

What have young people in out of home care said about "wellbeing"?



Like other groups, young people in out of home care prioritised family as the most important influence on their wellbeing; conceptualising family as a traditional nuclear model (parents and siblings), before widening this to extended members such as grandparents, aunts and uncles and cousins. Interestingly, the group did not include carers or other people not biologically related to them, and their domain rankings were more fragmented than other groups— which may reflect the stresses young people in this group face. While ‘family’ was ranked the most important, it was clearly a difficult topic, and unlike other groups, little information was volunteered in group activities about the structure of families, views on normative family functioning, or the relational dimensions of family life. The reticence to talk about family in ways that reflected their experience outside of a very safe environment underscores the tendency for young people to normalise experiences that may undercut their wellbeing. Strong, supportive, and safe friendships were stressed as important, yet where other groups often mentioned the activities they did with their friends, this cohort focussed more on friendship dynamics and the qualities they desired in their friends. Friends were named as peers who could be trusted; who they could help; who would listen; whom they could share secrets and personal information; and who would if there were fights, “get over them quick”. School generated mixed feelings, with some emphasising it as a place to establish and maintain friendships, while for others it was a place associated with bullying— at times a rotating continuum of teasing and social exclusion. 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 other groups. However, participants appreciated gaining recognition at school for their achievements, with long discussions of prizes, “good effort cards”, and “table points”. The group 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. When speaking about ‘community’, respondents included families, schools, and neighbourhoods and tended to emphasise the relational aspects of community— consisting of people who were familiar and who they

could trust. Money was ranked lowest in importance however respondents spent more time than other groups *imagining* how goods and services might be more affordable. Money was viewed as something necessary to meet basic needs: food, clothing, and shelter. Accordingly, they assigned little weight to money as enabling the purchase of luxuries— “motorbikes”, “games”, and “televisions”. A recurring theme was the desire for goods to be more affordable, and discussions around affordability often entailed ‘what if’ scenarios of fantasy—such as an alternative version of school likened to a “fun park” replete with water slides and roller-coasters and “no smokes”. At different times, participants mentioned robots who could do things for you (including household chores), or had super powers that could transport “you anywhere, anytime”. The world of the imagination was clearly an important space for these young people; a theme also shared by the mainstream group.