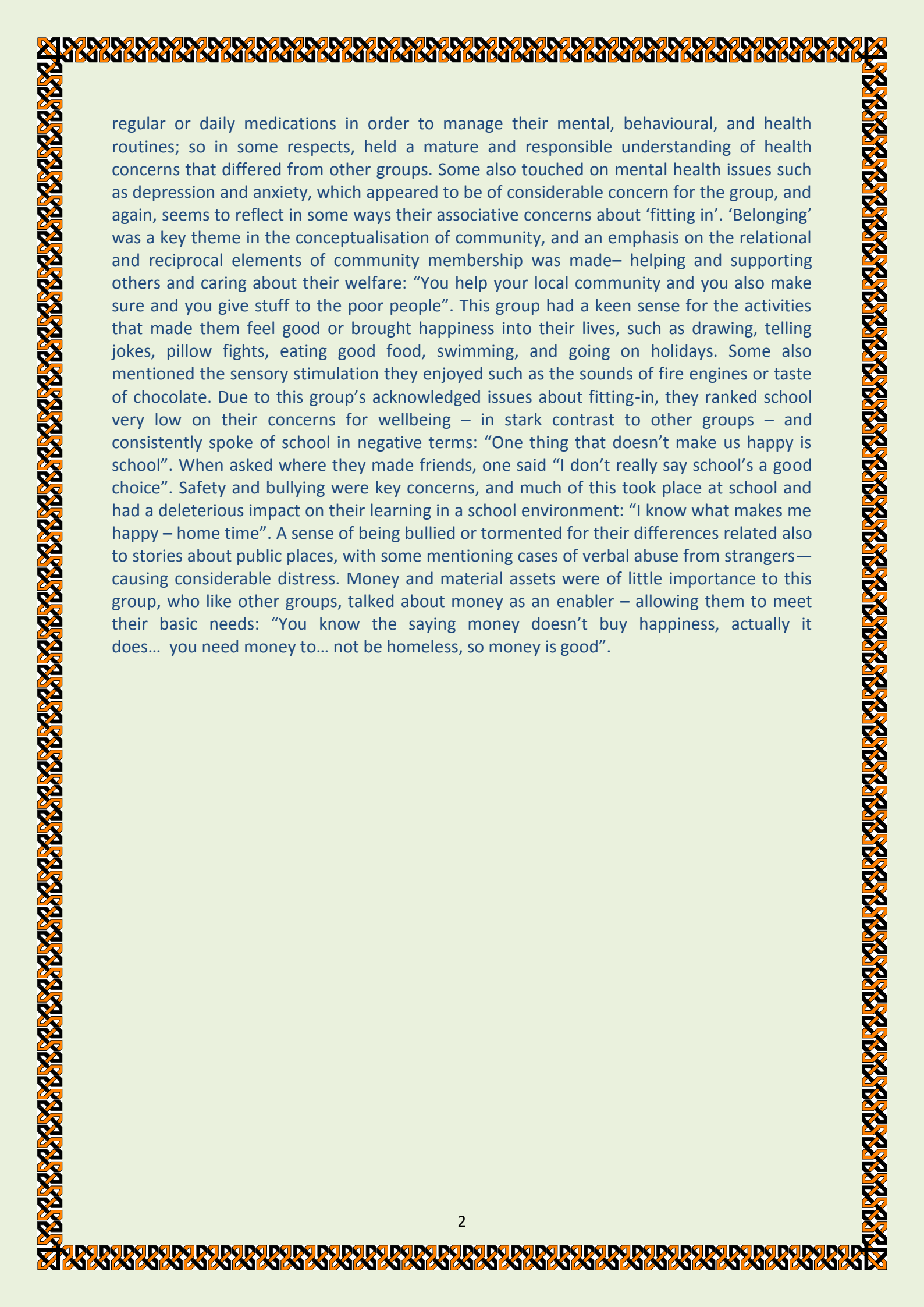


What have young people with disability said about "wellbeing"?



Young people with disability felt that the family was the strongest source for their wellbeing, being a safe and supportive sphere where they felt comfortable. Friends also ranked highly, however the main unifying theme for this group was that they often felt that they stood out from their peers, and this self-consciousness affected many of their views regarding ‘a good life’. Family was typically conceived as their parents and siblings, along with an outer regard for extended biological family such as cousins and grandparents. Family was seen as the nexus of these young people’s self-esteem and growth, and some specifically mentioned their cousins as being their good friends, indicating their emotional responsiveness to being able to play with young people who understood their differences, or where perceived differences could take a back seat. Friends were often defined in terms of what you did with them –playing and making fun – as well as in terms of the quality of the relationships. In comparison with other groups, friendship for these young people was very problematic, because many struggled with issues of belonging and acceptance, and in this way friendships took on a particular importance. Many discussed struggling to establish and maintain their friendships, so in this way, they valued friendships perhaps more comprehensively than other groups— “friends are important for making you not feel lonely [so that] you stick together.” Perhaps because they did not enjoy a wide circle of friends, young people with disability tended also (like some other groups) to value their pets as friends and confidantes—particularly if they felt they were being ‘roused on’ by their parents. Many spoke of the importance of their physical health, perceived as “having a healthy body”, and discussed health around the resources necessary for maintaining good health– dental hygiene; drinking “heaps of water”; eating healthy food like “fruits and veggies”; and doing exercise. Physical health for this group could also be related to belonging and fitting in: “Health is good because if you’re not that fit you’ll be lazy and fat and you won’t have many friends [so] you’ll get teased”. This group also discussed taking



regular or daily medications in order to manage their mental, behavioural, and health routines; so in some respects, held a mature and responsible understanding of health concerns that differed from other groups. Some also touched on mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, which appeared to be of considerable concern for the group, and again, seems to reflect in some ways their associative concerns about ‘fitting in’. ‘Belonging’ was a key theme in the conceptualisation of community, and an emphasis on the relational and reciprocal elements of community membership was made— helping and supporting others and caring about their welfare: “You help your local community and you also make sure and you give stuff to the poor people”. This group had a keen sense for the activities that made them feel good or brought happiness into their lives, such as drawing, telling jokes, pillow fights, eating good food, swimming, and going on holidays. Some also mentioned the sensory stimulation they enjoyed such as the sounds of fire engines or taste of chocolate. Due to this group’s acknowledged issues about fitting-in, they ranked school very low on their concerns for wellbeing – in stark contrast to other groups – and consistently spoke of school in negative terms: “One thing that doesn’t make us happy is school”. When asked where they made friends, one said “I don’t really say school’s a good choice”. Safety and bullying were key concerns, and much of this took place at school and had a deleterious impact on their learning in a school environment: “I know what makes me happy – home time”. A sense of being bullied or tormented for their differences related also to stories about public places, with some mentioning cases of verbal abuse from strangers— causing considerable distress. Money and material assets were of little importance to this group, who like other groups, talked about money as an enabler – allowing them to meet their basic needs: “You know the saying money doesn’t buy happiness, actually it does... you need money to... not be homeless, so money is good”.