they think they're better than you when they're actually not.*

## **Friends**

Similar to the other groups, these respondents ranked friendship high on their lists of domains which contribute to living a good life. Regional and remote respondents spoke about the importance of friends for supporting them, for listening and helping them, and for having fun with.

*I mostly did 'friends' because they keep you company, they can help you, support you, and some of these, there's writing on it, and friendship is a single soul dwelling in two bodies.*

*Friends are people who are usually about your age that might be going through challenges the same as you or they might be older than you. They can give you advice, give you just company. They might be younger than you. Maybe some fun.*

Most friends were found at school, but some spoke about making friends around the neighbourhood. One respondent made a differentiation between “friends at school” and “the street friends” – friends they had made around their neighbourhood. Beyond this, similar to some of the other groups, there was also a differentiation between ‘good friends’ and ‘bad friends’.

*A good friend would be someone who trusts you and who you can trust and who will respect you for who you are and then a bad friend just says they're your friend or they're not and stuff and don't really take you for who you are, they expect more or whatever.*

*Friends – a true friend, like, is always there to support you and help you, like, other people who aren't so much of a friend they might, like, they might – I don't know...yeah, leave you out. Yeah.*

Like the other groups, there was also evidence of some respondents counting their pets as friends, and pets being regarded as important sources of help and support.

*It's still good to have human friends but then, like, if they have – sort of they can do whatever they like to you. They can – whereas with a pet they can't – they're not going to, you know, say mean stuff to you or anything like that...you probably tell them secrets because it's not like they can tell anybody.*

*I've got 'pets' [for friends] because pets are a pretty important part of my life...*

*Well, they [pets] can be friends because if you're bored you can go out and they'll be there to play with you.*

## **Health**

Health was seen as another important dimension for wellbeing and for living a good life.

*Health is pretty important because you need a healthy life to be able to – not necessarily have a good life, but if you have a healthy life's its good because you know that you're not going to get like diabetes or cancer...*

*And I put health, well, fourth or third, because I believe that health is something that you need because if you don't have a healthy diet or even environment, there could be chaos or you could become overweight by the time you get older.*

In terms of resources required for good health, a number of answers were volunteered, including exercise and particularly sport; eating healthy food; and generally looking after yourself. One child also spoke about the cost of healthcare, “hospitals; I believe that they should be less expensive”.

*Looking after yourself, eating healthy food, exercising, doing all good things and basically just looking after yourself.*

*I think it's about trying to maintain a healthy diet and not eating too much junk food every day, because you can become obese within a short amount of time.*

*And good health by eating vegies and then choosing the right foods to eat – calcium, good protein and all that.*

## **School**

Like other groups, this group ranked school high on their list of domains for a good life. In talking about school, two key themes emerged. Firstly, school was seen as a place to get an education, a sphere for learning and growing. Accordingly, school was linked with *future* wellbeing in that attending school and learning was viewed as enabling them to secure a good job in adult life.

*School is probably your main base where you get your education.*

*School is basically education to help you for after – when you leave school to help you get a job and it's just teaching you stuff you could use later on in your life.*

*Probably school because to be able to be, not necessarily a good person, but to be able to be not super smart, but know stuff, you need a good education and by getting a good education you go to school.*

*And with school, you get a really good education providing sporting skills, maths, all them, because all them you need in life, like, if you're going to be a shopkeeper or a sportsman or athlete.*

Secondly, school was seen as important for respondents to socialise with their friends and peers, as noted in many other groups.

*It's a place for you to learn and meet new people and have fun things that you like to do...*

*School is like where you can have – get education and where you can learn but like you can also do other stuff at school, such as playing with your friends and doing any other stuff they have at school.*

## **Community**

The regional and remote group had a clear concept of community. Like other groups, they spoke about community as encompassing a number of different groupings, relationships and domains, spanning family and school. In addition, though the sense of 'community' differed between respondents, their definitions of community tended to revolve around shared activities.

*There's lots of different communities and like there's the community at school. There's community at dancing. There's community in all sorts of things. There's Indigenous communities, more out of town.*

*I think it's like community as in the place that we live...basically the people who live in that city and sometimes in that bush....*

*Home is a community. You've got school community. I've got a ballet community, jazz, drama, swimming.*

Again, the relational dimensions of community were emphasised by our respondents: community as a source of support and relational connectivity.

*Community is like maybe a small town or a group of people that care for each other and they look after each other, they work together, they share with each other and they will help each other, I guess.*

## **Money**

The regional and remote respondents identified money and material resources as the least important domain for wellbeing and living a good life. Like the other groups, money was seen as important insofar as it acted as an enabler to ensure that young people could access ‘the basics’, which included food, clothes and shelter. Computer games, iPods, expensive toys and the like, while considered “nice” to have, were viewed as luxuries and not at all crucial to living a good life.

*Money, because it's basically about what you want or what you need. So what you need is food, shelter, water and all the stuff you need to live and stay alive. And stuff that you want, like iPods and gadgets and little toys and – you don't really need them but it keeps you happy.*

*Money is important but it's not like the most important thing in the world because you do money to survive, like to buy food and to be able to have enough clean water and pay the bills and buy a house, and stuff like that. But you don't necessarily need heaps of money to be able to have a good life.*

*I have money because we don't just waste it on things that we don't need.*

*Money is something that can get you most of the stuff in the world but it can't get you friendship and all that. But it can get you shelter and necessities that you need...It's important in life to have money for necessities.*

Similar to the mainstream group, there was evidence of some of the regional and remote children using money to enact an ethical code. One respondent in particular spoke of the importance of taking a charitable approach to money and wealth distribution.

*You can, I guess, work and get jobs and get more money and you can feed people, help people and, I guess, if you were – quite a lot of money, you could donate to other people with no money.*

## **Stress**

Another key theme which emerged was the impact of stress on the lives of many of our respondents. Stress could be influenced by a number of different factors, including family concerns and bullying. Of all causes of stress, however, homework and schoolwork emerged as the main contributors for this group. Many children felt under extreme pressure to complete their homework, as well as do well in standardised tests such as NAPLAN.

*Yes, but sometimes when your brain's really active and full-on and you're just going, going, going and you don't stop, and then when you hop into bed you just can't get to sleep. And that's my problem as well...Because you just can't switch you brain off and you can't relax because you're always on the go, and yes, it gets pretty tiring.*

*Because, like, you want a job to get money. Sometimes you're not old enough but tests also get in your way because you're so stressed about it, which is sometimes why, like, kids fail because they're like, too scared. 'Oh, I'm not going to get this right, I can't do it.' So they would think they can't do it when they can, but they're just doubting themselves.*

### **Safety and security**

A particular concern which emerged in this first round of data analysis was this group's perceived sense of safety in traversing their neighbourhoods. Several of the respondents did not feel safe due to a number of factors. Some children spoke about physical issues with their neighbourhoods, such as broken glass. Generally, however, there was a marked sense of fear and apprehension about strangers. Some of the regional and remote young people spoke about strangers who appeared to have substance abuse issues; these strangers, one respondent stated, were "really noisy, loud, most of the time they're drunk". Participants sometimes conceived these types of safety issues along racial lines and perceived socio-economic characteristics.

*We were guarding the bikes outside the shop while my two little brothers and dad went in and did the shopping. And this lady came up to us and she's like, 'I want one dollar, I want one dollar'. 'Sorry, we don't have any dollars'. I was sort of scared then.*

*I feel a bit scared that it might happen to me because after school, when we catch a bus, you don't know who's going to be there and what's going to happen. Even walking from the bus stop to my house it's far away so I get a bit scared when I'm walking by myself.*

One participant suggested that neighbourhood safety had worsened over recent years, recounting what must have been an adult discourse in the area.

*Since my dad's lived here, which is his whole life, lots of things have changed. Like when my dad was a boy he was riding his bike to school because it's just what they did and their parents didn't really mind because they knew it was safe. But now there's a lot more Aboriginals, or people who would really do anything to, I don't know, be silly I guess you could say, and they just – it's not as safe because there's lots of people just wandering around the streets and if you go for a ride or something, it looks like they're all staring at you.*

Across the group there was a strong sense of young people feeling unsafe when they were alone. In order to feel safer, therefore, our respondents preferred to travel to or from school— or be in public with— other people, particularly parents or older siblings.

### **Bullying**

When queried about barriers to living a good life, like many of the children and young people from the other groups, identified bullying as an issue which affected wellbeing. This included exclusion experiences from friendship cliques— an adverse experience that mainstream young people were notably schooled against tolerating.

*It's not fun for anybody and the people who really feel the pain are usually the people who are being bullied or the bullies and bystanders.*

*I haven't really [been bullied]*

*I reckon that would feel pretty bad because – well, it hasn't actually happened to me but sometimes some of my friends – well it has happened to me. But some of my friends leave people out, or even just leave me out, and I find it a bit hard.*

### **Guidance and rules**

Regional and remote young people were quite direct about the importance of rules and regulations for structuring their lives. Most clearly saw, and were able to articulate, the importance of adult guidance, particularly for maintaining, and ensuring, their safety.

*I think it's a good thing in that, like, it can help kids and it can keep them safe and for rules and show them – like your parents showing them the way and stuff.*

*Rules are important. Because if you don't have rules, there's nothing to do.*

*They are good because some rules they're there for a reason. You don't run wherever, you know, inside the class because - just obvious reasons, you could trip on a chair or a table or a person or something.*

*They have to be - rules are there to protect you from, like, dangers and our safety.*

Where respondents could see the rationale behind rules and regulations they felt that they could respect and follow them. However, where rules and guidance were seen to be 'silly' or pointless, there was little respect given.

*Well, rules in general – I guess they keep you safe but sometimes some rules are a bit sillier. Like if you can't watch television until 6.30 or something like that. Or you're not allowed out of the house on your own. Like that's just something silly... Yes, because at my age, if I wasn't allowed to – because I've ridden around the block a couple of times on my own and mum and dad, well they do trust me but they don't.*

*Then there's other rules - I think I mentioned yesterday, like lace up shoes, I hate them and those sort of rules - yes, you can't have buckles or anything, it has to be laces and those sort of rules I just don't understand and, you know, you can't wear any jewellery or anything. I mean, I don't wear much anyway but I used to wear an anklet and now I can't... It doesn't really change me too much but I just - there's some rules that I just don't understand like that.*

## 5 Discussion and implications for questionnaire design

The purpose of this Chapter is to summarise and draw implications from the Phase One fieldwork. The main conclusion is that domains that are common to most surveys of child wellbeing (for example, as summarised in Land et al., 2007) could be seen as capturing most of the broad domains of concerns expressed by the young people who participated in group work for this project. This is not surprising for two reasons. First, other research that has engaged with young people about their concerns has often confirmed somewhat similar results (Fattore et al., 2007; Foley et al., 2012; Rees et al., 2009). Second, children and young people are socialised into worlds where issues such as family relations, health and education are openly discussed. It was apparent to the researchers from the fieldwork that children and young people are familiar with policy priorities as they relate to child health and development, for example about learning, nutrition, safety and bullying. This was reflected for example in terminology that young people used in the group work discussions.

Therefore, while the researchers attempted an open-ended approach, where young people could raise any issues they felt appropriate as important to their wellbeing, it is perhaps not surprising that most raised issues that could be easily situated within domains that are familiar to policymakers:

- Family
- Friends
- School
- Community
- Health
- Feeling good about yourself
- Money and material wellbeing

However, this overall conclusion that the ‘traditional’ domains capture the concerns of ‘marginalised’ and ‘mainstream’ Australian young people needs to be nuanced in several respects. First, it was possible to identify a number of cross-cutting themes relevant to many of the domains:

- Bullying
- Guidance and rules
- Learning
- Safety
- Stress

Again, this is not surprising. For example, the literature on learning, safety, bullying and stress as experienced by young people is considerable. However, within each of these domains, young people discussed issues that do not appear to be comprehensively covered in the literature. Future work on this project will explore in greater detail the relationship between findings in this study and the

wider literature. In this chapter, we focus on a number of dimensions that appear to us to be important for the development of a survey questionnaire that is relevant to ‘marginalised’ as well as ‘mainstream’ young people in Australia.

To anticipate our conclusion, it is worth highlighting a number of issues arising from this analysis that we think should have a bearing on the design of a survey of wellbeing among Australian young people in their middle years. First, while there was broad agreement among the different groups of children on the most important domains in their lives, there was quite a range of view on the meaning of those domains, or how they should be defined. This was most clear in the case of ‘family’, where some young people included only their parents, brothers and sisters, while others included a much wider group of relatives, but it was also true in the case of other domains.

Second, the young people clearly prioritise the domain of family as more important than any other domain in their lives. This suggests that a survey should devote more effort to understanding family relationships, pressures and dynamics than it might devote to other key domains. This is important for policy. Although family is clearly outside of the education policy framework, there is little doubt that family environments, relationships and dynamics can have a profound impact on young people’s formal learning.

Our third main conclusion is that within each domain, the concerns of young people who are marginalised may be different to those in the ‘mainstream’. This is revealed for example in the relative importance placed on school by the different groups who we talked with, by the experience of bullying (as opposed to an awareness of bullying), and by the experience of disability, and death in the family – disability in the family was reported by both mainstream and marginalised groups but may have been more prevalent among the marginalised groups (it appeared to be a common experience among the Aboriginal young people who we talked with).

Our fourth overall conclusion is that young people tend to understand their lives as a whole, and not necessarily in terms of domains or dimensions. Young people understand that their actions, experiences or relationships in one domain can have spill-over effects on other domains. On the other hand, it appeared that the domain ‘feeling good about yourself’, which might have been seen by young people as capturing some overall ‘satisfaction with life’ type dimensions, did not always make sense to the young people we talked with, who tended to locate such feelings within the different domains. This suggests the need for a survey of young people’s wellbeing to measure how they feel about the different dimensions that are important in their lives, and to give young people the opportunity to show how some concerns may stretch across more than one domain.

Finally, we can conclude from the Phase One work that it is important to pay attention to the language that young people use in devising questions for a survey. Of note was the discussion in several groups of ‘good friends’ and ‘bad friends’. Among Aboriginal young people, the word ‘culture’ appeared to have a particular meaning that we think needs further exploration.

We discuss concrete proposals for survey design in greater detail towards the end of this Chapter. First, we must summarise key findings from the different domains. It is important to note that there was considerable variation within many of the groups on the meaning and content of these domains. In the following sections we privilege commonalities within and between groups. Therefore much of



the variation that was evident in the groupwork and interviews is not captured in the discussion that follows.

## 5.1 Summary of findings from key domains

### ***Family***

Each group without exception consistently ranked family as the most important domain, although definitions and perceptions of what family meant, differed considerably between individuals and groups. While the nuclear family was the most common definition, several children included grandparents as family members. Although we did not ask specifically about whom the young people lived with, it was clear that not all people who they saw as ‘family’ lived in the same household. Moreover, young people in the Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse groups (and some other children) tended to refer to family in terms of an extended network of parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins. Children living in out of home care did not refer to foster carers as family, but referred instead to parents and siblings. Many young people across the different groups nominated pets as being family members (or friends), and this seemed to be particularly relevant to children with a disability and to young people in out of home care. Most children talked about the relational aspects of family life. Brothers and sisters were discussed in this context as well as parents (and in the case of Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse groups, their wider kinship group also). Positive aspects (which predominated) included love, support and fun. Negative aspects included fighting (between parents, or between siblings and parents), and bullying.

Reciprocal care between adult and child was also a feature of children’s perception of family in several of the groups (it was especially marked among young people in the Aboriginal and disability groups) – that is, young people often saw their roles in terms of providing support as well as receiving it. Many young people saw the provision of care and support to family members as both enjoyable and integral to their wellbeing, as evidenced by the young person who considered special, the time spent with his brother who had a disability.

### ***Friends***

The friends domain was ranked very highly by four groups and by three other groups ranked in the middle range. Friends were considered to be very important to participants, but also problematic. A complex picture of friendship groups and friends emerged, with children in most groups referring to both ‘good friends’ and ‘bad friends’, with some also distinguishing between these two groups and ‘best friends’. Many young people mentioned having fun with their friends. They saw ‘good friends’ as the ones who stood up for you and provided trust, closeness, respect, support, and other forms of help. ‘Bad friends’ on the other hand might be mean or confusing, turn their back on you, tell others your secrets, talk about you behind your back, or bully you, even though they were in the same very broad (and sometimes quite large) friendship group. A few young people mentioned ‘best friends’ as people with whom you could share any secrets. Many respondents also counted their pets as friends (some also saw pets as family members). This was notable among young people in the regional and remote group, as well as among economically disadvantaged young people, and young people with disability. Additionally the Aboriginal children often identified a wide range of relatives as friends.

Most friendships were made at school and friends were generally of the same age, although age grouping was less important for children in communities where interaction with kin was highly valued. Friendship was seen in both passive and active terms. Some young people talked about a sense of fulfilment from helping friends. In comparison with other groups, the friendship domain was problematic for young people with a disability. Many of these respondents talked about struggling to establish and maintain friendships, and about the hurtfulness of being recognised as different both at school and on the street, resulting in a tendency to highly value friendships with children in their extended family (and their pets). Similarly, for the young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, friendships were a complicated area which sometimes overlapped with a sense of being bullied and excluded at school, while others talked about supportive friendships by which they formed opinions about their own identity (subjects their friend's thought they were good at), which was at times in conflict with parental guidance and expectations. For the Aboriginal group, while the domain of friends was generally regarded as important, it was not given the same importance as was the case with other groups. Relationships tied to family and cultural participation appeared to accommodate the friendship domain for Aboriginal children.

### ***School***

The domain of school evidenced a mixed evaluation in the ranking exercises, where it was generally ranked in the middle of hierarchies (for example in the mainstream, out of home care, culturally and linguistically diverse, and regional and remote groups) or else was ranked quite low (as was the case among children with a disability, economically disadvantaged children and Aboriginal children). Even when lowly ranked, the benefits of school were generally agreed upon: for gaining an education (generally with a view to securing future opportunities and a satisfying job), as a social meeting place where friendships could be built and nurtured, and for some as the place to access sports programs and maintain physical fitness and wellbeing. A distinct variation to this consensus concerned the perception of school made by young people with a disability. School for this group was distinguished by safety and bullying issues rather than positive social interaction. For this group, 'home time' was seen as the best part of the school day. Many young people did not see school as the only (or even the most important) locus for learning. Many young people (especially Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse young people) greatly valued cultural and other forms of learning that occurred at home or within a community, or learning associated with the practice of sports and hobbies.

Some groups were concerned about the stress (and even depression and anxiety) caused by what they viewed as an excessive amount of homework and 'extra exams'. Others (for example in the out of home care group) appeared to be totally unstressed by homework, but expressed a clear dislike for it. School was also viewed as the main domain where rules and guidance were confronted, largely with acceptance but also with suspicion of 'strange' rules relating to uniforms, shoe colour, out-of-bounds areas, etc. School was also perceived, particularly by the culturally and linguistically diverse group, as a place for social acclimatisation and a place to practice English skills.

There was much discussion of teachers among the different groups. The importance of supportive relationships between parents and teachers was a concern for some, particularly culturally and linguistically diverse young people. In many groups, opinions of teachers were somewhat equivocal, with discussion of both good and bad (or lazy) teachers, and sometimes 'angry teachers'. Some young people reported having special relationships with one or more teachers that were clearly very

important to them. Others focused on the difficulties associated with telling teachers about problems such as bullying, not necessarily because of what the teacher would do in response, but because of reactions by fellow students.

### **Community**

Young people in the different groups expressed a wide range of views on the meaning of Community. Indeed, the terms appeared to confuse some children. For the most part, the Community domain was ranked quite low, with two significant exceptions. The culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal groups each ranked Community in second position under family. For many groups who did not rank community highly, there was some confusion when it came to defining a community, and in such cases the mention of ‘online communities’ helped stimulate how community might be conceived – as one young person put it, a community could ‘be people you know of’, but did not have necessarily have to know intimately. For others, community encompassed a number of different groupings, relationships, and domains spanning family and school, the local council and sporting clubs. The culturally and linguistically diverse group, many of whom were born overseas and spoke their own language at home, had a considerably more global conception of community than the other groups. Their communities consisted of people from the ‘same culture’ and from the ‘same country’, and their strong sense of a global community included contextual themes of war, peace, or cultural conflict. For the Aboriginal group, concepts of community were strongly linked with family and culture, including a wide variety of social experiences shared with extended kinship networks.

### **Health**

Health was seen as an important domain in all groups, though it was usually ranked behind family, friends and school. Understanding of the term on an abstract level most commonly included the importance of diet (related to both nutrition and weight) as the main component with a lot of discussion about ‘healthy food’ and ‘junk food’. Sport, fitness, personal hygiene and mental health were also commonly discussed. Maintaining good levels of fitness was considered beneficial to a healthy lifestyle, from ‘playing footy’ to ‘races with friends’ and ‘dancing’. Being active was understood as a healthy pursuit. While *physical* health was generally discussed within the groups and interviews, an understanding of *mental* health also emerged in some of the groups, including the culturally and linguistically diverse group, the disability group, the Aboriginal group and the mainstream group. In these groups, young people talked in abstract terms about mental health issues such as depression and anxiety standing as barriers to wellbeing and living a good life.

While health was generally seen in individual terms (young people’s *own* health) discussion of health in the Aboriginal group also encompassed a collective dimension, where the health of each family member was seen as important to the wellbeing of all family members. To a greater extent too than was evident in other groups, health was also seen as associated with adequate material resources, with considerable discussion of the need for adequate nutrition for health.

### **Feeling good about yourself**

Most young people did not rank feeling good about yourself highly. This may not have been because they did not consider it to be important, but perhaps more because they saw feeling good as something that occurred in the context of relationships and activities, such as having fun with

friends, or engaging in sports and social activities. This is apparent in the way that young people in the Aboriginal group and in the economically disadvantaged group talked about this domain. However, some young people also mentioned activities such as eating chocolate as having an association with feeling good about yourself.

### **Money**

Across all the groups, money was consistently ranked as the lowest, or closest to the lowest, domain for a good life. Money was seen as important as an enabler for respondents to access the ‘basics’ of life— usually food, shelter and clothes. Much less emphasis was placed on the accumulation of material items such as computer games, iPods, cars, or other ‘non-essentials’.

Of all the groups, the Aboriginal respondents placed money highest in their understanding of wellbeing and a good life. This may reflect the likelihood that most of this group was economically disadvantaged (and perhaps more so than the economically disadvantaged group that we talked with). Aboriginal young people referred not only to basics such as nutrition and shelter, but also linked the lack of it to serious consequences, including ill-health (‘get skinny’) and crime. Aboriginal young people also spoke with personal experience of the consequences for themselves of living in an economically disadvantaged environment – for example not asking for or expecting birthday presents, or not getting a lift home from an activity because parents could not afford petrol. As such, they displayed a pragmatic concern with money as an enabler for improving their everyday wellbeing.

Additionally, across some of the groups, namely the mainstream group and the regional and remote group, there was evidence of money being used to enact an ethical code. Respondents from both groups spoke of using money in a charitable way in order to address wider social inequalities such as poverty and homelessness. Redistributing money was one of the proposed ways young people thought they would feel good about themselves, by giving to others and contributing to society.

### **Bullying**

Bullying was a theme which often emerged in our discussions with all the groups and most individual participants. Though the majority of respondents flagged bullying as an extremely important issue for them, discussion and experience of bullying was quite diverse and multi-faceted. This was not only because there were multiple types of bullying identified – physical, verbal, mental and cyber – but also because bullying could span a number of domains, including family, school, community and friendship. However, most young people talked about bullying in a school setting, and most identified peers as the agents of bullying.

It was noteworthy that many respondents drew a sharp distinction between ‘good friends’ and ‘bad friends’. While ‘good friends’ were supportive and trustworthy, ‘bad friends’ were those acquaintances who our respondents felt were fickle, untrustworthy, and occasionally ‘mean’. This indicates that children experiences of bullying are nuanced and fluid; bullying appears to occur frequently within friendship groups (the actions of ‘bad friends’), and a ‘bully’ one week may not necessarily be a ‘bully’ the next.

Throughout the focus groups and interviews, bullying was framed in two major ways. For some of the groups (regional and remote, mainstream, and economically disadvantaged) bullying tended to

be discussed in an *abstract* sense – something which they had noticed was an issue but had not directly experienced. Conversely, the respondents from other groups (Aboriginal, culturally and linguistically diverse, young people with disabilities, young people in out of home care), detailed their *lived experience* of bullying. Often, bullying was seen to be related to issues of discrimination (or perhaps racism) and of young people's experience of difference and of 'standing out' from their peers. For some participants from these groups, their experience of bullying was constant and ongoing.

Finally, it is worth highlighting the experience of young people with disabilities who experienced bullying, not only in the school setting, but also in the wider community, in public places. It is also worth mentioning that while some young people talked about bullying in the home, the researchers did not probe deeper on this issue.

### ***Guidance and Rules***

In their discussions stretching across a number of domains, young people indicated that guidance and rules are important dimensions of a good life. The interviews and focus groups showed that participants displayed a nuanced understanding of rules and guidance. Across all groups, respondents were supportive of many of the rules that structured their daily lives. They overwhelmingly felt that many rules were put in place to establish and maintain their own safety and wellbeing. Most of the respondents spoke about guidance and rules as emanating from two basic domains: family and school.

Rules and guidance, nonetheless, could be problematic in at least two major ways. First, some respondents talked about a mismatch of rules across different spheres and domains (counterpoising school and home, and different parents' houses) which could cause them distress. Second, some respondents spoke at length about rules and guidance which they did not respect – that is, rules for which the rationale was unreasonable, unknown or senseless – several school rules were mentioned in this respect. Inconsistency and incoherency were therefore seen as key issues with respect to young people's perceptions of guidance and rules.

### ***Learning***

Most respondents expressed an interest in learning, both in school and in other forums, although its importance was emphasised by some groups more than others. As noted above, some young people notably those in out of home care, had a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards formal learning and homework. Others clearly enjoyed learning, while some valued it for its instrumental value – so as to get a job in adulthood, and not to get ripped off. While school was often seen as the central site of learning and education in young people's lives, many participants also said that they valued learning within their families and their communities. This was particularly true for some groups, for example, Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse young people, who repeatedly spoke about gaining cultural knowledge that they did not get at school from parents and Elders.

### ***Safety***

Among some of the groups, safety and security emerged as a key concern. Safety was usually discussed in terms of perceived threats to physical safety, sometimes from environmental dangers such as traffic, but more often from other people. In some cases therefore, concerns with safety

could also be interrelated with issues of bullying. The regional and remote group articulated considerable concern about the safety of their neighbourhoods, as did the Aboriginal young people to a lesser extent, while some of the respondents from the disability group spoke about their fears of strangers in public as well as issues of physical bullying at school.

### ***Stress***

Another key theme which emerged throughout the first round of qualitative data analysis was the impact of stress on the lives of many of our respondents. While this appeared to be a common concern among many of the young people that we spoke to, its source varied somewhat between groups. Stress could be influenced by a number of different factors, including concerns for other family members' wellbeing, and bullying. Among the mainstream and culturally and linguistically diverse groups in particular, homework and schoolwork were repeatedly mentioned as the contributors to stress, in combination with before and after school activities. Many young people discussed feeling loaded with homework, and feeling pressure to do well at school (one person mentioned NAPLAN in this respect), and felt they had little time to themselves. Some young people demonstrated considerable resilience in employing a number of techniques to deal with stress, including spending time alone, watching TV, talking to their parents, napping, spending time with pets, and listening to music.

### ***Fantasy***

The imaginary world was seen as important to several children who we talked with. This was true among children in both 'marginalised' and 'mainstream' groups. Fantasy was discussed both as an object of play, and as a means of escape from daily realities. In particular, young people in the out of home care group appeared to discuss super powers and other fantasy related concepts to a greater extent than the other groups. It seemed that in this case, fantasy was being used by the young people to imagine a 'better life' for themselves.

## **5.2 Implications for questionnaire design**

It is difficult to do justice to the richness of the young people's narratives in the stylised form that a survey questionnaire has to take. It is worth therefore reiterating the central assumptions or understandings of the project, which should serve as a guide to how the qualitative data are used in the development of a survey questionnaire.

- That children are experts in their own lives; that is, they are the people who can best inform on their wellbeing.
- That wellbeing is important for policy, with reference to education and other portfolio areas. Policies to enhance children's wellbeing cannot stop at the school gates.
- That capturing the wellbeing of young people who experience marginalisation or disadvantage is especially important, since policies aiming to enhance children's wellbeing are often targeted at these children.
- That children, like adults, have a holistic view of wellbeing. "The research in this project will draw on a concept of wellbeing that acknowledges not only its subjectivity, but that also

reflects its social and cultural influences, and the world views associated with life in adverse circumstances (Nussbaum, 2012; White, 2008).” (Redmond et al., 2013, p.3).

- That while qualitative research methods are essential for developing an understanding of how young people see their wellbeing and what is important to them, large scale surveys are needed in order to provide the necessary evidence for policymakers to implement effective policies to enhance children’s wellbeing.

### ***Overall structure and design of the questionnaire***

It is important that young people overall, and young people who are marginalised in particular, can ‘see themselves’ in the questionnaire that they are asked to complete. In other words, it needs to relate to their lives and address their priorities, as they see them. This implies

- More attention in the questionnaire on domains that young people rate as the most important.
- Development of a survey questionnaire that marginalised children, as well as those in the mainstream, can easily understand. This suggests the following:
  - An attractive computer interface (or embedding questionnaire in an app.)
  - Audio
  - Attention of wording and length of questions
  - Attention to ordering and placement of questions.

The issue of ordering and placement is important in two respects. First, it is important that young people remain engaged with the questionnaire. Second, it is important that questions are ordered in such a way that makes sense to the young people and requires them to answer only those questions that are relevant to them, by way of branching based on previous responses.

### ***Content of the questionnaire***

The Phase One qualitative work suggests that a survey questionnaire design should include the following domains:

- Family
- Friends
- School
- Community
- Health
- Money and material wellbeing

Family, friends, school, community and health were all rated highly by some groups. Research on some of these domains needs to be deepened. This is the case for example with ‘community’ where alternative terminology may need to be tested. This is also the case with ‘money and material

wellbeing’, which was on the one hand rated as relatively unimportant by most groups, but was nonetheless highlighted as important for wellbeing in other ways, for example for health, and for enacting an ethical code. The questionnaire need not group questions relating to family, friends, etc., into distinct sections. However each of these should be covered.

The following cross-cutting domains emerged as important in the group work and interviews:

- Bullying
- Guidance and rules
- Learning
- Safety
- Stress

These domains were cross-cutting in the sense that while for some groups they could be placed almost wholly in one of the main domains, for other groups this was less the case. For example, culturally and linguistically diverse young people reported bullying as occurring mainly within the school. On the other hand, young people with disability talked about bullying in the community as well as at school. The issue of safety was related to that of bullying for some respondents (for example young people with a disability) but not others (young people in regional and remote Australia). The domains of guidance and rules, and learning stretched across both family and school for several groups. Stress was associated with both school (homework) and friendships.

This suggests the importance of not embedding questions about bullying or stress (for example) in any one domain, but perhaps to use questions about these issues which explore linkages between the different domains and their contribution to the young person’s wellbeing.

All of the above domains have been discussed in the literature on child development and wellbeing. Many surveys of children and young people ask questions about the issues highlighted as important by young people in the workgroups. One of the aims of questionnaire design should be to draw on this accumulated knowledge and use, as far as possible, questions and scales that have been validated in other surveys— although the psychometric properties of any such scales would need to be empirically ascertained in the pilot survey. Thus, it is intended to introduce completely ‘new’ questions only for those issues that young people see as being important but that are not covered by existing survey questions.

### ***Specific issues for questionnaire content arising from group work***

The list of bullet points below is not intended to be exhaustive. We expect that more issues will emerge as we analyse the data, and as new data are collected.

- Devote adequate questionnaire space to family relations, and how they inter-relate with other domains (that is, allow perhaps more space than for other domains). Group work suggests the need for questions about relationships with siblings and grandparents as well as parents; worries about parents; illness and disability in the family; and rules and guidance.



- Develop (or look for) a bullying module that not only asks about whether the young person was bullied but that also gets at the idea of ‘good friends’ and ‘bad friends’; that is, it seems likely from the young people’s descriptions that bullying is contingent and often the work of friends in large friendship groups. This may also suggest the need to distinguish between aggressive or anti-social behaviour with others and between peers, and bullying.
- Get a picture of young people’s views of ‘good’ teachers and ‘bad’ teachers, and how this is related to young people’s opinion of and engagement with school.
- Understand ‘good rules’ and ‘bad rules’ or ‘silly rules’ in the school context, and their association with young people’s engagement at school.
- Some young people talked about parents advocating for them at school, and how this could be positive or negative. Questions on parents’ relationships with school could provide data that links the school and family domains.
- The concept of ‘Health’ is well understood by young people in ways that would be recognizable to policymakers (healthy diet, fitness, etc.). This may suggest the possibility of asking about health through questions about exercise and diet, etc. However, it may also be useful to recognise the collective perspective on health expressed by some respondents.
- Ask questions about young people’s active engagement with parents, siblings and friends – caring, helping, supporting; these appear to give a sense of positive wellbeing. One important issue here that was not adequately explored in the group work is whether (and how) engagement may be age-related.
- In several groups (especially the marginalised groups), pets were described as friends. Young people described them as providing important comfort, companionship and even protection. Pets made them feel better about themselves. This suggests the need to ask questions about young people’s relationship to their pets.
- Some issues appeared to be quite specific to one group, and it may be worth examining how these can be accommodated in a questionnaire. For example, Aboriginal young people talked about culture in unique ways that did not resonate in other groups. Young people in out of home care talked about ‘family’ in different ways to other young people.
- Several groups used specific words to describe particular situations – the most widespread being ‘good friends’ and ‘bad friends’ (see above). Consideration needs to be made as to how (whether) phrases such as these should be incorporated into a questionnaire.
- The meaning of the word ‘community’ also needs to be tested. Not all children understood it in the same way; the word neighbourhood may be clearer for some young people, but may not be as meaningful for others (especially Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse young people). Again, it may be the case that use of words such as ‘community’ changes as children get older.

## 6 Conclusion and next steps

Phase One of the ACWP has highlighted how young people themselves, and especially young people who are often seen as marginalised, conceptualise wellbeing. As expected, much of what they report is consistent with findings from existing literature on child development and wellbeing – such as the centrality of family in young people's lives. It is in the details within domains, and in the ways that young people draw linkages between domains, that the data collected as part of this Phase One research has the potential to influence questionnaire design. A number of these details are outlined in Chapter 5, and it is likely that as we work through the data, other details will emerge.

The next steps in the project are therefore to match existing validated questions in successful questionnaires to these detailed issues. To support this goal, we have identified a significant number of survey instruments that have been tested on young people in the 8-14 years age range. These instruments, in conjunction with young people's perspectives as reported in this paper, comprise the raw material from which a new survey instrument will be developed. The aim here is not to create a totally new instrument, but to build on accumulated knowledge and experience in Australia and elsewhere to construct a questionnaire that will, as far as is possible, reflect young people's perspectives; complement other instruments and datasets being collected in Australia; and provide an element of international comparability.

The first task in the next phase of the project is therefore to match topics and issues raised by young people at Phase One to existing questionnaires and instruments. In many cases, this matching may be straightforward. For example, if the health domain, as young people see it, can be largely captured by questions about diet and exercise, then a large number of examples exist in existing questionnaires from which these questions can be drawn. The process, as carried out in several other studies (see for example, Rees et al., 2009) involves first, identification of detailed topics that are reported by young people as important to their wellbeing within each domain; second, identification of information that may be needed in order to understand or interpret young people's perspectives (here, information that can adequately identify the six groups of interest are important, but so is information about the young person's living arrangements, and basic demographic information such as age, sex and where the respondent lives); and third, identification of questions from existing surveys that have the potential to capture young people's perspectives.

Parallel to the work of identifying (or developing) questions for the draft questionnaire, work on a computer interface will commence. These will be the major tasks for the remainder of 2013. The research team has established a good rapport with the recruitment partners who provided young people for Phase One of the research. It may therefore be possible to return to these partners for testing of questions and constructs, and development of questionnaires and interfaces.

Finally, it is important to state that while the process at Phase One has been detailed and robust, our research has identified some important gaps that might be the subject of further research, and other gaps are likely to emerge as the research continues. An important role for the researchers on this project is to document these gaps and propose how they might be wholly or partially filled, either in the context to the current project, or in future research.

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## Appendix A: Geographical area classifications.

### **RRMA (Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas) classification.**

Developed in 1994, this is the oldest classification. This classification comprises three broad zones (metropolitan, rural and remote) and seven finer classes:

#### *Metropolitan Zone:*

- Capital Cities: M1;
- Other metropolitan centres (populations  $\geq 100,000$ ): M2

#### *Rural Zone:*

- Large Rural Centres (urban centre population 25,000–99,999): R1
- Small Rural Centres (urban centre population 10,000–24,999): R2
- Other Rural Areas (urban centre population  $< 10,000$ ): R3

#### *Remote Zone:*

- Remote Centres (urban centre population  $> 5,000$ ): Rem1
- Other Remote Areas (urban centre population  $< 5,000$ ): Rem2

### **ARIA (Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia) classification**

Developed in 1997, the ARIA classification consists of five classifications which are defined by a series of ARIA index values ranging from 0 (highest level of goods and services) to 12 (highest level of remoteness). It uses road distance as a proxy for remoteness and population size of a service centre as a proxy for the availability of services. The five ARIA classifications and the index value range are:

- Highly Accessible (HA): 0–1.84
- Accessible (A): greater than 1.84 but less than or equal to 3.51
- Moderately Accessible (MA): greater than 3.51 but less than or equal to 5.80
- Remote (R): greater than 5.80 but less than or equal to 9.08
- Very Remote (VR): greater than 9.08 but less than or equal to 12

## **ASGC-RA (Australian Standard Geographical Classification - Remoteness Areas classification)**

This classification consists of six area classes. Each class (except for Migratory) consists of a series of ARIA+ index values (which is an advanced version of the ARIA index values) ranging from 0 to 15. This classification extends the classification of population size and distance to 5 categories (instead of 4 in ARIA) and uses a different weighting factor for Tasmania.

The six categories are:

- Major Cities of Australia (MC): greater than or equal to 0 but less than or equal to 0.2
- Inner Regional Australia (IR): greater than 0.2 but less than or equal to 2.4
- Outer Regional Australia (OR): greater than 2.4 but less than or equal to 5.92
- Remote Australia (R): greater than 5.92 but less than or equal to 10.53
- Very Remote Australia (VR): greater than 10.53 but less than or equal to 15
- Migratory: These are areas composed of off-shore, shipping and migratory Census Collection Districts (CDs).

## **Appendix B: Surveys Examined for Identification of Domains of Young People's Wellbeing**

Questionnaires and other information from the following surveys and research instruments were examined:

*A: HBSC (Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children) Mandatory Questions (for ages 11, 13 and 15)*

Variables listed as mandatory in the 2005-06 Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC), World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborative Cross-National Survey were included in the analysis. In collaboration with the WHO Regional Office for Europe the HBSC survey is conducted every four years in 43 countries and regions across Europe and North America. The HBSC collects data on 11-, 13- and 15-year-old boys' and girls' health and well-being, social environments and health behaviours.

*B: Student Health and Wellbeing – NZ (for ages 12 plus)*

The Youth2012 Student Health and Wellbeing Questionnaire was the instrument used to investigate the health and well-being of secondary school students in New Zealand. Developed by the Adolescent Health Research Group (2008) based on items used in earlier surveys and on focus groups with young people, the instrument included 622 questions and involved 9,107 Year 9-12 students in 96 secondary schools across New Zealand.

*C: Brief MSLSS (Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale) (for ages 8 plus)*

The Brief Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (BMSLSS) (Seligson, Huebner & Valois, 2003) is a shorter version of Huebner's (2004) multi-dimensional life satisfaction measure for children, which was suitable for young third grade students (aged 8-9). The 6-item self-report instrument comprises items relating to five specific life domains and an overall measure of life satisfaction. The items were included in a survey of young people's subjective well-being by Rees et al. (2005).

*D: Children's Society (for ages 10-15)*

Questions used in the 2008 national survey of young people's well-being (Rees, Goswami and Bradshaw) were included in the analysis. Participants in the 2008 survey comprised 6,853 young people in Year 6 in primary school and Years 8 and 10 in secondary school. The questionnaire included over 100 questions about children's over-all well-being and a set of single-items that measured children's well-being in various domains.

*E: Children's Worlds (for ages 7-13)*

Children's Worlds' (CW) is an international survey of children's subjective well-being which aims to collect data on the lives of children aged 7-13. A group of international researchers (Andresen, Ben-Arieh (ISCI), Bradshaw, Casas, Rees, Fronces, George, Hoelscher (UNICEF), Korbin, Richardson (OECD),

Stephenson) developed the instrument in 2012 and it is currently being used to survey young people in a number of countries.

*F: Growing Up in Ireland (for 9 year olds)*

The National Longitudinal Study of Children living in Ireland (Williams et al., 2009) comprised questionnaires for parents and carers as well as children. The wave 1 Main child questionnaire and the Child Core Sensitive Questionnaire were included in this analysis. This Irish study has been tracking the development of two cohorts of young children since 2007 (approximately 11,000 infants and 8,500 nine-year-old children). The study examined the lives of 9 year olds randomly selected from a total of 910 schools across Ireland.

*G: HOWRU? (for ages 11-17)*

The survey consists of a core instrument and four modules—an Aboriginal module for students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin, and three others assigned randomly to the remainder of the sample. The first survey conducted in 2009 included a final sample of 10,357 adolescents in Years 7, 9 and 11 from schools across Victoria. Only questions found in the technical report (not including the appendix) were available for analysis. Based on the numbering of questions, this represented over 90% of the overall survey questions.

*H: KidsScreen (for ages 8-18)*

KidsScreen is a 52-item health-related quality of life questionnaire for children and adolescents aged 8 to 18. The instrument was used in 13 European countries with a total of 22,296 young people.

*I: KINDL-R (for ages (4-7) (8-12) (13-16))*

Kindl-R is a 24 item German-language measure of health-related quality of life in children and adolescents originally developed by Bullinger et al. (1994) and revised by Ravens-Sieberer & Bullinger (1998a, 1998b). The questionnaire has been used in studies involving over 3,000 healthy and chronically ill children and families.

*J: LSAC (The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children ) – CSR (Child Self-Report) (for ages 12-13)*

The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) (Growing up in Australia Study) managed by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS, 2011) examines children's development and well-being. LSAC collects data from multiple respondents including parents, teachers and children. Children in Cohort K began completing the Child Self-Report Interview (CSR) in Wave 2 when they were 6-7 years old. Questions from Wave 5 (ages 12-13) of the CSR were included in this analysis.

*K: MDI (Middle-Years Development Instrument) (for ages 9-10)*

First developed in Canada, the MDI is a 72 item questionnaire that assesses children's development and well-being. In Canada the MDI was administered in Vancouver to 3,026 Grade 4 students (aged 9-10) who completed the self-report questionnaire at school.

*L: PWI-SC (Personal Well-being index for School-aged Children) (for ages 12-16)*

The PWI-SC is an adaptation of Cummins' (2002) Personal Well-being Index (PWI) for adults. The wording was changed so that the PWI-SC respondents are asked to indicate their level of 'happiness' rather than 'satisfaction' (used in the adult version). The PWI-SC was used in an international study across three countries involving over 5,000 young adolescents by Casas et al. (2012). In this study

two items which assessed satisfaction with myself and satisfaction with use of time were added to the PWI-SC, as well as the school index suggested by Tomyn & Cummins, 2011.

*M: Sec World Vision Childhood Survey (for ages 8-11)*

The first world vision study of children in Germany aged 8 to 11 was undertaken in 2007.

The study was repeated in 2010 and 2,500 children aged 6 and older completed the quantitative component. Parents also responded to socio-demographic questions about family background. The aim of the study was to obtain a “picture of the life situation along with the desires, needs, and interests of children in Germany” (Hurrelmann & Andresen, 2010, p.7) and give children a public voice.

*N: Young Lives Study (for 12 year olds)*

Approximately 12,000 children from four study countries, Ethiopia, India, Peru, Vietnam participated in the study which focused on childhood poverty. The questionnaire comprised instruments completed by the study child and the primary caregiver. Only the self-report questionnaire for young people aged 12 was included in this analysis.