

What have young people from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander group said about "wellbeing"?



The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander group discussed ‘family’ in ways that referred to both immediate and extended family as well as culture and country. Initial responses to ‘community’ centred on family relationships where concepts of family were heavily imbued with references to health and safety, and some pressures of living in low socioeconomic circumstances, so that family and community were often strongly linked to concerns about health and material assets. The group expressed a very sophisticated and complex understanding of family which included family members beyond the immediate household – siblings, half-siblings, cousins, grandparents, nephews and nieces. In discussions of relationships with older relatives, these young people clearly drew on the life experiences of these people to formulate their world view: “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”. In this sense, a strong notion of culture was entwined with family and reached from actual relatives to the non-human: “when we went down to [Dad’s] house, we would always see snakes or spiders and we would be nice to them snakes and spiders”. A strong commitment to caring for family members was shown, in ways expressing resilience and a clear value system, and a number expressed concerns about the physical health and wellbeing of family members. Health was an important aspect of wellbeing and included the importance of material resources, basic nutrition and hygiene, the benefits of good fitness, obesity-awareness, and mental health. Maintaining good levels of fitness was considered beneficial and included “playing footy”, “Races with friends” and “Dancing”. Participants also noted safety measures such as: “Don’t pick up needles” — a widely promoted campaign, however one not mentioned by other groups. Most strikingly, inadequate provision of basic necessities was discussed in terms that suggested a closer experience with inadequate provision than other groups: “You need food because if you don’t have any food you’ll...

start stealing and you'll be like shoplifting... And you'll go really, really, really skinny". Money was an issue at the forefront of these young people's concerns about wellbeing, and having more money was clearly considered beneficial – for "everything", "having a house", to "buy stuff", "a good car", "phones", and "just to look at it". Money was seen as enabling people to buy the basics: "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 and community and good health.

School was not ranked so high, possibly because many in the group had access to alternative learning and friendship networks within their community. School was discussed positively and constructively in terms of being an important resource that could generate choices in later life– "Like when you go to the shop, if you get ripped off you can see". This indicates participants were aware that people with a lack of basic education were vulnerable to exploitation. A number of respondents were ambivalent about school as a safe environment: "sometimes school has its ups and downs, sometimes you get bullied, sometimes you don't. It's a mixed world". Compared to other groups (except perhaps young people with disability), bullying was discussed as a familiar (rather than occasional) occurrence at school. Obtaining Aboriginal knowledge was considered a priority for these people's wellbeing, and had an alternative value to the benefits of the public system. Community as a domain was initially used in reference to Aboriginal identities – one's people, culture, and heritage – and did not reference universal notions of the township or general community. When asked for further clarification, the term was expanded to include "the government" because they "make money" and "make houses for people to live in", particularly "homeless people", and also to "Police", "Safety", and "the Shops". One person described the limits of community as: "wider than [the town]. It's every single country and state and town [But it's] The same community". Community was viewed as a place to have fun, and where elders discussed community issues: "Working together as a big group". Friends were regarded as important but not discussed as a great priority, largely including familial friends and kinship relations, and were not so strongly tied to school or sporting experiences like other groups. A mischievous regard for friendship was conveyed – "they do the silly stuff with you"; they "stick up for you", and they "take the blame". One young person included a pet dog as a friend, and another aspect was this group's greater recourse to narratives related to the struggles of maintaining a positive self-esteem; offering more detailed accounts of specific incidents that troubled them and which needed to be overcome. These accounts were often structured through their interactions with adult relatives, indicating both a broader exposure to health and safety issues, and how to overcome and avoid adversities. These young people believed they needed to attend to the fun times and sad times, enabling them to connect with others, "because then you could have a laugh at someone or cry with someone [too]."