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Voices of Children and Young People in Wales Study:

A qualitative study of Wellbeing among children and young people under 25 years old



Abbie, Aged 6

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young people under 25 years old**

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Assembly Government

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1 Acknowledgements

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2 Executive Summary

This qualitative study focused on perceptions of wellbeing among a sample of children and young people up to the ages of 25 years across Wales. The findings from this study will be incorporated into the 2011 Children and Young People's Wellbeing Monitor for Wales.

The study involved focus groups and face-to-face interviews with children and young people, and also included some parents of very young children. While the participants covered a wide age span, some similar perceptions of wellbeing were shared by those of quite different ages, and from those in different circumstances. Particularly notable among these was the value placed upon relationships with

others, which for the most part took precedence over more materialistic concerns. Another notable finding was the way in which children's and young people's perceptions about their responsibilities towards each other and themselves changed as they became more independent from their parents, and again for those young people who were parents of young children themselves. Perceived personal responsibility (particularly to succeed educationally and/or secure employment), were associated by young people as a source of future wellbeing, as well as a source of anxiety, concerning young people's perceived efficacy in reaching these goals.

The main findings of the study are set out in this report, and summarised as key points as follows:

Young children were attached to the areas where they lived, mostly for the people that they knew (friends and family) and for their access to contexts (including gardens, the street and parks) where they could play. Older children and teenagers' assessment of where they lived also focused upon access to friends but, those in rural areas, were often critical about the perceived absence of suitable entertainment for young people.

Feeling safe and secure was important for children and young people, irrespective of age. Younger children, particularly, drew on adult fears (such as the 'stranger in the paper'), and looked to parents to protect them. Young people became more aware of the contexts of safety and age as they grew older, for example, when out alone at night and in different areas of the city. Whereas parents controlled the environment of young children (for example, where they play and access to the Internet), as they aged, young people learnt to take responsibility for their own safety. Young people with children of their own, valued safe environments and close community contexts for their children, although in rural areas the downside of these was perceived as everyone knowing their business.

Young people and children, irrespective of age, perceived relationships with others as one of the most important aspects of their wellbeing. For the most part, relationships were prioritised by children and young people over material possessions. Younger children focused primarily on the importance in their lives of their parents/guardians, while older children looked to their relationships with their peers, teachers and other significant others, as well as their families.

Children and young people highlighted the importance of treating others with respect, and in the same way as they wished to be treated themselves. They appeared for the most part to be tolerant of, and indeed value, difference. Hence, they accepted and welcomed opportunities to mix with others, with different experiences, backgrounds and cultures. In this sense young people

appeared generally accepting and inclusive of others.

A sense of identity was highlighted as very important by many young people and children. Many participants in the study said that they were proud to be Welsh, and that this engendered a sense of belonging. Equally those young people who perceived themselves as English (often being born in England and having little exposure to the Welsh language in the areas where they lived) claimed an English identity. Importantly having a strong sense of identity was not perceived as threatening towards, or by, others with alternative allegiances. For those living on the borders, identity was less well clear cut and some young people struggled to locate themselves. Despite the perceived importance placed on identity and belonging, for the most part young people distanced themselves from extremist patriotic attitudes and behaviours.

Most children and young people enjoyed school, deriving satisfaction variously from aspects of the curriculum, pedagogy, their peers and teachers. One concern about school was its perceived fitness for purpose in a changing world. That is, pupils demonstrated preference for practical subjects and expressed desire to have a greater focus on subjects which would help them 'get on in life'. Learning about money management was highlighted particularly by many young people as very important in the current financial climate.

All participants were aware of bullying issues, and many had been directly affected. Young people talked about the misery and isolation caused by abusive behaviours towards them by others, particularly at school. While adults were described as trying to address bullying, they were perceived as sometimes unable to grasp the seriousness of the problem. Partly this was because the phenomenon was perceived as more serious contemporaneously than it had been when adults were children. Bullying was described as having serious implications for young people's outcomes (including psychological wellbeing as well as educational outcomes).

While children and young people readily identified preferred occupations, older children were uncertain about whether these would be realised because of the economic crisis and competition for jobs. Young people were thoughtful about money and had an eye on the future. University fees were described by some young people as acting as deterrent to the taking up of University places because of the prospects of large debts with no guarantee of employment following graduation.

Stress was an issue for young people especially in relation to the demands of

educational achievement and, linked to this, the prospects of securing work. Young people felt under considerable pressure to get good grades, at the same time aware that even these may not secure their future.

Children and young people were aware of the relationship between their own behaviours and health (and thus accepted some responsibility for their own health). Irrespective of age, children and young people, distinguished between healthy and unhealthy diet, although most admitted a preference for unhealthy food. Some young people compensated for unhealthy dietary behaviours by taking exercise. Very few children and young people said they currently, or had ever, smoked and smoking was generally perceived as very unhealthy and no longer 'cool'. Most young children reported that they did not like, or engage in, alcohol consumption although this was considered the norm among older (including under-age) young people, a few of whom acknowledged binge drinking.

Most young people highlighted the importance of champions in their lives, who were adults (including parents and teachers) who would listen to them. For the most part young people said that adults filtered out what they felt were non-important issues raised by children and young people, and in some cases the ability of adults to grasp what was important to those from the younger generation, was queried. Generally children said that outside those known to them, adults (and the media) as a whole were not respectful towards children and young people.

As children grow older and parents relinquish their control over their environments and choices, they accept more responsibility for their safety, their health and their futures. It was apparent in this study that while young people talked about having responsibility for themselves (and about treating people how they would like to be treated), there was some reticence in accepting responsibility for others. However, those young people who had children of their own, talked about their responsibilities to their children, mostly prioritising these over their own interests. Their concerns for their children appeared largely informed by their own experiences, worries and opportunities available to them as young people.

3 Introduction

During the past decade there has been a shift in terminology surrounding health education/promotion to encompass a broader definition of health and wellbeing (Nuffield, 2003). Indeed Health Promotion Wales was recognised as an early pioneer of this shift, through their website 'Promoting Health and Wellbeing in Wales', publication of the key strategy document 'Promoting Health and Wellbeing in Wales' and the promotion of health as a part of wellbeing (rather than wellbeing as an add-on to health), which underpinned this shift (DOE, 2003).

The concepts of health and wellbeing offers considerable potential to involve all sectors in improving health and wellbeing, where an integrated approach is critical to improving health, at the same time as allowing various sectors to work towards their own goals. It has been argued that wellbeing constitutes a unifying concept for health improvement which encompasses a range of medical and non-medical priorities, differing values and objectives, which in the real world cannot be separated (Cronin de Chavez et al., 2005).

In the past, children's voices were predominantly silent in childhood research perhaps due to overprotection of children, which led to their exclusion (Alderson & Morrow, 2004). More recently, a new imperative has emerged which emphasises the importance of children's perspectives in increasing our understanding (Kellett, 2005; Watson, Abbott & Townsley, 2006) particularly about poverty (Bennett & Roberts, 2004), social difference (Sutton, Smith, Dearden & Middleton, 2007) and health related behaviours (Warren, Parry, Lynch & Murphy, 2008). Reflecting this theme, at the turn of the millennium, the Welsh Assembly Government established the following priority:

The Assembly wants to hear the voices of children and young people, to listen to their views, and to ensure that services respond to their needs and their aspirations (Welsh Assembly Government, 2000, p. 3)

This imperative was reiterated in the 2008 Children and Young People's Wellbeing Monitor for Wales. The purpose of this study is to respond to this imperative, by soliciting the views of children and young people living in Wales. The findings from this study will be incorporated into the 2011 edition of the Monitor

4 Methods

4.1 Aim

The project set out to explore children and young people's perceptions of wellbeing.

The study was guided by the aims of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which have been adopted by the Welsh Assembly Government as the basis for all of its policies and programmes for children and young people in Wales. The Assembly Government has translated the UNCRC into seven core aims as follows:

1. Every child should have a flying start in life and the best possible basis for their future growth and development.
2. Every child and young person should have access to a comprehensive range of education, training and learning opportunities, including the acquisition of essential personal and social skills.
3. Every child should enjoy the best possible physical and mental, social and emotional health, including freedom from abuse, victimisation and exploitation.
4. All children should have access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities.
5. All children and young people should be listened to, treated with respect and have their race and cultural identity recognised.
6. All children and young people should have a safe home and community which supports physical and emotional wellbeing.
7. No child or young person should be disadvantaged by poverty.

Additional areas explored by the study included: the concept of wellbeing or happiness; what being a child/young person in Wales/the world is like today; aspirations, dreams and hopes for their lives and their futures; any challenges or difficulties; self perception and how others view them and their peers; and rights and responsibilities.

4.2 The sample

The sample (n=82) was selected purposively, and represents a wide range of respondent ages (under 25 years) and circumstances. The sample comprised only individuals able to give informed voluntary consent. The respondents:

Were drawn from counties across Wales (n=9), comprising: Caerphilly, Camarthenshire, Cardiff, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Gwynedd, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Wrexham.

Represented a mixture of household types including those with: separated, single, married and step-parents; adopted children; and children living in care. Sizes of families also ranged from single parents living with one child, to households comprising 10 family members.

Comprised children/young people aged between six months and 25 years. Children from four years of age spoke on their own behalf, and younger children were represented by their parents. Parents' ages ranged between 19 and 37 years.

Children interviewed under 18 years (n=61), young people interviewed aged 18 to 25 years (n=15), parents interviewed (n=11). Parents who were aged under the age of 25 years were counted twice (as parents and as young people).

Genders of children and young people: female n=37, male n=32, gender of parents interviewed: female n=13.

Included children/young people from socially disadvantaged and more advantaged areas, urban and rural areas, disabled young people and those with learning needs, British White and British Minority Ethnic participants.

4.3 Recruitment of the sample

Several strategies were used to recruit respondents from a range of locations. Initially, the research team members drew on their contacts with appropriate organisations and agencies. Participant groups not researched through this strategy were identified and appropriate sources of these respondents were contacted. Organisations contacted for recruitment of participants, and engaging with the study, included schools (residential, special, private) and Universities, Community and Youth Groups, Family Groups and Charities.

4.4 Data collection

Data collection comprised:

One-to-one, face-to-face interviews (n=15), involving 15 respondents.

Group interviews (n=16), involving 67 respondents.

Group interviews ranged from groups of two to eight respondents: two respondents (n=5), three respondents (n=3), four respondents (n=2), five respondents (n=1), six respondents (n=2), seven respondents (n=1), eight respondents (n=2).

Respondent language use in interviews/group discussions: English language (n=63), Welsh language (n=19).

A semi-structured interview schedule was developed from a checklist of key topics informed by the research aims. Digital audio recordings of interviews were made, with respondents' permission.

4.5 Analysis

The data set comprised verbatim discussion and detailed notes made from the audio recordings. Interviews were written up by interviewers following each interview. A qualitative data software package (NVivo 8) was used to manage and structure the data. Following initial reading of notes and listening to the recordings, an analysis framework was developed which was used to structure data under identified headings. This comprised the first stage of the data analysis which was informed by a constant comparative, thematic approach (Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. 1990). Validity of identified themes was checked across the whole data set and across research team members. Themes identified are evidenced by data extracts taken from interviews and group discussions.

4.6 Ethical approval

Ethical approval was obtained from the Glyndŵr University Ethics Committee and independent guidance was sought from safeguarding representatives in respect of procedures and development of study materials. The study was compliant with relevant legislation and procedures including the: Data Protection Act (1998), Children's Act (2004), All Wales Child Protection Procedures (2008), Safeguarding Children: Working Together under the Children's Act 2004 (2007).

Parents/guardians consented for children (18 and under) to be included in the study, and informed assent from the children themselves was also sought in all cases. Informed consent was obtained for all other participants.

All data in the report have been anonymised and all identifiers have been removed or changed, including locations and specific incidents etc. Pseudonyms have been used to protect respondents and those they refer to. All researchers underwent enhanced CRB checks.

5 Findings

5.1 No place like home: “I love my house”

Home

It was apparent that children and young people taking part in the study experienced a wide spectrum of living arrangements. While some lived at home with both parents all the time, others had more varied living experiences. Some participants, like Joshua for example, lived in single parent families with their mothers, but stayed regularly with fathers:

Joshua 14yrs¹: I live with my mum, my brother and my sister and sometimes my mum's partner...and then I like every other weekend like Saturday and Sunday, I go and stay with my dad.

For the most part, participants were attached to the houses where they lived, and any change, or move tended to be unpopular:

David 8yrs: I miss my older house you just get used to a house and you need to get more money and your mum just says 'come on we're moving' and then you just have to get used to it really.

For parents, irrespective of age, moving to new accommodation was desired only where it was associated with discernable benefits. While for Emma, a move was necessary because of changed circumstances, it was perceived as positive because it offered the possibility of longer term security:

Emma 19yrs (children 6mths, 3&6yrs): I lived in private rented accommodation. I'm on the (council housing waiting) list but have got to change my requirements in the next week or so as I've just got married my circumstances have changed...I think I'd rather have one (council house) now as it gives a bit more stability really.

Parents were willing to tolerate some problems with their accommodation in order to maintain that stability:

Vivienne 30yrs (children 1,3&14yrs): I like my house it's just a shame that it's falling apart...terrible damp, the walls are black all the time...the doors are warped and don't sit right in the frames...when I phoned the council it was 'oh we will send someone out to put new draught excluders on'...unbelievable.

¹ Pseudonyms have been used throughout the report.

The area where I live

For young children, the area where they lived was valued for the opportunities which it offered them for play:

Amelia 5yrs: I like to go to the park it's really cool, there's one it's only down there, I like to go there because like I can know the people there.

George 9yrs: Next door I've got my friend and my class and then we've got the high school behind us so we play down there and at the bottom we've got the Scouts and if we want to go down there and play football we found this goal that we can use and on the right we've got this big playing field with a goal and loads of people play football there so we go and watch and we've got ramps to go on and then we've got the park.

The younger children were also often involved in organised/supervised activities:

Daniel 6yrs: I go to Football club and Tennis club

Abbie 6yrs: I go to Ballet clubs

Charlie 5yrs: I go to my swimming I'm in stage two

Abbie 6yrs: I go [swimming] only on holidays you can have free swimming lessons then on holiday.

Finley 7yrs: I go to a Football club, a Swimming Club and I go to Tae Kwon Do club and after school club.

When describing the area where they lived, children also highlighted the number of people who were known to them locally:

Meredith 13yrs: When you go out, everybody is like out

Catrin 15yrs: Everybody knows everyone

Mari 15yrs: All my family is up here.

Freya 14yrs: Most people are friendly...I don't know really, just like you know people. You see them they smile at you and say hi and stuff.

The main source of dissatisfaction that children expressed about the area where they lived was where they perceived themselves as isolated from their friends:

Maddison 13yrs: My problem is all of my friends are up in (other valleys town), so that's quite a long way away from me because I only live down the road.

As children advanced further into their teens, they were more likely to express dissatisfaction with the type and level of entertainment offered by the areas where they lived:

Adam 14yrs: It's boring because we can't do nothing down here so we go over the mountain and get bother with the boys then...I know everyone down there and they know me.

Chloe 18yrs: I hate it where I live. I'd rather live anywhere else than here. I've been here eight years but I'd rather live where we used to live. There's just not much to do here. For people my age there really isn't much to do because we don't want to go and play in a park.

This was not perceived so much as a problem by those who lived in, or whom had access to, more urban areas:

Alexa 17yrs: It's alright...like because (the city) is quite nearby, it is quite good just to go out in the day in (the city) or we just get on the train and go to (another city) or something. But if you organise things like at night then it's alright. But there's nothing to do if you haven't organised anything, there's nothing to do.

Here, the importance of access to and affordability of local transport was stressed by some participants:

Jake 18yrs: I use public transport a lot, because I can't drive. I haven't even tried to pass my test. But because there is a train literally two minutes that way and it takes about 10-15 minutes to get to the centre of (the city) so I don't really see the point. I do think it's a bit expensive unless you've got a railcard, which I have got but for other people it is quite expensive.

Older participants were also more likely to be aware about/critical of the reputation/status of the areas where they lived than younger children:

Freya 14yrs: When you say you live (in this area) you just get a reputation kind of thing...it's some part of it, if you go into (another area) it's all like posh and stuff.

Brooke 17yrs: I think this estate has always had the status of being quite low – where people who don't have much money would live, so you feel a bit like you're at the bottom of the bus really. It is a nice area though and I'm glad I've lived here through my childhood but definitely wouldn't plan on living here for life.

Jane 22yrs: (my town) in general hasn't got a good image. There have been lots of programmes on TV recently about why it's bad, why it's one of the worst places in Wales to live. I disagree, I think there's plenty of opportunities here... It is a nice place but because of the negative image, people live up to the bad image...I wouldn't want to live here forever.

Some young people, particularly those living in rural areas, perceived intolerance towards them, by older community residents:

Aaron 15yrs: (it's) mostly old people, we're just walking about, and they're saying 'you're causing trouble again you lot'...not just us, everyone up there, they whinge about every young person.

For parents of young children, the areas where they lived were assessed according to how safe they were perceived as being, for their children:

Anita 37yrs (children 2&5yrs): Generally there is a really good community spirit about the place. The majority of the children (Primary/Junior) go to the village school and it's a really nice family place to live...It's not as safe as it was say 20 years ago, but they are going to be able to play out with friends in a safe environment.

The downside of living in a small community was the lack of privacy, according to some respondents like Emma:

Emma 19yrs (children 6mths, 3&6yrs): I like it that it's quiet I feel safe it's quite friendly, my dislikes are with it being a little village if you don't keep yourself to yourself everyone knows everything about you sort of thing so the lady in the shop loves a good gossip.

That participants' evaluation of their environment appeared for the most part to be age-related, is supported by Tom's re-assessment of the small rural town where he grew up, and which he 'escaped' from as a teenager:

Tom 22yrs: Since I've come back I realise that you don't realise how beautiful it is around here. I was saying to mum, I went to (local seaside town) the other day, and I'd always seen it as a bit of a dump. But it's really quite pretty when you look out to sea and all the mountains.

5.2 Safety and fear: “that stranger in the paper”

Children and young people variously perceived themselves as being in danger in particular contexts and from non-specific others. In the following exchange, young children talk about the danger from traffic in the areas where they live:

Abbie 6yrs: There are lots of cars...yeah and some people come round the corner really really fast so you've got to stay away from the end of the street or they'll like come round there.

Daniel 6yrs: Once when I was waiting to go to a Football match there was a car it was coming round and it skidded it just made a massive noise it was a teenage boy.

In the following exchange, children talk about potential danger or threat of strangers:

Freddie 4yrs: My mum doesn't let us go outside...I'm not (allowed to play outside) because my mum says no.

Amelia 5yrs: I'm scared sometimes people checking in the bins and things, oooh, there's was a man he looked like he had drugs.

Evan 8yrs: He'd had drugs and he was checking in the bins and things. He like of had an envelope in his hands and he was stuffing it in the bin and his eyes were staring and stuff...We see people like this around sometimes.

For most, these fears were expressed in the form of 'folk devils' or menacing strangers who wished to take children away, and whom must be resisted:

David 8yrs: And you know that stranger in the paper you would say to your friends be careful like there's a stranger. I've already said this to all my friends that would walk but I've said it to other people and they were really like who 'I didn't know that'. But it's all so shocking because why would you want to take a child when they are already with their parents?...it says as one of golden rules is protect other people's property, but it's not that one it's the first one, protect people.

Evan 8yrs: I feel safe I know about the dangers of things like people than that...if someone tries to, like tries to put their arms there and your hands and stuff, you have to say to people.

Older children and young people (particularly the girls) talked about fears of “drunk people” (Catrin 15yrs), and other individuals who appeared different or behaved strangely:

Freya 14yrs: There's like dodgy people...you just look at them and you can kind of tell they're a bit weird, they're on the streets and

stuff and if you walk past them you like worry that they are going to like rob you or something.

Certainly this applied in the evenings, after dark:

Erin 16yrs: I feel comfortable in the town during the day. But if I were to go after dark I would be less certain about my safety, some of the characters who hang around the town in the day are a little more scary at night.

Brooke 17yrs: I feel quite wary when I'm walking home from work at nine o'clock – I do feel quite scared walking across there. As I've got older I've known about more things that have gone on, so it makes me a little bit more wary about things and nervous...Nothing bad has happened to me has happened in the village, but I was in a taxi coming home from (town) and I had some guy (taxi driver) talk some rude things to me. And then we went to the police. And also once I was in (city) and I was followed by a man for about four hours. And that was a bit scary too. I didn't want to leave the city centre because I was too frightened of going on a train or if he'd follow me there – so it was quite scary that was. I reported that as well.

While the older boys talked less about their fears of strangers, or being followed, than the girls, they described definite 'no-go' areas:

Jake 18yrs: This is (the) higher (town) whereas lower (town) is more, I don't know drugs and stuff. But I wouldn't be scared to walk through there. In (the city) I know people who have been mugged and stuff. I wouldn't walk through there at night, but I would run through there!

Rhys 18yrs: I feel safe in the area, but when I...in the night in town in some cases you can feel not that safe, but I know what to do, just carry on walking fast, don't look back...I know where the rough spots are so I don't go there.

Young women, with children of their own, focused upon safety of their children in the areas in which they lived:

Emma 19yrs (children 6mths, 3&6yrs): I feel it's safe there...the thing is, with it being a small area, if anything strange is going off in the village you soon get to know about it. So, not that I know of, but if there's a certain man going around in a red car that's looking at

children, you'd get to know about it to keep your children safe so it's quite nice to be in a small village.

Bethan 25yrs (children 1&4yrs): The violence, the teenagers hanging round street corners. It's a bit frightening when you've got young kids yourself, you know...not last night the night before a 17 year old boy got stabbed five times. He is very lucky to be alive...they didn't stab him deep enough. But if it's like that now, what's it going to be like in 10 years time? When our children grow up? Which is frightening really. It is really frightening round here.

Technology and safety

Children, participating in the study, were familiar with information technology at a young age:

Daniel 6yrs: (I like) my Wii

Charlie 5yrs: I have my iPod...my dad has a iPhone.

The computer, in particular, was an important part of these young people's lives:

Evan 8yrs: Computer, without that you couldn't live, because...I go on the Internet like YouTube and stuff things online but be really careful and you can go on lots of games...see videos of animals and rich people.

Harry 10yrs: My favourite thing would probably be my laptop I just like to go on the Internet and like search things and see what's going on there is like loads of games everywhere that I can click on a link and it will take me to this game it's quite cool...I used to go on club Penguin (when I was younger) but I don't any more.

Erin 16yrs: I do spend about an hour and sometimes more each night on my laptop, I do use it for my college work a lot more at the moment and I email friends and things.

Tom 22yrs: Like with Facebook. Although it might say you've got 230 friends, a lot of those might be acquaintances. But is it a good way of keeping in touch – if you lose their telephone numbers. Skype is especially good with for example (good friend in Wales) and (other friend in Kent). It's a good way of communicating. Especially as they work shifts and it's someone I can see and communicate with in the day. It's really good that I can communicate sort of physically with them during the day.

The Internet was a subject raised by children and young people in relation to safety and danger. The younger participants said they were either not allowed to use the Internet, or that their access to it was monitored carefully:

Toby 6yrs: I'm not allowed to go on it on my own, it's like a little laptop.

Sophie 7yrs: I'm not allowed to go on a website without asking.

In the following exchange, young people discussed the precautions they took themselves to keep safe while online:

Joshua 14yrs: You put locks on Facebook and everything so like only your friends can view it.

Cameron 13yrs: I don't add anyone that I don't know, I just add the people that I know.

Dylan 12yrs: I don't add people that I don't know.

Joshua 14yrs: I just do what I think is right.

Dylan 12yrs: I think [my mum] just trusts me that I won't do it...I think I know a bit more but she's a bit clued up about it.

Drew 15yrs: I wasn't allowed on (Internet) things when I was younger but now I'm a bit older but it's still like on Facebook or anything, if I don't know someone then I don't add them, I just have my friends on there.

Alexa 17yrs: I think parents are there, I think parents are more aware than some kids because some people still do it, go and meet people.

The police and the law

Younger participants were generally positive about the police and their role in protecting individuals like themselves:

Evan 8yrs: If we didn't have the police everyone who's bad would fight and things, and those with guns you'd see them like violent.

The majority of the older young people appeared to have little or no first-hand experience of the law enforcement, and like Mari, perceived the police as those who, while sometimes inconveniently interfering with their entertainment, generally were there to look after their interests:

Mari 15yrs: Whenever you're out every day the police always come and last night they told us to go in about nine o'clock.

Even those young people, who had experienced brushes with law enforcement, were not disrespectful of the police or their behaviours regarding young people:

Isaac 16yrs: I've got a driving licence, well I haven't yet but I'm getting one...I used to have a motorbike, this disabled lad, and I let him have a go because I feel sorry for him, yeah you get some people like take the piss out of him but he can't help it like, so I gave him a go on the motorbike. He crashed into a tree, broke me rev broke me brakes. And the coppers come, so they were going whose bike is this? 'Mine'...they just, I just got a warning and if they catch me on the bike again they'll take the bike off me I said 'alright then'.

Aaron 15yrs: I got a yellow card I did, like next one you get a red then if you get a red card if you get another red, if you get two reds you get on bail or something...

Isaac 16yrs: ...the last time I was in trouble with the police with yellow cards, I've never been arrested, it must have been about two years ago innit?

For young people with children of their own, local law enforcement services were perceived as an important resource to deal with unruly behaviour in the community:

Emma 19yrs (children 6mths, 3&6yrs): I think last year we had a couple of knock knock runs with the teenage lads I think it started again the other night with us and then I think the phone box window got put through but then there's a PCO in the village and she's quite happy for you to phone her up and call her in off the streets and she's really nice and she's got a good rapport with the teenagers. As well last year we had hell with the knock knock running and stuff and it wasn't just me it was a lot of the neighbours around (the area) I and her and couple of other PCSOs went undercover just walked around the village in their normal clothes and they caught them she tries her best and she's really friendly... just took them home to their parents and gave them a rollicking.

Indeed, these young people valued local law enforcement support, especially in areas which were perceived as having a reputation for disturbances:

Bethan 25yrs (children 1&4yrs): After 5pm there is nobody (on this estate). If you have a problem you have got to phone (nearby town) or 999 and then they come from (away). There is nothing on the spot here then.

5.3 Education: “relevance to later life”

For the most part, the younger children described school as a positive experience. Generally children found school activities enjoyable:

Amelia 5yrs: I like school loads.

Evan 8yrs: I like it a little.

Amelia 5yrs: I like the toys, I like drawing pictures and going on the computers.

David 8yrs: I really like being in Mrs Grey’s class because she likes singing and working with instruments and I like working with Miss Brown because she likes doing PE and she’ll sometimes push you to the limit.

Apart from their interests in different subjects, and their preferences for particular teachers, children, for the most part, enjoyed the social aspects of school:

Scarlett 13yrs: Over the summer holidays you get really bored and you just want to see your friends.

Ruby 13yrs: I think I would miss out if I didn’t come to school, I think I would be a bit bored.

Poppy 13yrs: I would rather come to school than be home schooled.

Homework constituted the least positive aspect of school for some children:

David 8yrs: I don't like (homework) because we've already worked hard in school, we shouldn't have homework. I like it when it is art homework or something but if it wasn't art homework I'd just colour in or something like that.

Although opinions on homework differed according to the subject and its required format:

Harry 10yrs: We've got this thing it's like the only fun homework I think is fun is this thing called we have a learning log book and we can do the homework any way we want which is good.

George 9yrs: I don't like it when you have two lots of homework and you have a separate one of maths, you have a separate one of normal homework, I just wish you had one. We should have like because we work five days we should have a separate two days instead of doing work on the separate two days.

Participant perceptions of teachers were clearly associated with enjoyment of schooling in young people’s accounts:

Freya 14yrs: I like English but I don't have a good teacher so that makes it so that you don't like it as much. I took History GCSE and I had a really good teacher now I like it even more than I did before. When you have a good teacher it makes so much difference.

Owen 15yrs: I think most of them are good really but there's different teachers that each pupil works well with and learns better and things like that.

Alexa 17yrs: Some teachers are alright, some teachers are really nice but you obviously get some of the teachers that are just like, shouldn't be here, some teachers can't. I think they find it difficult to teach students, they know what they're talking about but they just find it difficult to like to show it, to like tell people what it is and for people to absorb the information.

Children and young people's assessment of their secondary school was, similar to parents, often related to the perceived performance and reputation of the school:

Dylan 12yrs: ...even before I came to school I knew that it was good, that's what made me come, because I would have gone to (a more local school) otherwise but I just really wanted to come here, it's just a good school, loads of people have got good level good exam results from it.

Owen 15yrs: It seems to be (a good school) with all the grades compared to some of the other ones.

Drew 15yrs: Well I always wanted to come here but I did go to other schools like open evenings but this is just better in terms of facilities and that...I moved from (other town) to here just to get into the school...my parents just like it, we'd just heard of it as a good school.

Alexa 17yrs: We used to live (in another town) and we were going to move to (the city) but they decided to move to this area because of the school because my brother is dyslexic so it's got the dyslexic unit so that's why.

The concern of young people to do well at school is also reflected in the discussion below among young people about 'setting':

Maddison 13yrs: Some subjects, we don't get setted in, like Drama, me and (my friend), we really like Drama but they don't set us so

the people who aren't as good at Drama, we've got to wait for them to catch up so I personally think we should be setted.

Lucy 13yrs: I think we should get setted for RE, Geography and History as well, because they have put us in really mixed classes, so that when we do like things getting ready for assessments, we have to do like more simple things.

One criticism about school, apparent across quite a wide age span, was a perceived lack of opportunities for learning practical life skills:

George 9yrs: I reckon in our school we should learn about building stuff together because that would be good say something broke you would know how to fix it...my granddad is a painter and he makes stuff as a painter as well, I helped him make a shed well I sat on the roof and kind of helped him.

Joshua 14yrs: Like some lessons I think don't like are of no relevance to later life like, some like random lessons that you're never going to use in your life.

Alexa 17yrs: The money thing is missing I think, I don't know anything about like money. I think we could do with some more stuff like that and I know they have started doing, well especially in sixth form, they've just started doing cooking lessons but I don't know how to cook at all. So I think they should do, especially for people who want to go to Uni, because people will just get takeaways so they don't have to cook so it would just be good if they could learn to save money as well, especially with the prices Uni's going up.

Those young people in the study, who had been moved from mainstream schooling because of behavioural, or other, problems described alternative programmes more suitable for their needs. In the first of the two exchanges below, young women focus again on the practical side of the programme. In the second exchange young men, discuss the advantage of freedom which their programme allows:

Ellen 14yrs: I used to go to (local School) but I am in like a (special programme). I went...because of my attendance in school, so it's much better now.

Fiona 14yrs: If you get your GCSEs that you want then it will help you get a better job

Ellen 14yrs: In registration now we're doing a GCSE work on managing money, how much money would we have spent a week on clothes, food and stuff like that so then we'll know how to manage our money later in life

Isaac 16yrs: I got kicked out (of mainstream school) because I used to get blamed for things. I used to fight a lot...

Aaron 15yrs: I've been there this year...

Isaac 16yrs: I didn't want to go there it's just that I've got a quick fuse if someone pisses me off I go for it BANG. That's when I was younger I've got ADHD where you're on tablets but now I'm getting older I've quietened down loads, if someone says something to me I just blank it out and if it takes it too far then...I'm glad I'm in (this school).

(What is better about this school?)

Aaron 15yrs: You don't have to do any work.

Isaac 16yrs: You get to choose whatever you want.

Isaac 16yrs: Half an hour and it's two lessons a day so an hour

(What is your favourite lesson?)

Isaac 16yrs: Art and maths.

Aaron 15yrs: Art and woodwork.

For participants in special needs schools, again the focus was on the practical aspects of learning:

Lloyd 18yrs: I have been involved in a project it's a project where you basically collect waste paper, cans, plastic and glass bottles, it is to care for the environment and not use landfill, so much of this material can be reused, this recycling means it can be used again, then they don't have to cut as many trees down and it also means that they use less oil and things. From the school I collect cardboard, paper, glass, tin, batteries and anything that can be recycled. We have put recycling bins in every classroom and in every houseroom we have also put them in the maintenance workshop and the school offices and I collect these every week, this can be a full day we then take it to recycling centres in (local and near-by towns). I thought it was a good idea, it was my teacher who thought of it but I wanted to be involved with this. I think it has been a very successful recycling project.

Further and higher education was valued by young people again for anticipated practical benefits:

Olivia 16yrs: College is completely different from school. Its still people talking to you and you're writing things down but on Tuesday you go on placement. Because you have to plan to go on placement you get do the activities, like drawing and painting. I'm doing childcare.

Chloe 18yrs: I really like college. I always hated school from reception. I used to kick off at everything right up to year 11. I hated it. I hated 6th form and then I went to college and I really love it. It really is a lot different...You choose to go there so if you don't turn up you are only causing suffering to yourself and your education. It's great. And on Wednesday you are in the workshop all day. Making stuff, applying the things you've learnt on the Monday and Tuesday. I really like it.

In the case of Emma, who had no educational qualifications, being accepted onto an access course formed part of her long-term plan to become a social worker:

Emma 19yrs (children 6mths, 3&6yrs): I went for an interview (for Access course) and she basically said have you got any A levels and I said no. And she said have you got any GCSEs and I said well not really, passes no, and she asked me why I went for the interview because I shouldn't really be able to get on the interview without A levels and stuff. And I just said 'well you know I could be someone who's got no experience whatsoever who lives in a five bedroomed house with mummy and daddy that could be a brain box and stuff like that, and done all me A levels. But I've been through the care system I've been here I've done it so tell me why I can't do the job as good as they can'. She said 'well that's true if you've had the experience you're probably one of the best people to do a job like social working' and stuff like that and I kept phoning and moivering her and kept going to her office and in the end she gave in to me...the thing is if you want something you have to go out and get it no one's going to do it for you are they...now I've finished college I think I still want to go (to University) but at the moment I'm trying to get jobs at the bottom and work my way up sort of thing.

Young people's focus on the practical aspects of education was also very apparent from their perceptions of University. Many young people were skeptical about the value of University education:

Grace 13yrs: If you get a degree these days it means barely anything because you get a degree to get a better job but then so many other people want to get better jobs as well they will go for the more experienced people.

Certainly, University was not something that academically able participants automatically opted for:

Jake 18yrs: I left school in July and like everyone else I applied to Uni to do architecture, not fully wanting to do it. I wasn't confident that I wanted to do it, I just wanted to like follow everyone else and just apply just in case. And then when I went to all the open days I saw what it really was and thought I don't really want to do it- it's a seven year course, money and everything. So then I cancelled that and I wanted to go travelling, but I did want to go to University eventually and I just wanted to have time to find out exactly what, what is the best career option, plus enjoyment of the thing, the best University.

5.4 Money and finances: "I think it comes from seeing mum struggle"

The majority of children who took part in the study said that they received pocket money from their parents and/or grandparents on a regular basis:

Freddie 4yrs: My mum always gives me pocket money and granny does.

Edward 5yrs: When my granddad and my nana come granddad gives me pocket money.

Daisy 4yrs: I get pocket money from my granddad.

Most participants, from eight years upwards, who received pocket money described it as a reward for tasks which they were required to carry out:

George 9yrs: I have to do recycling clean-up and then I get two pound well not every single week that I get off my granddad and then mostly I save up...then every year at Christmas I save something up from my mum and buy her something.

Holly 10yrs: I clean up around the house. I wash up and dry and I bring the dirty washing down from upstairs and then I get 50 pence a day.

Isabella 14yrs: I work in the house (for pocket money) I do. I do ironing and I put things away when we get back from shopping and I keep my bedroom clean.

In some cases, participants felt hard done by in comparison to others:

Chloe 18yrs: I get about the same as one of my friends but another of my best friends she gets loads of money, like £5, for not doing anything. And I get like half of that for doing things.

In cases where children did not receive pocket money, they relied on their parents to purchase what they wanted:

Lucy 13yrs: My mum doesn't give me pocket money because she thinks if she gave me pocket money I would spend it on things I don't actually need, whereas if I had to save it up I'd understand about money more and I would save up for things I actually want.

Dylan 12yrs: No (I don't get pocket money) my mum just buys me things.

While children usually said this was to ensure they spent their money sensibly, it was apparent that many children and young people were familiar with the concept of saving:

Evan 8yrs: We get pocket money, previously when I was young I'd spend it all, but now, like before I'd spend it on junk, but now I save up for something better...new skateboard, Xbox 360.

Lucy 13yrs: I have to save my money up from Christmas and Birthdays.

Nicole 13yrs: I spend all my money, unless I really, really want something and I save.

Indeed, particularly among the older children and young people, there was awareness of the need for money management:

Brooke 17yrs: I definitely get by on my money. I don't have a lot. I get £150 a week because I'm an apprentice. So I don't get paid a fortune. It does get me by.

In the following account, Tom describes how his awareness about the importance of money management arose from his experiences of watching his mother struggle financially to make ends meet:

Tom 22yrs: I don't like debt because I think from seeing mum struggle, when I was a kid, I don't like it... And I think it comes from seeing mum struggle. Because going through her finances every week I used to sit on a Saturday morning with her and she used to have her books out and go through them with a fine-tooth comb, and she'd know how much money she had down to a penny. I always know what's coming in and going out of my account. Not like a lot of people I know who just go to the ATM and keep withdrawing money until their account's empty, until it stops giving them money.

Those young people, who were wholly responsible for their own finances, tended to compare themselves favourably to those who received 'handouts' from their parents, and who were perceived as unable to manage their own financial affairs:

Jake 18yrs: I know people who have everything, people whose dads work for big companies and they just have all money into their pockets for no reason and they don't do anything...Two of my best friends are pretty rich like I know their dads are on £250,000 a year and he pays everything for Uni, he's an accountant and he's doing accountancy in University and when he comes out of University he has got a job lined up like that so he hasn't done anything on his own...I think I am probably the other end of the spectrum, I think I am the only one who pays rent...and they will say something like 'oh let's go up here' and I go 'I haven't got any money' and they go 'why don't you ask your mum and dad to pay?' but they won't pay. I have to pay which is in a way good but in a way bad.

Money issues

From a young age, money was acknowledged by some participants as an issue:

Sophie 7yrs: We haven't got enough money - we're poor...we don't have enough money for sweets and candyfloss.

Indeed, the effects of the current economic crisis were acknowledged by young people when they compared what they could buy previously with what they could afford now:

Ruby 13yrs: I think we can't hold onto our money as well as we used to because of the prices going up and it's very difficult to find things that we enjoy doing that we can afford, because there aren't as many recreational things that we can afford we don't have much to do and that can be quite depressing.

Again, disparity in the amount of money that young people had at their disposal was acknowledged as problematic by some young people:

Fiona 14yrs: They don't get as much as we get, they get less and less things than we've got...and they feel like they're left out.

Seren 14yrs: They get jealous, when we're all talking about stuff like going to the cinema they might feel a bit left out.

Financial support

Participants with young children of their own talked about the financial difficulties they faced in realising their ambitions to work or undertake further or higher education:

Emma 19yrs (children 6mths, 3&6yrs): I don't really want to be like a statistic who just sits at home and does nothing and gets paid on the benefits and stuff I do want to go out there to work but like I say (working enough hours to compensate for benefits) puts strain on the family, me being not able to see them. Every night before pay day we write it all down. I'm paid fortnightly then there's my contract phone then (my partner's) going mad and saying we don't need it. But then I'm stuck in a contract and if I come out of it I'm going to get a red mark next to my name. There's the TV, gas, water, electric, obviously phone contract.

In particular, these young people focused on the availability and cost of childcare facilities which might release them for work or study:

Mair 22yrs (child 1yr): They ought to be giving a good childminding option to you free - that would be an incentive for you to work, because you wouldn't have to spend all your wages paying for childminding.

Eleri 23yrs (children 2&5yrs): At the end of the day they are going to make it impossible for people to live, they are not going to be able to survive, because if they're going to, you know cut the benefits down for the people like (friends with young children) who can't go to work, they are not going to be able to survive on the money they are having.

5.5 Identity and belonging: "I am Welsh it makes me feel proud"

Issues of identity and belonging were clearly important to children and young people who took part in the study. Those participants who were born in Wales, with Welsh parents and (in some cases) spoke Welsh, were clear about their own identity as Welsh, if less sure on occasion about their relationship to others:

Harry 10yrs: I would say I quite like it in Wales to be honest.

George 9yrs: Even though we are the second smallest country in the world.

Harry 10yrs: The only problem is because we're so small no one notices us because like say you sign up to something and he says 'where are you from?', 'I'm from Wales', 'where is that?'

George 9yrs: We've got this country that we are next to.

Harry 10yrs: Europe.

George 9yrs: Yeah everybody notices that but they think we're Europe but we are actually England and Wales, so we should have a separate little name for ourselves, Wales and England.

David 8yrs: And Liverpool.

George 9yrs: Separate from like the whole thing Europe.

In one focus group discussion, young people who identified themselves as Welsh, reflected on the historical relationship between England and Wales. Here, the views of some young people are tempered by participants who distanced, what they understood as, acceptable patriotism from more extremist positions:

Zoe 13yrs: I'm Welsh...most people don't know what Wales is, they think it's just another part of England.

Ruby 13yrs: I hate it when people automatically think oh you're British aren't you? No, I want to think of myself as not just British, I want to think of myself as Welsh.

Grace 13yrs: I am Welsh and not British because I think that if you're British then you're like Irish, Scottish, Welsh and English, but just Welsh...I hate being compared to the English as well...they tried to get rid of the Welsh language and I didn't like that.

Max 13yrs: I wouldn't say they're less friendly, just past times with Wales and England haven't been...

Grace 13yrs: We are not English, we are Welsh.

Zoe 13yrs: They are kind of killing the Welsh language because all the schools there are only a few that are Welsh and all the rest are English, they are kind of killing the Welsh language.

Scarlett 13yrs: That's Wales' fault.

Ruby 13yrs: If you know English, you know a bit further than if you just speak Welsh.

Grace 13yrs: I don't understand why there is this competition between England and Wales, because that all happened centuries ago. I think it's good to be patriotic but not so patriotic that you put others down.

Jake 18yrs: I am from the (South Wales) valleys so maybe I am more Welsh than people round here (who) are really English. I take the mick out of one of my mates because he's got a proper English accent. But when people overdo it like saying 'I hate England' it's just pathetic I think, or when they get tattoos of Wales flags on their arms and stuff it's quite sad to be honest.

Similar to the young people born in Wales, who very much saw themselves as being Welsh, those who were born in England, had English parents, and lived in areas of Wales where Welsh language was used less often, saw themselves as English:

Cameron 13yrs: I don't feel Welsh, no one speaks it in my family. I was born in England, like no one around here speaks Welsh's like on the signs you've always got like the Welsh name and the English name but like when you go into England, it's all like English is not like English and Welsh but I don't feel Welsh at all.

For the most part, irrespective of whether young people identified themselves as Welsh or English, and the strength of the attachment to that identity, the relationship between the two groups appeared unproblematic:

Drew 15yrs: I'm Welsh but don't speak it, I can't learn it, I find it difficult but there is always like friendly banter between my friends who are English and that so yeah it's like they say something about Welsh people and we're like 'well you shouldn't be in our country then'.

Many children and young people had one English parent and one Welsh parent. Moreover, many of the focus groups included those who saw themselves as Welsh, others who saw themselves as English and others who were unsure:

David 8yrs: I was born in this Welsh like hospital, and I'm supposed to be Welsh and I'm not really English.

Harry 10yrs: Well me and my sister are Welsh and my mum and dad are English, so I would say half Welsh, half English.

George 9yrs: All my family is Welsh.

David 8yrs: My dad's family is English and they know nothing about Wales, they don't even know Bore da or anything like that, and my mum's family are just like Welsh and they know everything, and it's crazy.

Finley 7yrs: My whole family is English, English, English. I was born in England, I lived in England for five years, more than I've lived in Wales so I'd say I am more English than Welsh.

David 8yrs: I might be going to this Welsh school...it's really Welsh all my mum's family went there...it's really like Welsh you have to speak Welsh every time in lessons and everything, even Science. You can speak English outside but it's really Welsh.

Arthur 12yrs: I'm kind of half Welsh, half English.

For those participants living near the borders of England and Wales, the issue of identity appeared less clear cut than for others:

Maddison 13yrs: I am very Welsh...I don't like it when people say they're British, because you're not.

Callum 13yrs: You are though.

Maddison 13yrs: If you are born in Wales, you are Welsh...I like saying I am Welsh, it makes me feel like proud.

Callum 13yrs: I was born pretty much on the border of Wales and England so I say British.

Kai 13yrs: I would call myself British but I am very proud of Wales in general, it's got beautiful landscapes.

Callum 13yrs: It's just another country.

Lucy 13yrs: My whole family is in Wales so I wouldn't describe myself as being British, because they would all describe themselves as being Welsh.

In the following extract, Charlotte talks about how she feels unable to make a legitimate claim to Welsh identity, although she was born in Wales, and describes how she would like to become more proficient in the Welsh language:

Charlotte 17yrs: I always feel a little bit sort of on the border because I'm technically Welsh, my parents are actually from (England) so they don't actually speak Welsh. I'm not a fluent Welsh speaker myself, but I do try my best. I don't have a very Welsh accent but technically I'm Welsh because I was born in (Wales) and have lived here all my life but I find that having, you know being sort of Welsh it's like there's a lot of English-speaking people here and so there is never really any teasing to be honest. It's sort of light-hearted if there's any, but I'm part of the national youth choir of Wales and so I've had the chance to mix with people from more Welsh speaking backgrounds and sometimes they feel a little bit regretful that I'm not a fluent Welsh speaker because obviously only done a GCSE short course here so I've got a certain amount of language experience. But I think I would like the opportunity to speak with a fluent Welsh speakers more.

Those who took part in the focus group discussion, among children from British minority ethnic groups, also acknowledged the importance of identity and belonging through reference to the importance of cultural and religious celebrations:

Taj 8yrs: We celebrate Eid...it's special to my mum and dad and family.

Masood 9yrs: We give money and sometimes my cousins come over to my house and they give cards, you know.

Selina 9yrs: I celebrate Eid and sometimes my friends come and all like my friends...they come and there might be games or something.

Maya 10yrs: It's a big celebration...we've got two Eids. One is 31 days of fasting and then we celebrate and there is another one, we don't do 30 days of fasting, we just celebrate Eid.

Samir 8yrs: The children that celebrate Divali felt left out so we celebrated that.

5.6 Difference: "I don't think speaking different is a reason for people to make fun of you"

Children and young people who took part in the study were tolerant towards, and accepting of, those who were different from themselves. In the following exchange, young people discuss how pupils, newly arrived from another country, are accepted into the school:

Alexa 17yrs: I don't know if it's true, two people that have just come to the school, I think they're Spanish and they're both black but well I heard that they were being bullied but I don't know if it's true.

Charlotte 17yrs: The school have made quite a good effort to make them feel welcome.

Alexa 17yrs: And there's not a lot of like black people here or people of other races here because I don't even know why but there's not so.

Charlotte 17yrs: It's because we're not a big city really isn't it, it's just sort of because we're just sort of a fairly small village, it's like everybody seems to be of the same sort of background, you know English or Welsh, that's basically it.

Owen 15yrs: They can't even speak English and they are getting on alright.

Charlotte 17yrs: Yeah they're getting on so well. I've heard from my teachers because one of my language teachers particularly is very involved because I think she is one of the heads of year, and she said that they just they get on so well in lessons, really enthusiastic.

As indicated by Holly, some participants, particularly in rural areas, had little regular contact with those from other ethnic backgrounds:

Holly 10yrs: When I go to the youth group in the West Midlands there are lots of different people from different places, but not around here.

Meeting and mixing with young people from a range of ethnic minority backgrounds was generally perceived as positive by young people:

Freya 14yrs: Because it's a Christian school you don't get people who are like Muslims or anything, and that can be a bad thing... There's only white people and I think some people don't really know much about other races and stuff because they don't go to school with them or anything.

Participants were not only tolerant of those from different ethnic minority backgrounds, but also those who differed from them in a range of other ways. For example, (as Joshua and Brooke indicate) not having the same amount of money (which potentially restricted the activities in which young people could engage) was not perceived by most as a reason for exclusion:

Joshua 14yrs: Nobody gets like mistreated for it, so like our friendship group like no one gets like put down if like they can't afford something or they can't go somewhere like say we're all going out and they can't like it's too much money or something no one gets like taking the Mick out of him for it, so it's not too bad.

Brooke 17yrs: If they haven't got any money to go to the cinema I'll say 'I'll pay' and it doesn't bother me. I'd rather go and have fun with my money and enjoy myself or save it for a rainy day.

Among some older participants, there was also acceptance of those with a range of sexual orientations:

Charlotte 17yrs: I think there is a lot more acceptance towards same-sex relationships, especially in the sixth form I would say and actually just yesterday me and some of my friends were wearing purple for, its awareness of the prevention of the teen suicides because there have been recently, not here or anything like that, but on the news, teenagers who had committed suicide due to homophobic bullying, so me and a few of my friends decided that we would try and raise awareness of that.

Bullying

Most of the participants in this study were aware, or had direct experience, of bullying. While in the case of the younger children it was difficult to distinguish references to bullying from other accidental, or intended, aggressive behaviours. Clearly these pupils distinguished between others on the basis of their behaviours towards them:

Daniel 6yrs: Sometimes (another pupil) is mean. Sometimes she barges past me and I say 'don't barge' and she just does.

Charlie 5yrs: (other pupil) hurt me he pushed me out onto the sand pit and he hurt me I told (the teacher).

Finley 7yrs: There are also some other people in the other class who make me feel uncomfortable.

Amelia 5yrs: Sometimes people push me and things.

David 8yrs: It's harder to have loads of friends, do you know Graham? He is always bad for friends, he's just not very nice if you do something wrong by accident he thinks it's on purpose and he does horrible things to you, he's just not very nice.

While aware that bullying did happen, accounts of the levels of bullying, and the extent to which it was addressed effectively, varied:

Dylan 12yrs: The school is pretty good at keeping down bullying. I don't know I just don't see much bullying around.

Joshua 14yrs: Maybe the odd fight but that's about it.

Cameron 13yrs: Yes the teachers get involved and then they sort it out.

Older participants referred to several ways in which bullying was addressed, distinguished between teasing and bullying, and differentiated between incidents/circumstances where outside intervention might be, or might not be, required:

Erin 16yrs: I have never been bullied but a friend of mine once bullied another friend of mine, in some way it was resolved, it came to a point where I had to choose who to side with we are still friends but not so close. We dealt with this ourselves we did not involve teachers. It was fighting over something rather silly really. It only really lasted a week. People get teased but I don't think that's the same thing.

Many respondents talked about their personal experiences of bullying. These included verbal taunting and intimidation, as well as some instances of physical abuse. What is so poignant about the accounts of bullying which follow, is the implications of these behaviours for children's education and other life outcomes. In the following account, Ellen describes how verbal abuse from other pupils deterred her from attending school, thus interrupting her secondary education:

Ellen 14yrs: In (my secondary school) I used to be bullied by boys calling me fat so that was one of the reasons I moved from there...they took me to court with my mother about the attendance, because I didn't want to go to school because of what they were doing.

Likewise, Brooke described how her dislike of school arose from the discriminating behaviours of other pupils towards her. These behaviours prompted Brooke to leave school following her GCSEs, opting for employment in preference to higher education:

Brooke 17yrs: I went to (local) high school. I absolutely hated it purely for the fact that I had a really hard time there with pupils and that. The bullying carried over from primary school. I had a girl who was two years older than me and she used to be really quite nasty. Her mum was friends with my mum at the time. My mum fell bankrupt after splitting up with my dad and it was something my mum told her friend and it must have got mentioned in front of someone and she heard it or whatever and she was really quite nasty. She called me a gypsy and it went all round the school and I was excluded from everyone. It was a really hard time for me and I felt I really had no-one and my best friend was her sister and she got her to stop talking to me and not to interact with me...I couldn't put up with it any more. I used to come home really upset every day. It was a very big school and teachers didn't know your name. You felt sort of lost and you felt meaningless really. I used to get bullied there really quite badly.

Likewise, Tom left school following his GCSEs, opting for a further education college in an urban area:

Tom 22 yrs: I didn't really have a good time at school. I left at 16. I think I got a lot of stick from people because I was different. Not that I was out at school or anything, but I think I was targeted because they could see there was something different about me. And I think they did pick upon the gay thing, but that was just a part of it. Because I didn't follow the herd I really got stick for it.

The experience of isolation, engendered by bullying, was very apparent in these young people's accounts. While for the most part, participants talked about isolation from peers. As the following account from a young person suggests, adults themselves may exacerbate the problem experienced by young people:

Rhys 18yrs: There were some days when I would feel a bit bad and some days which I just thought 'oh I can't wait to go to University'. If they did something to me in class, some of the teachers would go 'be quiet and carry on with the lesson'. There was one teacher who laughed with them and I was a bit shocked by that. My mum and dad were tempted to talk with him about that. I think that was one of the hardest days, when the teacher laughed with them.

It was not only educational outcomes which were cited by participants as affected by bullying. Mair, who had a young child of her own, described how being taunted about her weight led to the development of eating disorder behaviours:

Mair 22yrs (child 1yr): I was bullied so bad right, and everyone was always calling me fat and stuff. I never ate and it sounds sick, right, but I understand why people do it because it feels amazing. You look in the mirror and you're like 'oh wow, I am in control of this, I did this to myself and I look amazing'. I might not be doing it in the best way, but I'm getting off on it.

To reiterate, most participants had awareness, or experience, of bullying at some point during their time at school. It was acknowledged by some young people how bullying behaviours diminished once pupils entered the sixth form:

Charlotte 17yrs: I've experienced it (bullying) lower down in the school myself because when I was in year eight I came out as bisexual, I mean I don't know if it was just a phase or I don't like to pigeonhole myself personally, but I did I mean because it was year eight I think it was I don't know maybe a bit bad judgement to have told people about it maybe because they were all quite immature...it was really quite bad but it was dealt with very well at the school, I think really as you get older its just a case of waiting for people to mature I think that's just a natural thing to be accepted really...there would have been a lot more sort of prejudice I think even just going back a few years I think things have improved quite a lot.

As Charlotte notes, decreased bullying may go hand in hand with increasing maturity. Alternatively, as Alexa suggests below, those pupils engaging in bullying behaviours may leave school prior to sixth form entry:

Alexa 17yrs: When you get to sixth form, the people like the big intimidating groups they seem to don't go up to sixth form and if they do they mature as because they are not around to the other people.

5.7 Staying healthy: "I eat pretty much junk food but I use my trampoline"

As highlighted by previous research, health was not necessarily a concept which children and young people thought about until they, or their significant others, became ill. When asked about their health, most children were able to recall an incident where they had been unwell and/or visited hospital:

Freddie 4yrs: You get a hot water bottle (when you're poorly)...when my sister's sick she always has my medicine and once I was poorly I had a yellow one a yellow medicine.

Daniel 6yrs: When I broke my wrist I was really scared there were some playthings (in the hospital) and they made me happy and they just had to bandage my arm and I couldn't bend it because it was so strong and when I went home I stopped off at McDonalds and bought everyone a happy meal.

For a minority of young participants, visiting hospital was described as a frightening experience. In the first account, David describes being confused about what was happening to him in the hospital. In the second account, George, indicates that his fear of hospital is related to his brother who died:

David 8yrs: The only time I've been to the hospital and it was quite bad, in the night it was really late in the middle and I couldn't stop my nose bleed. But for some reason, because I didn't have a tummy ache, they made me sick and they made me sick by putting these lollipop sticks there and it's horrible but I don't like that that's why we have a different sort of hospital thingy because they always used to say he got a tummy ache? No, but they didn't listen and they just went yeah yeah you have there and they just used that lollipop sticks right there and it really like hurt your tummy but it was really like horrible and it just wasn't feeling very nice they put it pretty much all the way to the back of your mouth and it was really horrible.

George 9yrs: I mostly go to hospital with my heart...I have check-ups because my heart and because those born with twisted tubes and because my brother died. Once I had these stickers all over your body and it tested you...(I felt) upset I don't like going.

Older children, when asked about being healthy and/or unhealthy, tended to associate their own health with engagement in health-related behaviours/activities. Hence they described themselves as more or less healthy depending upon their engagement in physical activity, having healthy diet and whether or not they smoked:

Drew 15yrs: I feel fine like but I do a lot of sports outside of school and that but I've finished doing more inside, instead of just the one hour a week of PE, I just like do two hours.

Brooke 17yrs: Oh God I'm not very healthy at all. I eat all the wrong foods.

Gwen 19yrs: (do you feel healthy?) No, because I smoke.

Diet

Children at a young age were aware of the importance of diet for health. Hence, while many expressed a preference for 'unhealthy' foods,

Daisy 4yrs: (favourite) super noodles.

Edward 5yrs: Chips sauce baked beans.

Freddie 4yrs: My mum always gives us treats because she always has to.

Daisy 4yrs: I like sweets.

Edward 5yrs: I like chocolate and biscuits.

Sophie 7yrs: I'm not healthy, because I eat junk, chocolate, sweets...because I like it.

Meredith 13yrs: I'm very unhealthy...all I eat is rubbish...I don't like healthy stuff.

All participants were able to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy food:

Abbie 6yrs: I don't eat white bread I only eat brown bread because it's healthy.

Daniel 6yrs: Sometimes I eat white for toast in the morning.

Daisy 4yrs: Eat some fruit.

Freddie 4yrs: Five you could eat loads of fruit.

Daisy 4yrs: Breakfast porridge.

Edward 5yrs: Fruit and fibre.

Finley 7yrs: (Coke and lemonade) can be bad because there's lots of sugar in it...I get this fizzy drink cold tonic water which is quite fizzy but it's not as unhealthy as lemonade, Irn-Bru, Fanta.

David 8yrs: I had this like sweetie and it tastes really like tangy, I looked on the back and it had lots and lots of sugar in it to make it really tangy sort of thing.

Finley 7yrs: You have to have some salt and sugar because to keep the balance on your tongue because there is a salt side and a sugar side.

Children also talked about the availability of healthy food at school. In the exchange below, children indicate not only how the school may influence their eating behaviours, but also their own levels of knowledge about nutrition:

Holly 10yrs: At school we have a 'let's try it' and there's lots of healthy food like apples and bananas and fruit and veg. And at

lunch time theres a selection of three different types of vegetables and you get all of them if you want.

Iwan 11yrs: In my old school they had biscuits and some had fruit in them and some didn't and you could only have the ones with fruit in them. You weren't actually allowed to have a normal biscuit. But they were all covered in sugar, on the top and bottom, even the ones with fruit in them, and we had to have them. So that wasn't right.

In the following exchange, young people talk about how, in the interests of nutrition, adults at home and school may restrict the choice of food available to them:

Callum 13yrs: I eat quite healthily because my mum and dad are on a diet, so my only option really is to eat healthily.

Lucy 13yrs: I have sandwiches so my mum makes my meals, I don't really have a choice and when I do eat like school dinners it's a very healthy choice.

Kai 13yrs: I have sandwiches as well, so she knows what I am having.

Maddison 13yrs: I have school dinners but I usually go for the sandwich or baguette...I don't usually have the hot stuff because it's usually way more fattening.

Barriers to healthy eating highlighted by the participants included the perceived higher cost of nutritious food:

Ruby 13yrs: I think it's hard for us because fruit and veg is expensive and we can't really afford them so instead we buy things that are cheaper, like convenience foods and it's important that we get our five-a-day.

Money, however, was not the only resource which was deemed necessary to maintain a healthy diet. Brooke, for example, describes how she does not have enough time to eat healthily during the day:

Brooke 17yrs: In work, obviously, you have a lunch break but the girls tend to be quite naughty and book your clients in or something, so literally you've got two minutes. So you might grab a packet of crisps, a biscuit or a caramel wafer bar and you'll have about four of them. Or crackers and butter – all the stuff you can eat instantly and quickly in two minutes and go straight back out into the work zone. I'm awful. And then I get home quite late at night, which my mum always moans about.

For those with children, providing a nutritious diet was described as a priority:

Emma 19yrs (children 6mths, 3&6yrs): We do try and do a lot like of homemade meals we do like shepherds pies and spaghetti bolognaise and stews so we try and save money and feed the whole family.

Ava 35yrs (child 10mths): I'm very keen on trying to help him to eat as healthy food as possible now he's on solids so just making sure he gets all his vitamins and nutrients that he needs...just make sure he's got a well balanced meal.

Exercise

While younger participants did not necessarily associate health with exercise it was apparent that they engaged in a wide range of unsupervised play as well as organised activity and supervised exercise:

Amelia 5yrs: I run round the school playground like ten times.

Samir 8yrs: I usually play outside or go for walks, if it's raining we play Wii Sport in the house.

Evan 8yrs: I do loads of things, I keep fit because like I'm not one of those people who just sits down, one of those who doesn't do anything, like plain, I'm like exciting, going out and doing things.

Nicole 13yrs: I do Taekwondo about four or five times a week and I do Welsh squad (similar to Taekwondo), so that's about two hours and I do horse riding and stuff.

Callum 13yrs: I do rugby.

Kai 13yrs: Rugby for the school and for (the town).

Maddison 13yrs: I do netball for (the town) and for the school and athletics for the school...we do a lot of cross country.

Nicole 13yrs: We have double gym on Friday.

Notably, some children described how, while they did not necessarily eat healthily, this might be to some extent offset by their engagement in exercise of one form or another:

David 8yrs: I eat pretty much junk food but I use my trampoline and most of all my favourite sport is cycling.

Smoking

The vast majority of participants in the study said they did not, and had never, smoked. As is evident from the exchanges below, anti-smoking attitudes were prevalent among the study participants:

Toby 6yrs: You'd die - the smoke can go on fire, and if you're next to people you can get on fire too.

Sophie 7yrs: Smoking is really bad for you, you can die.

Harry 10yrs: You get addicted to it when you first have it because of the, I can't remember what it is called, it makes you addicted.

David 8yrs: One of my uncles smoked and the nicotine. You have to stop yourself otherwise you can really hurt yourself but nicotine is bad because it makes you do it again and again. But it also can make you want to stop but you just can't, and you still want to stop.

From their responses, it was clear that quite a lot of young participants had fairly sophisticated understandings about smoking and what it can cause, not just to smokers themselves, but to others as well:

Evan 8yrs: I know, it's really bad for you, it all like gets in your lungs and closes down and do bad and when someone smokes next to you if you're passing someone who is smoking try not to breathe it in because it's like you smoking as well...killing you as well.

Some participants talked about how parental behaviours might influence the behaviours of children, and others described how they had (successfully) encouraged their parents to quit:

Grace 13yrs: With smoking, it doesn't help if the parents smoke, if the parents smoke then they would feel encouraged to smoke as well.

Cameron 13yrs: It's stupid...my dad used to smoke but he stopped because it was harming us and it was just horrible because you're like ending your life early and you're paying for your death really, when you could spend your money on other things.

Joshua 14yrs: It's disgusting...I don't know its just foul, my mum used to smoke and I made her quit because it was horrible. It looked disgusting, and it took her well she said it was quite hard to quit and she had to use patches and stuff but she done it that way.

Those who had experienced smoking-related illness or death among family members, were among the most vehemently opposed to smoking:

Rhys 18yrs: Never smoked in my life, never wanted to. Smoking wise I have seen personal experiences of family going through it and smoking kills and knowing the effects of it, I know well, and it smells disgusting. I know not to touch it.

The small minority of participants, who did smoke, talked about the detrimental affects of smoking on their health:

Fiona 14yrs: I do...I was 13 when I started. I am quitting down to three a day so I can just stop. It's really bad for my health and you get out of breath easily with sports and all that so.

Aaron 15yrs: I just don't feel healthy at all because I smoke.

Significant others were described as an important factor in the uptake of smoking. While aware that peer pressure could be influential:

Scarlett 13yrs: Probably their friends start to smoke and then they start to join in.

Aaron 15yrs: I started when I was nine that's been six years. We started both smoking together.

The general consensus among young people was that it was no longer 'cool' to smoke, and that no amount of peer pressure or other influence would persuade them otherwise:

Charlotte 17yrs: I think a lot more people now are starting to realise that it's not cool because it used to be sort of you know people would get pressured into it and to an extent there is still a little bit of that but more people are just like 'why are you doing it?', it seems it's very unhealthy, I've personally never been pressured into smoking and I've never been tempted to try it. I know one of my younger friends started smoking because she thought it would make her feel bigger, more cool, but I don't think a lot of people really think that any more, I think the attitude is definitely changing because of all the things we've done, especially lower down in the school about awareness of how it affects you. We've done these things in science where you there is like the cigarette machines and it shows you like all the tar and everything that comes out and it's really horrible.

Brooke 17yrs: I've never smoked, never done drugs – nothing like that appeals to me at all. Obviously other people have tried to get

me to do things, like when you were out they'd say 'ooh try this or that', and I've always said 'no', which I felt quite comfortable doing as its never appealed to me. I'd rather spend £35 on a top than go and waste it on drugs and alcohol.

Alcohol

Children who took part in the study were for the most part wary about alcohol:

David 8yrs: Alcohol can make you drunk because it contains something and it's like wine. My mum only takes a sip, but if you take too much you can get drunk and you might be sad, you might be happy, you might be angry, you might be silly.

Holly 10yrs: I think drinking is horrible.

Faith 11yrs: Well it's horrible but also we're not old enough. I wouldn't anyway. It's weird, I wouldn't because it's like hurting yourself inside sort of thing. Like with smoking, you see pictures on the wall, pictures of what happens to you if you do it (smoke).

Like Holly, several children associated drinking with other unhealthy behaviours (particularly smoking). Drinking alcohol was also associated by some participants with what they perceived as 'less desirable' others:

Scarlett 13yrs: Because it's like a council estate, most people drink there...it's not nice.

Ruby 13yrs: They're not like that in our street, but a bit further down.

Scarlett 13yrs: They do drugs as well.

Children in their teens were more likely than younger participants, to talk about trying or 'experimenting' with alcohol:

Joshua 14yrs: I might drink the odd bit sometimes like parties, if you go to one, but not like obsessive drinking like everyday or every week or whatever not getting really drunk all the time...I don't know where people get it from. At parties it's just there.

Cameron 13yrs: I have it on the weekends like, I don't like beer, I like cider but I don't like beer, just go in the fridge and it is there, just to help myself to one or two cans a night on a Saturday and maybe a Friday night...I drink with my mum and stepdad and at parties I drink a little bit.

Certainly participants distinguished between moderate drinking by significant adults and binge drinking, which they associated with some young people:

Dylan 12yrs: My mum has a bit of drink every Friday and Saturday.
Cameron 13yrs: I know of people that get smashed like but with their girlfriends they like go like down into the field or like on the Football pitch and just get wrecked. (They get it) from their mates who are old enough to drive, they just get it and then they give it to them, they just get smashed and sick and stuff like that.

In the following exchange, young people talk about the influence of both peers and adults on their drinking behaviours:

Aaron 15yrs: (I'd drink) just really up (in the village) on the skate park, I'd drink about eight litres of cider, Strongbow or Frosty Jacks.

Isaac 16yrs: Not since he's hanging around with me. When he started hanging around with me he thought I was going to have a drink. Then he started gobbing off at coppers and I told him if he's going to be like that he cannot come to mine cos my family, they don't like drinkers because they don't drink. Well they have a drink on a special occasion, and I don't like it

Aaron 15yrs: I stopped it. I listen to people, I listen to my mates I listen to his family too, his dad and mam's mint.

As indicated in the following exchange, underage drinking is perceived by some young people as the norm, and access to alcohol as unproblematic:

Alexa 17yrs: I think people are becoming more sort of aware ... I don't know about the boys but, when we were younger we used to just be silly about it but I think we've got a bit more mature about it now. But even though even though we're still not supposed to be allowed to drink and buy alcohol it doesn't really make any difference.

Charlotte 17yrs: It doesn't really make any difference, I think I mean the smoking law, going back to what we were talking about before, has made a difference, but I think the fact that the legal age of alcohol is 18, I don't think that makes a lot of difference to some people, although I shouldn't be saying this.

Alexa 17yrs: A lot of our friends are 18 anyway so they just get it for us, especially because we are all friends with the year above us, the people who have just left.

Olivia 16yrs: There's a lot of pressure to smoke and drink on people my age - like when you go clubbing.

For those aged 18 and over, increased alcohol consumption was associated with nights on the town, and peer pressure to maintain high levels of consumption were acknowledged:

Jake 18yrs: Drinking, I think everyone does that at our age. I can't think of anyone who doesn't...On the peak times it would be like twice a week, proper drinking...probably like go over someone's house with like eight cans or something then when you get into town buy some drinks. But we're only 18 so we don't need as much as a 25 year old.

Rhys 18yrs: It's only recently when I have drunk a fair bit, but when I go out I drink, I don't drink at home...it only tends to be when I go out to town...If you look like a teetotaler there is that feeling that you couldn't enjoy yourself and everyone else was and there will be some idiot who says 'oh you should drink, come on you wimp'... I drink every two weeks...I am pretty lightweight, so maybe two or three or four, but no more than four cans...If you have been ill in the past you kind of learn when to stop...doing stupid things - you see the leaflets and think 'hmm I'd better not do that, that's stupid'.

Drugs

There was little discussion among participants about drugs. For the younger children, drugs were associated primarily with medication and to a lesser extent with sport:

Finley 7yrs: Maradona used to take drugs to make him run faster. It was a bad thing because he got banned from Football for two years.

It is acknowledged that the illegal status of drugs may have deterred participants from talking about their experiences of substance misuse. According to teenagers who took part in the study, drugs were not something they had encountered..,

Grace 13yrs: Our school doesn't do drugs, does it?

Ruby 13yrs: Not that we see. Anything could be going on behind what we see.

Scarlett 13yrs: Nobody has come up to me and asked 'do you want some drugs?'

and were, in any case, to be avoided:

Seren 14yrs: I'm not worried about drinking but I wouldn't do drugs because they tend to kill you.

Adam 14yrs: No drugs...it will get in the way of my boxing.

For young people, taking drugs was described as a matter of choice rather than availability:

Isaac 16yrs: I don't touch drugs neither.

Aaron 15yrs: I don't touch drugs only cigarettes.

Isaac 16yrs: I've been brought up the right way not to touch drugs and that.

Aaron 15yrs: And me.

(Are there a lot of drugs about?)

Aaron 15yrs: Oh yeah, if we wanted to then we could.

Jake 18yrs: Not as much (experimenting with drugs) as other people, but our group of people aren't drug-takers per se...I wouldn't go as far as like, anything I know would get you hooked - crack cocaine or something...(cannabis and ecstasy?) probably, in Uni I think you've got to experiment. I know people that have, close people to me that have done cocaine.

5.8 Wellbeing generally: "sometimes (money) makes you more sad"

For study participants, the concept of wellbeing held a range of different meanings. Indeed because it was understood differently by participants, particularly by those at different ages, we approached the issue in a number of ways. Hence, we asked them directly about wellbeing as well as their priorities and what made them happy.

The youngest participants responded best to questions about the most important things in life, the things that made them feel happiest or best. For some children relationships between people, and the way in which people were treated, were very important to them:

Abbie 6yrs: It's important to be kind.

George 9yrs: I think you should treat people quite nicely, treat people how you would like them to treat you.

Adam 14yrs: You should be respecting others and they respect you. Like old people I ask them if they want help when they are crossing the road.

The study findings suggested that children were not particularly materialistic, tending to value people and relationships over money and possessions:

George 9yrs: I would like my brother to live...I'd like him to not be dead, now I'm an only kid...my mum doesn't have a lot of money...sometimes (money) makes you more sad because some stuff that you buy with money can kill you.

Finley 7yrs: My friend has a dad and their family is a millionaire but my friend never ever gets to see his dad because, he earns about £5,000 a week, no 4,000 a week, but he never ever gets to see (his son), he only gets to see(his son) on a Saturday...my dad earns £4,000 a month, his dad earns £4,000 a week but (we're happier) because we get to spend more time as a family than they do.

George 9yrs: I would like to see my dad more, I haven't seen my dad for five months, my mum and dad split up and I would love to see my dad more, I haven't seen him for five months.

Harry 10yrs: I've got a friend who hasn't seen his dad for four years...he doesn't care about his dad, his dad he was going away for ages, he came up to the house I was there with him and he came up to the house and he goes and his mum goes 'are you going to say goodbye to your dad', and he goes 'no I can't be bothered'.

While young people did reference money in relation to wellbeing, these references were more in respect of having adequate funds to live a 'good' or 'healthy life', rather than desire to be wealthy:

Freya 14yrs: How they live and stuff and if you're in poverty. And like status, how up on the scale they are, have enough money and everything.

Dylan 12yrs: Yeah being healthy.

Adam 14yrs: Living a good life.

Issues of safety and security were also highlighted as important by young people:

Geraint 18yrs: It means your welfare. Where you go, what do you do, and will I be safe in the places I go?

Tom 22yrs: Safety and security, a sense of belonging as well. Knowing I'm needed and not just floating about. Just to know where I belong – a home basically.

Jane 22yrs: To me now it's being stable and safe in a home, rather than living in someone's spare room, and making money, because at the end of the day money doesn't count for much. It's not really that important. I feel very safe here at the moment because I've got people here I can see or family.

Psychological wellbeing

For young people mental health was perceived as very important to their sense of wellbeing:

Anwen 16yrs: General happiness, mental and physical and all the rest. At the moment, I'm pretty happy.

Charlotte 17yrs: Sort of being comfortable with your life really and where you are, not getting overstressed. I know I get myself overstressed sometimes and I think that's an important part of it. I think it's having people that really understand you, like I'm not an overly social person but I've got a few close friends who really understand me, who I really value. I think it's having a supportive family as well so I think when people have family troubles it can be a lot more difficult for them. Like succeeding at school and things, my family have always really supported me so I think that yeah that's what wellbeing is really.

In the following two accounts, young people talk about experiencing severe psychological problems:

Brooke 17yrs: What worries me? About a year and a half ago I would say, being hurt. But after my dad leaving (the country) I don't think I could ever be hurt much, more than I already am. I was so so upset when he left. I went to counselling and I went to my doctor quite a lot. And a lady used to come to the house to check on how I am. It hit me really hard because I was so close to my dad...no one can hurt me as much as my dad hurt me by leaving me.

Tom 22yrs: (I) came back home recently. I came home due to having mental health breakdown. To be honest I should have come back when it originally happened in February but I didn't really realise that back then. I moved back when I realised it's the only option I have. I'm living with mum now...I'd have been worse (more unwell) if I'd have stayed. Things would have got on top of me a lot more. So I'm glad I left.

Many young people talked about expectations of school as a major source of stress in their lives. While, to reiterate, some of this stress was linked to bullying, for the most part it was associated with academic achievement:

Drew 15yrs: We get a lot of coursework now and I don't really like doing coursework because I can't do it so I panic a bit about it, so I think that's what's going to let me down.

Charlotte 17yrs: I sometimes feel quite ill because I get quite stressed out about school and just about all the different things that I have to do because I'm taking four subjects this year and I'm applying to Cambridge as well for next year so it's quite yeah and I'm a musician as well so I've got all sorts of musical activities to do, so I find it a little bit stressful, that's just my own thing I need to take on I think.

Catrin 15yrs: It's stressful - all the exams.

Mari 15yrs: Exams are stressful, you have got to work to like deadlines.

Alexa 17yrs: Yeah it is quite stressful, I suppose that's a big issue isn't it especially when it comes down to coursework end times, coursework deadlines, yeah I do tech this year which is quite hard because we've got so much work to do but especially like we've all got resits in January and when we've got them over we've got coursework deadlines and when we've got that over we've got other exams.

Participant discussions highlighted the importance that young people, like Brooke, attached to finding what made them good about themselves, in her case doing a job that she enjoyed:

Brooke 17yrs: Beauty therapy has a low status about it, you feel that people look down on you because of what you do, well I do. And being academically capable you do notice those things, because people will put you down. And say, why haven't you gone to University, done this or done that? I think your job is so important about making you feel good.

Social wellbeing: relationships and responsibilities

To reiterate, one of the most important aspects of wellbeing described by participants, was their relationships with others. Nowhere was this more apparent than when they talked about the importance of friends, family and other significant others. For the youngest participants, it was parents who assumed the most importance:

Freddie 4yrs: When (my sister) hurts me I tell and I cry I tell mum. And mum comes. And when I can't get up because my legs hurt mum comes running to me. And when I'm sick and I'm in my bed. Last week I was in mum and dad's bed and I was sick on dad and I

had to go to the sink and dad had to wash his tummy and he got out of bed.

Harry 10yrs: (What is most important?) My mum and dad.

George 9yrs: They get you everything, they give you money, they get you toys, they get you everything

Ruby 13yrs: My parents are there to help so if I get lost they will just say, kind of push you back to the right place.

Cameron 13yrs: I can't talk to my mum, she always gets on my nerves and stuff like that. But my dad is like a mate. You can tell him anything and stuff like that and he'll have like a laugh and a joke with you and stuff like.

Older children and young people described parents as very important to them:

Charlotte 17yrs: My parents are very understanding. I have a very good relationship with my parents, I don't know about anybody else's experience because obviously you don't know exactly what happens in somebody else's house do you? But I find my experience of home life is very good and I'm sure my sister would agree as well, and I get on very well with her too.

Drew 15yrs: I get on with my mum and dad quite well and like if I've got something I'll tell them and they understand.

Brooke 17yrs: I'm fortunate because I'm really close to both of my parents as well. I could tell my mum anything. And I could tell my dad anything. I think my dad frets about me, because I'm his only daughter but I could tell him anything. And it's important because you are not scared of hiding anything. We are a very open family, and very open to everyone else as well.

Rhys 18yrs: I get a lot of support from my family. I am comfortable talking with them about quite a lot of stuff really.

Young people's peers and friends were acknowledged as a very important part of their lives. To reiterate, one of the positive aspects of school that was highlighted by participants, was that it provided the opportunity to meet with friends:

Charlie 5yrs: I have 10 (friends)

Abbie 6yrs: I'm friends with all of them all of everyone in my class

Faith 11yrs: The only good thing about school is like seeing your friends. If you don't go to school you wouldn't see your friends very

much. At school you normally see your friends every day and on the weekend you see them anyway. But if you asked your parents could you see your friends every day they'd say no most of the time.

For older children and young people, relationships with friends were also cited as very important:

Ellen 14yrs: I have got about - because I am in (a special project) all of them are my friends, so out here I have got about 50 I bother with about here. We're quite a big group...I know nearly everyone around the estate because I've lived here all my life.

Brooke 17yrs: I also think your friends are so important in your life. To get out and they're an escape if you need to talk to someone. If there's anyone you can trust it's your friends you tend to turn to.

Rhys 18yrs: I have friends from different groups... some friends will help me out. There is only a few who I can trust - who I would be happy to talk with on those matters. They tend to be boys. On some issues it can be girls, but I think it would be boys actually.

Some young people talked about leaving friendships made at school behind them as they grew up. In the first extract below, Rhys talks about how early friendships with young people from diverse social backgrounds helped him to 'survive' school. In the second extract, Jake describes leaving behind a set of friends in the South Wales Valleys when he and his family moved to the City:

Rhys 18: I enjoyed school, I have got a range of friends from lower backgrounds, areas who weren't well off and those who are very well off so you have got a mix of people and you realised how to survive with – I don't want to say it but - chavs mainly. You had to get on their good side...It's kind of a survival guide - you know what to say...it's toughened me up a bit I guess.

Jake 18yrs: (moved from the Valleys) probably in the first year I was here, but then literally I have forgotten them...If I saw them and I recognised them I would probably say hello to them and go for a drink or something...I left when I was about 10, now I have got much closer mates...Most people have gone to Uni, but I have got friends within a five mile radius probably. (If I'd stayed in the Valleys) I would probably have stayed there the rest of my life...probably more like get stuck in with the wrong crowd.

Having a close supportive network of friends and family was perceived as particularly important by those with young children:

Ava 35yrs (child 10mths): I like to think that he's been really fortunate, he is surrounded by people who love him and hopefully he is being offered all the opportunities that a little one needs in this particular age...he feels comfortable and secure...It's just nice to be able to talk to somebody about all the decisions you have to make about the little one. It's not completely innate, you are learning on the job.

Anita 37yrs (children 2&5yrs): Activities and time out, I don't get much time we have got quite a large circle of friends and a couple who we do see more. We tend to see them with the children and that is really good because they have children of a similar age.

To reiterate, relationships with others were a very important part of young people's lives and a key contributor to how they felt about themselves. It is not surprising, therefore, that treating people with respect, or how they would like to be treated themselves, was highlighted as one way of making life better:

(How do you like to treat other people?)

Fiona 14yrs: The way people treat me

Ellen 14yrs: Fairly

Young people generally did not wish to assume more responsibilities for other people. While, like Joshua (14yrs), they were happy to lend assistance to their parents 'I had to like help out a little bit', for the most part they focused upon developing responsibility for themselves:

Alexa 17yrs: I feel like I'm responsible for myself but I'm not responsible for anyone else I don't think because everyone's responsible for themselves.

Charlotte 17yrs: I'd say I'd agree with that I mean I'm on the sixth form management team so I suppose I feel a bit more responsible because of that and being one of the oldest members of the music department, I feel responsible in that way to turn up and you know help people out with their rehearsals and stuff but generally what (she) said basically sort of responsible for myself.

Drew 15yrs: I feel responsible for myself but I'm not on the council or anything so I don't feel responsible for any more.

Relationships and sex

Children and young people, who took part in the study, talked easily about girlfriends and boyfriends, as indicated in the following exchange between some of the youngest participants:

Toby 6yrs: If you don't want one (girlfriend) would you say yes or no, I used to have one I dumped her.

(Why did you dump her?)

Toby 6yrs: She pulled my hair, (my friend) said (she) tripped him up on the concrete and he hit his face, and I said and she did that with my hair.

Sophie 7yrs: (my friends) used to have a boyfriend and they snogged (giggles).

Having a girlfriend or boyfriend held different meanings for participants, particularly across the study age groups. The fact girls mature earlier than boys was reflected by focus group discussion among early teenaged boys about their relationship with girls and girlfriends:

Joshua 14yrs: Yeah it's fine, everyone has like normally has a girlfriend and whatever...since year five really.

Cameron 13yrs: I don't tend to have girlfriends really, just make people laugh.

Dylan 12yrs: The whole boyfriend and girlfriend thing has started to come around in my year and just a few people have them.

While discussion among boys of this age, avoided the subject of sex, some of the girls were less reticent to broach the topic:

Meredith 13yrs: We learnt about that (sex) in RE...but I don't want to have sex until I am least 16 or 17.

Gwen 19yrs: I talk about it to my friends, I don't talk to my mother, she would be too embarrassed.

Brooke 17yrs: I've never really been like promiscuous or anything like that. I've only really ever had two boyfriends, including the one I have now. I've not been in a relationship other than that. Obviously I'm still quite young.

In one focus group, the young women discussed the increasing acceptance of same sex relationships as young people in their year group matured:

Alexa 17yrs: I think it's the fact that there's more people like standing up and openly saying it but my mum and dad they're not

against, well I think they are actually, I think they wouldn't like me to be like come out gay or my brothers or anything but I think they're not as open, not as like accepting as us.

Charlotte 17yrs: When you get to year 11, sixth form, people are less silly about those sort of (relationship) things, I think it's just to be expected really you know when people are sort of year eight, year nine and sort of like 'oh you're not going out with anyone', but I think because people are really quite young to be having relationships at that stage so I think it's any kind of immaturity is to be expected.

Alexa 17yrs: There is a lot of quite a few gay people in our year.

Charlotte 17yrs: Yeah but it's nice because no one judges them, do they, it's really nice.

Alexa 17yrs: ...they don't even get treated any different do they really as having other relationships but if they came out quite late in the year like so like in year 11 about, but if they'd come out earlier I think they would have got teased more.

5.9 Being listened to and understood: "I try to get my point across"

Being listened to, and related to this, being respected, was an important issue for young people and this was reflected by the lengthy discussions on this topic. Because most of the participants were still at school, these discussions often centred on the extent they felt listened to by teachers. While acknowledging that teachers had a lot of call on their attention, children were aggrieved when they felt teachers did not listen to their point of view and/or were perceived as unfairly taking the side of another:

David 8yrs: Sometimes (grown-ups listen to you). But some, like Miss Black, if you get like in trouble and it's somebody else too, she's always like 'no no no shush shush shush' and she doesn't give us the chance to talk. When we're like doing things and one of the teachers thinks like it's you, you just lose like golden time or something and it just isn't fair.

George 9yrs: They shouldn't just say that person, they should try and find out before they actually say it.

Meredith 13yrs: No...they don't listen to you in school. They haven't got enough time to get on with everyone because like everyone is asking for help.

Maddison 13yrs: I know a lot of people that would listen to me but others, they just like know what they're talking about and they don't listen.

Nicole 13yrs: They think they know everything .

Lucy 13yrs: Teachers usually show you respect, but if you do something badly they won't listen to your side of the story.

Many of the participants talked about school councils as a context which provided a forum through which to express their opinions:

Taj 8yrs: We gather opinions of what children want to say about school...we're just speaking for the children.

Aisha 8yrs: We make suggestions like to make our school better, if we want to have more equipment or if children don't want to have an apple in the fruit trolley we could get oranges.

Maya 10yrs: We were talking about like what school dinners were like and where you can sit or where you are allowed to sit.

Faith 11yrs: In primary school, in the school council, they had a boy and a girl from each class from nursery upwards and they'd all come together every two weeks and then talk about- like you'd go to them if you needed help – if you had a problem or something- and they'd talk about it in the meeting.

However, some children said they were disillusioned with school councils, because while they listened to what children had to say, rarely things changed as a result:

Joshua 14yrs: I am on (the school council).

Cameron 13yrs: Yeah I did it as well but they don't do anything, if you put your opinions down they don't get taken in really...I think the bike shed was mentioned...but there's no point if no one's bringing any bikes and there's no point in having it just before winter because who's going to bring a bike when it is icy and stuff like that. It's like a danger hazard and stuff like that.

Joshua 14yrs: They like waste money like I think like that bike shed, that must have cost like about 500 quid or a bit more and there's four bikes in it so there's no point.

Arthur 12yrs: I can speak to the people who are on the school council. I have tried for it but they talk about stuff they would like to change but it never happens most of the time.

Notwithstanding the frustration experienced when representation to councils or panels was perceived as ineffectual, that the mechanism was offered and in some cases worked, was appreciated by participants, not only in school:

Jane 22yrs: Our panel of young people from care came together, and said 'I don't like that my social worker has got to sign my permission slips for me to go on school trips' so they have changed

that and now the foster carers can do it. And they also said 'I don't like the fact that I can't go over my friend's house unless his mum or dad has been CRB checked'.

Children and young people described how the extent to which they were heard, and responded to, depended on how important the problem was perceived to be by those doing the listening:

Iwan 11yrs: Sometimes when there's talking and I'm not really listening, because I'm thinking I don't really need to be thinking about it when other people need to because they are older they need to. Sometimes when it's something and affecting me as well I try to get my point across and say 'well why is this happening?'. Sometimes, depending on what the situation is, they'll listen. Or if it's something I think I want to get across but it's something they want to deal with, they say 'I'll deal with it and you don't really need to worry about it'.

In this way, children acknowledged how parents and teachers filtered out what they perceived to be non-essential information:

Faith 11yrs: Adults like do listen but if you are trying to tell something to your mum, like what happened in school or something. And they're like cooking dinner or working on the computer. And you're telling them and you stop. And then they're silent and you say 'mum'. And they're like 'what?', so they haven't like really listened.

Notwithstanding this, the study participants acknowledged the importance of champions in their lives, who could be relied upon to listen to problems and issues that were important to them:

Dylan 12yrs: My mum will listen to me and take my opinions.

Joshua 14yrs: Sometimes if you've got a problem then you talk to your mum and dad. And normally they'll try hard to stop it. And if they tried but it still goes on they take it a step further until it is resolved. So they won't stop if you've got a problem.

Owen 15yrs: Yet I think it's the teacher, what teacher you'd go to if you had a problem, whether they would listen to you or not.

Gwen 19yrs: If she (mum) doesn't listen to me, my dad will listen to me.

Holly 19yrs: In college if I have any problems I can talk to my tutor and they would listen. And if there's a problem they would resolve that.

In some cases, participants perceived that adults might not gauge accurately the importance or seriousness of some issues which affect young people today:

Brooke 17yrs: We told the school twice (about bullying) – like my head of year and she dealt with it. As much as they can do because it's almost like out of their control, because it was such a big school they didn't listen they didn't care. It's so hard to get your feeling across to someone and for them to totally understand, because at the end of the day they are so much older than you are and it was probably a lot different from when they were in school. I don't think bullying then was as excessive as it is now and I think children can be so mean to other children.

Across all the respondent age groups, there was some strength of feeling that adults did not perceive children's problems as significant. In other words that children and young people were less important than adults:

Ruby 13yrs: You are less important than everyone else.

Scarlett 13yrs: They think that we're up to something all the time.

Max 13yrs: I disagree with that, my parents trust me.

Grace 13yrs: Adults in general are just like, if you hang round on the street laughing with your friends then there will be some adults passing you and they will give you a really snooty look and probably think like they are probably drinking and there is adults that don't listen...adults that base them on their experiences of when they were a kid, it's changed since they were little so they don't listen to, like, what we have to say.

Much group discussion among participants focused on the perceived negative image that many adults held of young people in general:

Scarlett 13yrs: Like when you go out most people say teenagers stay indoors too much these days. So you go out and they say 'oh, they are always hanging around the street'. So it's kind of like you don't win, so you just don't know what to do.

Freda 14yrs: Most teenagers are disengaged at the moment, but that could be something to do with their backgrounds and to do with youth culture as well today and I don't think it helps with the media giving negative stereotypes all the time because it's not fair.

Joshua 14yrs: People around here think we are jobs.

Certainly, there was a perception that adults took other adults more seriously than they did children or young people:

Olivia 16yrs: In college I'm in class with two 40 year olds. And it's like there's one tutor and she drives you nuts she talks to you like you're one of the children. But when we complain about it, these two (older) women don't see it. They aren't intimidated by it and so the tutors talk to them like they're adults. Older people definitely get more respect and are more listened to.

Chloe 18yrs: There's people where I work from about 15 to 50 years old and you definitely get listened to more, the older you are. For the younger people they tend to say 'if you don't like it then get out'. If it really is a problem and it really needs seeing to then it will get sorted but if it's a smaller thing, the younger you are the more trivial they think your problems are. But then, when you are older the problems are often bigger than when you are younger.

5.10 For the future: "mostly when you leave school it never works out like you want it"

Participants, across the age groups, talked to us about what they felt the future held for them. Here, the younger participants assumed that their current interests and desires would remain unchanged as they grew older:

George 9yrs: I'd want a car, a tank, and a private aeroplane.

David 8yrs: I'm going to have all the new technology from the future so I'm going to have like this helmet with like these glasses that you can have like games and this bike.

For the older children, achieving good results at school assumed much importance:

Dylan 12yrs: Get quite good exam results and keep my friends.

Cameron 13yrs: Friends, get good GCSEs and then have a nice car, (and) perhaps a house. Have holidays and stuff like that so be wealthy and stuff like that, yeah. Because without money you're nothing, so you've got to have money, everything is money now...as much as I can there is no limit really. You just have as much as you can, and be wealthier than other people.

Meredith 13yrs: Get my GCSEs and have a place to live.

Seren 14yrs: Shelter, GCSEs and health.

Drew 15yrs: Get good grades at GCSE.

Young people's focus on exam results was linked to their concerns about finding employment and security when they got older:

Fiona 14yrs: (in five years time) getting a paying job, something that starts me off with money, then get a permanent job then for what I want to be.

Ellen 14yrs: Have a little flat and a job...I want to be close to my family.

Joshua 14yrs: I just want to earn about 50K to like 100K a year and just get a good job because my dad earns quite a lot now because it is his business and I'll just carry on with that...and a good family and a nice house, and a bit of land like because they could use motorbikes and just go on the field racing round.

In their discussions about the future, children's accounts illustrated how much they were influenced by their childhood experiences and by their parents:

Fiona 14yrs: (in 10 years) I hope I have got a house, maybe with my pet. I would like a little flat first...when I have children I want to move out...a tidy place, like on a quiet street where children can play in the park and stuff like that...this is like, the way I see it, it's like a rough estate to me and I don't want to bring my children up here. People are saying it's the way you bring them up and I don't find that. It's the environment that they are in and I just don't want to raise them here.

Ellen 14yrs: Have a house, have a boyfriend, still have my job. A well paid job.

Drew 15yrs: I wouldn't want a job that I don't like because my dad he's just changed jobs because he hated his old job. He was quite well paid, but he's dropped his pay because he hated the job so. He enjoys this one and he seems to be happier and that. So I'd rather have a job that I enjoy and be a happier person and that...have a family and that and I don't know.

Charlotte 17yrs: An inspiring job I would say, not lots of money but a job that I enjoy because my dad's always hated his job. He's always dreaded going to work. He's quite well paid but always at the end of the weekend 'oh I've got work next week', it's just sort of you know you don't want to think about it so I want a job that I really enjoy.

Most of the study participants, who were still at school, reflected on the type of job they would like when they grew up. Although these speculations were not (particularly in the case of younger children) always realistic:

Freddie 4yrs: I'm going to be a knight...and my dad is going to be a knight, my sister is going to be a princess and my mum is going to be a princess.

Edward 5yrs: I'm going to be a knight for fighting dragons. We're going to be on horses...I'm going to live in a kingdom. Who wants to live in a kingdom when they grow up? It's my kingdom, it's my castle, where I live when I'm a grown up.

The anticipated occupations of younger children often mirrored those of other family members:

Amelia 5yrs: I want to be a hairdresser like mum, I cut mum's hair and she'll cut mine.

Samir 8yrs: At University, like be a doctor, my brother is going now...he's going in (city).

Aisha 8yrs: I think I am going to be a doctor...a lot of my cousins work in a hospital.

Cameron 13yrs: I want to work with my dad in insurance, he's quite wealthy so, I could be wealthy as well.

One young person indicated how parents may directly attempt to influence young people in respect of education and work:

Cameron 13yrs: My dad hates college and University, he thinks it's a waste of money and stuff like this, with all his pay rises, no he didn't do it himself. He says 'as soon as you finish school, once you've got your GCSEs, then come straight into work and I'll take you under my wing and teach you from there, so you don't need college and stuff like that'.

The older children were often quite thoughtful about their desired occupation, and what might be achievable:

Kai 13yrs: I want to be an actor when I am older, so I would quite like to go to University. But my dad says that I shouldn't just put my whole hopes into one thing, which I actually quite believe...and I want to do some English writing things as well.

Grace 13yrs: I know what I want to be, I know it's not going to like work out because mostly when you leave school it never works out like you want it to. But like I want to study all the stuff and be like a lawyer and just do something like that. (why wouldn't that work out?) You could do it, but it's not easy when you leave school. Everyone says when they're younger, I want to be blah, blah, blah, I will be blah, blah, blah.

Drew 15yrs: I enjoy sports a lot so I want to be something in sports like with football or something. But I don't think I'll be a professional footballer so like a physio or something. But if that doesn't happen then I'd like to be a PE teacher or something because I don't mind teaching people things and that so I enjoy that.

Young people in their teens were also aware that getting a job might not be easy:

Scarlett 13yrs: Because there is like a credit crunch as well and most people will be rushing to get a job and there won't be much choice for everyone...

Ruby 13yrs: Everyone says like it's a long time away, but when you think about it it's not really that far away. People who are younger than us, maybe more jobs will come when they're there, but for us I think it's going to take us a bit longer to find a job than it will for them because there aren't any.

For young people with children of their own, working per se, let alone working in a preferred occupation, was problematic:

Emma 19yrs (children 6mths, 3 & 6yrs): I started my Access course but I found it difficult with the family situation so I had to leave the course at an early stage...it was just a lot of the work was outside of the college...it was a lot of homework and essays at home and stuff and by the time you know I got home and wanted to chill out then I've got three children wanting my attention and my husband wants my attention it was just like I felt guilty for saying go away I'm writing an essay because they wouldn't understand that when you're doing an essay it's not good to be interrupted but at the same time I felt guilty because it's not their fault and even when they did leave me alone I can hear them playing downstairs and that and number one I want to be downstairs playing with them and number two I can't concentrate because I can hear them screaming and shouting.

For those with support from families, balancing work with parenting was a little easier:

Eleri 23yrs (children 2&5yrs): Nightmare...they were in school and it was literally we would swap over between us, one of us would go out and one would come home...half term, holidays were a nightmare.

Bethan 25yrs (children 1&4yrs): My mother has my children once a week for me to have a break myself, on Friday night I have a bit of time to myself and they go over to their Nan then once a week for a couple of hours...I am grateful for that.

Laura 25yrs (children 4,6&8yrs): I was lucky...I have a lot of family around so when I started this job all I had to do was drop him off in school and then my mum or my sister was going to pick him up...but I found it pretty easy, yeah.

Many young people wished for a safe and predictable future, including a house, job and a family:

Freya 14yrs: I want to be working in a hospital and I want to get married and have kids and stuff, I guess everyone wants to. Well, not everyone.

Erin 16yrs: In 10 years time I would see myself with a family in this locality. I do want to marry, I don't have a boyfriend at the moment, I did have one for a week once.

Geraint 18yrs: I would see myself five years from now working as a zoo keeper and living with my wife and kids.

Lloyd 18yrs: In the future I want to be married, but I don't have a girlfriend at the moment.

For those young people with children of their own, hopes and wishes for the future ultimately centred upon the wellbeing of their children:

Emma 19yrs (children 6mths, 3&6yrs): I want to be a residential care worker somehow or other. I want the kids to be healthy and happy really and get a good education...I know how to do it wrong so now I'm trying to do it right if that makes sense...so now I'm trying to do the opposite and make it as comfortable and stable as possible for them...trying to get the career I want like I said as long as the kids are happy and healthy and getting a good education

and getting rid of the kids so I can spend some time with my husband.

Bethan 25yrs (children 1&4yrs): I would like to think I could go one day, from around here. Me personally I don't want to be here in a good couple of years ...I don't plan to stay around here...in a couple of years we would like to go, for better things for the kids really, so they have a better education somewhere else...I haven't got anywhere in mind yet.

Likewise, for older parents who took part in the study, the safety and happiness of children and opportunities for them to realise their potential, were paramount:

Carys 30yrs (children 10mths, 5&8yrs): I just want my little girl to be able to go out with her friends and come home smiling instead of crying...because every day she comes home crying.

Rhiannon 32yrs (child 8mths & 3others): I just hope my kids, even if they grow up and they're on the dole, as long as they're happy I don't care really.

Ava 35yrs (child 10mths): I just want him to be able to fulfil his potential...For my kids to have a secure, loving home life with lots of positive role models.

Anita 37yrs (children 2&5yrs): I have aspirations that I want them to do well in school, like any mum want them to be happy, find employment when they are at that stage...Housing for the boys in the future, children living with parents much longer, which is fine...but not if they don't want to, I just hope they are able to get a house, chances are they will not be able to afford it.

Barriers and facilitators to aspirations

Some children and young people talked about having opportunities to realise their ambitions, even where their parents might struggle to support these:

Scarlett 13yrs: I think my mum and dad give me the opportunity to do something. If I want to really do something they would say you can do it. It would be hard to afford but if you really want it.

Poppy 13yrs: My mammy don't like me missing out on stuff because she'll feel like guilty. But like sometimes I don't want her to like have to pay for stuff because then I feel bad.

However, children and young people were aware of their own responsibilities vis-à-vis realising their ambitions. Given young people's concerns about doing well educationally, it is not surprising that much discussion centred on working hard at school:

Sophie 7yrs: To be a vet you have to really work hard at school.

David 8yrs: I need to go to college.

Harry 10yrs: Well I need to go to college, if you want a job you have to go to college...(my parents) will make me pay for it.

Nicole 13yrs: Staying in set one and getting the highest possible marks.

Zoe 13yrs: Sometimes the work can be hard and tests can be hard but then like if it wasn't hard, then it would just be too easy.

Older young people also associated higher education with significant risk. The main risks identified by young people were the prospect of accumulating debt and the inability to repay this if they were not successful in securing employment:

Alexa 17yrs: I want to see if it's worth going into so much debt to go (to University) first because I know so many people that have come out of Uni with really good qualifications in good subjects like geography, maths, and a few of my friends, and science, then none of them have got jobs in that specific area . So I look at it, and I don't want to go and get in so much debt to then not have a safe job at the end of it, a good job.

Drew 15yrs: Yeah because my mum works in the Co-op and there's people that come from University with good degrees and that but they are only working in the Co-op. Ad there's no point going into that much debt and that just to work in the Co-op!

Alexa 17yrs: And with tuition fees going up as well, (I) just don't know if I want to go.

Lloyd 18yrs: There would be some serious training before you can even get into the (occupation), there is about two years training I think. I would have to go to a training centre I think there is one in Bristol. I do want to work towards it, I think it would be extremely difficult to do a course like this with a lot of hard work and I would have to be very patient.

Concerns and worries for the future

Aside from young people's concerns about whether they would achieve their qualifications and obtain employment, they also talked about other less concrete anxieties, including growing old dying, or simply going off the rails:

Catrin 15yrs: I want to have my own like independence, but I don't want to grow old...I really don't want to die or grow old.

Meredith 13yrs: I'm scared...just in case we die in 2012.

Catrin 15yrs: We're not going to die, because why would they do the Olympics if we're going to die?

Mari 15yrs: You don't know what's going to happen to you, We had a death in the family.

Gwen 19yrs: I'm scared just because I drink on the weekend and don't wake up in the morning, choke on your sick...like Billy off Eastenders...becoming an alcoholic.

Mari 15yrs: Hanging round with the wrong crowd.

Catrin 15yrs: Not getting good like qualifications in school.

Parents of young children worried primarily for their children's wellbeing. These worries covered a range of issues, many of which, including bullying, were identified as an issue for children and young people across the whole sample:

Eleri 23yrs (children 2&5yrs): My worst fear is my kids growing up to be the bully.

Laura 25yrs (children 4, 6&8yrs): The kids being bullied, that is my worst fear.

Bethan 25yrs (children 1&4yrs): Mix with the wrong crowd and everything, basically. It's easy enough. Wherever you live there is probably the same problems going on. It can happen anywhere basically, that is my main worry.

Vivienne 30yrs (children 1, 3&14yrs): That they will get sucked into all the bad behaviour.

Anita 37yrs (children 2&5): The different culture we have, the easy access of drugs these days and giving in to peer pressure, that is something that does worry me. I have noticed the change from when I was younger I know how I was as a teenager and I wasn't the norm in that most children will bow down to peer pressure. I know how easy it is with drugs in school. The thing is there is an Americanisation of our society and I think what is happening there now will be how we will be in 10 years, with weapons in school. I just think it is a quite frightening place when you think of the future. You think of your kids...mind you we will be old then, it will be worse for us!

6 Concluding Comments

The study focused on the perceptions of wellbeing among a sample of 82 children, young people and parents of young children from across Wales. While the study size was small, there was agreement by children and young people irrespective of age, about key contributors to their wellbeing.

In particular, most children and young people, taking part in the study, valued relationships with others over more materialistic concerns. They were also concerned that people should be treated in the way that they liked to be treated themselves, and in valuing the diverse experiences of those from different cultures and backgrounds to themselves, children and young people appeared generally inclusive. At the same time, a sense of identity and belonging was very important to the young people who took part in this study, but irrespective of whether or not they saw themselves as Welsh or English, they generally distanced themselves from extreme nationalistic beliefs and practices.

Psychological wellbeing was highlighted as very important by young people. In particular, young people talked about school as a source of stress on two accounts. The first of these was bullying, which was identified as a concern by many young people and parents. Here, young people felt that adults often did not grasp the extent, or the seriousness, of the problem because it was perceived as less of a problem for adults when they were young. While it is noted, that similar to the findings of the All Wales Survey of Bullying in Schools (Welsh Assembly Government, 2009), bullying appeared to decline with maturity, it is noted that bullying did have severe implications for children and young people's psychological wellbeing, and other outcomes, in some cases.

The perception of being misunderstood by adults was part of a wider issue reported by young people. That is, adults were generally portrayed as filtering out problems reported to them by young people, according to adult perceptions of importance, which were not necessarily accurate. Moreover, many young people felt that adult concerns, and indeed adults themselves, were prioritised over young people and their issues and concerns, and that generally young people were listened to and were valued less than adults.

The second key stressor associated with school was the imperative of succeeding in education. Here many young people felt under enormous pressure to do well, at the same time realising that in the current economic crisis, getting good grades would not necessarily secure them employment. The importance attached to finding employment was linked in young people's accounts with the imperative of providing education that was 'fit for purpose' and which would supply them with requisite skills, including life skills such as financial management. Many young people were skeptical about University, claiming that it could not guarantee them future employment, while at the same time anticipating it would burden them with considerable debt.

Both these findings about bullying and pressure to succeed, support findings from a European-wide study funded by the European Commission which explored the topic of children's rights (European Commission, 2010). These included the perception of young people in the European study that they were under great pressure to succeed, and that they would like adults who are close to children to listen to them more carefully and look out for threats to their rights.

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