The Nest consultation

Findings from consultation with children, young people, parents and other adults conducted between March and September 2012

Prepared by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY)
November 2012
Abstract

The Nest consultation with children, young people, and the community is a cornerstone of The Nest: a national plan for child and youth wellbeing. The consultation was facilitated by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), in collaboration with 150 consultation partners, and the support of principal partner, Bupa Health Foundation.

The consultation process aimed to ground the national plan in the views of children and young people so that policies, practices and programs match their aspirations and personal goals. In doing so, it explored three main themes:

1. What is perceived to be vital for child and youth wellbeing
2. How Australia is perceived to be faring, and
3. Where we are heading in the future.

A range of different methods were used to engage people in the consultation, including an online survey, face-to-face activities, and school lesson plans. Nationwide, over 3,700 participants (children, young people, and adults) took part in the consultation between March and September 2012. The majority of these responses were from the online survey (around 3,100 responses). ARACY and its consultation partners also conducted face to face consultation with over 500 children, young people and their parents in communities throughout Australia.

Almost one half of survey responses (46%) were received from children and young people (aged 24 years or less), with three in 10 (30%) provided by those aged 17 or under. Geographic representation was quite typical of the overall population distribution across states and territories. The metropolitan/non-metropolitan comparison rate also reflected the national demographic profile.

The consultation took a positive and constructive perspective with participants identifying and describing what a ‘good life’ meant to them. Over three-quarters (78%) of children and young people, and almost nine in 10 (88%) adults, indicated through the survey that being ‘loved and valued’ is one of the top three aspects of wellbeing. This was followed by ‘being healthy’, ‘being safe’, and ‘being able to learn and develop.

While the majority of participants thought that life for children and young people in Australia is ‘good’ or ‘very good’, three in ten children and young people, and more than four in ten adults considered that life was ‘okay’, ‘bad, or ‘very bad’. Factors that influenced this view included parents not having enough time, concerns about public and personal safety (including, for young people particularly, bullying), increased pressure on children and young people to achieve, conform and ‘fit in’, and perceived declines in health and economic prosperity and opportunity.

This consultation report demonstrates the strength of drawing together the voices of children and young people to co-design a national action plan for child and youth wellbeing so that policies, practices and programs match their aspirations and expectations – and their contribution now will count in shaping their own future.
Acknowledgments

The consultation component of The Nest project has been enabled by the contributions of a number of individuals and organisations, to whom ARACY expresses its sincere thanks. The time and ideas of every person who participated in the consultation, by completing a survey or joining in a face to face activity, is greatly valued and appreciated.

The project has been fully funded from philanthropic support:

- Bupa Health Foundation, principal funding partner
- Ian William Dodd Charitable Trust and the Estate of the Late James Simpson Love (both managed by Perpetual Foundation)
- Sabemo Trust
- The Caledonia Foundation

ARACY thanks each member of the Steering Committee and the Expert Reference Group for their many contributions to enable the consultation.

Over 150 consultation partners helped with developing materials, circulating information, promoting the online survey, recruiting participants and/or conducting face to face activities, and providing feedback on the project.

The Youth Ambassadors continue to be a critical part of the success of The Nest. Thanks to Arif Nabizada, Dan Ryan, Lia Ursich, Peta MacGillvaray and Sarah Thomas.

We are also grateful to the work of ARACY staff in supporting, developing and managing the consultation, particularly Joseph Falzone, Rebecca Rohan-Jones, Rachael Wilken, Neil Stafford, Annemarie Ashton, Tiffany Bonasera and Rhonda Zappelli.
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Summary of key consultation findings
The Nest is an independent project designed to improve the health, wellbeing and life opportunities of all children and young people in Australia by developing a national plan for coordinated action and setting future priorities. An open and inclusive national consultation contributes to the development of strategy around an action plan grounded in the views and experiences of children and young people, and the communities around them.

This consultation, facilitated by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) in conjunction with partners across the Australian community, focuses on three core perspectives:

- what people believe is important for wellbeing
- what the current situation is like, and
- where they see things heading.

Consultation activities include an online survey, with over 3,000 respondents (almost half of whom were 24 or under), and face-to-face discussions and activities directly with over 500 children and young people across Australia.

What is important for children and young people?

Participants consider a number of main themes and areas as being important for a ‘good life’. These are summarised in the following figure, which also depicts their relevant prevalence (i.e. the larger segments and boxes in the diagram were more frequently raised as being important).

Figure 1: Areas and themes contributing to a good life

Overall, the theme of children and young people being ‘loved and valued’ is considered the most important aspect for contributing to a good life. In The Nest survey over three-quarters
(78%) of children and young people and almost nine in ten (88%) adults indicate this to be one of the top three important aspects to wellbeing. Around one half of all respondents indicate ‘being healthy’, ‘being safe’ and ‘being able to learn and develop’ as one of the most important things, with children and young people placing more emphasis on the importance of health than adults. One quarter consider ‘achieving material basics’ as important, and less than two in ten indicate ‘being able to have a say’ and ‘being a part of the community’ as one of the most important factors.

**What does wellbeing look like?**

To further understand wellbeing and how this manifests for people, the consultation asks participants to articulate in their own words what seven different pre-defined aspects of wellbeing ‘look like’. The main elements expressed in relation to each aspect are outlined in the table below:

**Table 1: Key descriptors of different aspects of wellbeing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KRA</th>
<th>Aspect of wellbeing</th>
<th>Key descriptors of what this ‘looks like’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|     | Being loved and valued | - Having loving, trusting, unconditional relationships with family and friends  
|     |                     | - Being accepted for who you are, being listened to and respected  
|     |                     | - Having support networks and someone to turn to  
|     |                     | - Being taken care of, nurtured and provided with security  |
|     | Being safe | - Being with family, people who love you and you can trust  
|     |           | - Being free from harm, abuse, conflict, and free from the fear of harm  
|     |           | - Being responsible and making safe decisions  
|     |           | - Being cared for and provided with basic human rights  |
|     | Being healthy | - Eating well and nutritiously  
|     |           | - Being physically active, involved in exercise  
|     |           | - Having a good state of mind and being happy  
|     |           | - Being in a healthy environment where you are loved and supported  
|     |           | - Having a balanced life (work, study, fun)  |
|     | Learning and developing | - Having access to and participating in formal education  
|     |           | - Having freedom to learn and find things out for yourself  
|     |           | - Being able to see new things, experiences and surroundings  
|     |           | - Engaging and interacting with others  |
|     | Having a say | - Being able to have a say in things that affect you  
|     |           | - Having the confidence to speak out and express oneself  
|     |           | - Being listened to and taken seriously  
|     |           | - Having opportunities – e.g. forums – to express views  |
|     | Being part of a community | - Getting involved and contributing to communal events and activities  
|     |           | - Being connected and able to socialise with others  
|     |           | - Being supported by the community around you  
|     |           | - Having a ‘sense of belonging’  |
|     | Achieving material basics | - Food and water  
|     |           | - Housing and shelter which is safe and secure  
|     |           | - Access to education  
|     |           | - Health and sanitation  
|     |           | - Clothing, toys for play, and access to computers  |
How are we perceived to be faring?

Overall, the majority of participants believe that life for children and young people in Australia is ‘good’ or ‘very good’. Children and young people are more likely than adults to consider this the case (67% in the survey saying ‘good’ or ‘very good’, compared with 53% of adults). In contrast, adults are more likely to consider that life was ‘okay’, ‘bad’ or ‘very bad’ for children and young people (44% indicating this), compared to children and young people themselves (30%).

A range of responses underpin why respondents believe life to be good, okay, or bad. The main perceptions are summarised below:

Table 2: Why life is considered good/okay/bad for children and young people in Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good / Very good</th>
<th>Okay</th>
<th>Bad / Very bad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Access to services (e.g. health, education)</td>
<td>- Inequity and gaps in wellbeing</td>
<td>- Parenting issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Opportunities available to children and young people</td>
<td>- Parenting issues</td>
<td>- Tough economic conditions and lack of opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Australia compares well to other countries</td>
<td>- Safety concerns and fear, crime, and bullying</td>
<td>- Safety concerns and fear, crime, and bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Have the basics in place (food, shelter etc)</td>
<td>- Pressure on children, growing up too fast</td>
<td>- Lack of respect, responsibility and discipline of children and young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Support and a ‘safety net’ provided</td>
<td>- Health issues faced by children and young people</td>
<td>- Pressure on children, growing up too fast</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those who consider life to be ‘good’ or ‘very good’ tend to focus on areas of provision and support structures in place in Australia. They often compare Australia positively with other countries. People who believe that life is ‘okay’ also frequently note that many children and young people in Australia are supported and provided for, but there are notable gaps and levels of inequity, whereby some children and young people do not fare well at all.

Other issues raised by those who think that life is ‘okay’, ‘bad’ or ‘very bad’ include challenges for parents (such as time) and observations of bad parenting practices, concerns about public and personal safety (including, for young people particularly, bullying), increased pressure on children and young people to achieve, conform and ‘fit in’, and perceived declines in health and economic prosperity and opportunity.

In terms of examining specific aspects of wellbeing, again, children and young people were more optimistic than adults in terms of believing these to be faring well, and that they would be better in five years time. Areas deemed to be performing the best are ‘learning and developing’ and ‘achieving material basics’, whereas aspects of participation and contribution (‘having a say’ and ‘part of community’) are the least well regarded aspects of wellbeing in terms of current performance.
Where to and how?

The Nest survey allowed participants to indicate how important they consider an aspect of wellbeing to be (‘importance’) and how they felt it was currently faring (‘performance’). Mapping the two together provides an opportunity to identify perceived priorities (i.e. those features that are relatively important but not faring well), as well as areas to monitor, maintain or capitalise on, depending how well they are faring and how important they are perceived to be.

Essentially this shows that the area of ‘being loved and valued’ is considered a priority, in that it is thought to be the most important aspect to wellbeing and is performing fairly averagely. ‘Being safe’ is also tending towards being a priority, suggesting that some aspects of safety require more attention than others. For children and young people, ‘being healthy’ is also a priority issue as it is given fairly high importance but has relatively lower performance.

In terms of taking future action on the wellbeing of children and young people, participants tend to indicate responsibility for this is shared widely and relies on multiple factors coming together. These factors include parents, educational institutions, all levels of government and community groups and organisations. Many ideas and suggestions are raised by participants about the types of things that could be done, with the main issues and themes depicted in the figure below (note: font size is indicative of relative response frequency).

Figure 2: Issues and ideas to address

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROVISION AND SUPPORT</th>
<th>HEALTH IMPROVEMENTS</th>
<th>BETTER EDUCATION</th>
<th>PARTICIPATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More support, resources &amp; services</td>
<td>Improve physical &amp; mental health</td>
<td>Improve education standards and</td>
<td>Greater freedom &amp; opportunities to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for those in need</td>
<td>More involvement in sport &amp; exercise</td>
<td>consistency</td>
<td>develop self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better funding, programs &amp; policies</td>
<td>Engage in fun and play</td>
<td>Help with cost of further education</td>
<td>Be given a voice in community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower cost of living / affordability</td>
<td>Reduce access to technology, TV etc</td>
<td>Accessibility to subjects &amp; courses</td>
<td>development and decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teach self esteem, how to value oneself</td>
<td></td>
<td>Provision &amp; involvement in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>community groups / facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self discipline and regulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARENTING</td>
<td>SAFETY AND SECURITY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to spend more time with</td>
<td>Address public safety concerns through</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children</td>
<td>prevention &amp; protection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental education &amp; information</td>
<td>Increased focus and seriousness on</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community engagement in welfare</td>
<td>tackling bullying</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrations of love &amp; understanding</td>
<td>‘Alternatives’ to drugs, alcohol, antisocial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>behaviour – places to go</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While there are many similarities in issues and ideas expressed by children and young people when compared to adults, greater emphasis was placed on aspects of participation by children and young people. This included having a say in decisions and feeling part of a community. In fact, while many issues and themes were raised on a nationwide basis, solutions often focused on a local, community level, and children and young people wanted to be part of these solutions on an ongoing basis. This response underlines the importance of the input of children and young people into a national action plan, and should be a focus when considering the approaches and strategies that are developed and taken forward as a result.
1. Background and approach
1.1 About The Nest

*The Nest* is an independent project designed to improve the health, wellbeing and life opportunities of all young Australians (0–24 years) by developing a national plan for coordinated action. Launched on 28 February 2012, *The Nest* seeks to provide a practical response to evidence and opinion that Australia could be doing more to advance the wellbeing of children and young people.

Overseen by a steering committee of experts in the youth and wellbeing fields, the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) has three key streams of work for *The Nest*:

i. A review of existing evidence, undertaken with KPMG, to highlight what works to improve outcomes for children and young people, and establish clear measures so Australia can see how it is doing over time.

ii. A national consultation, facilitated by ARACY in conjunction with consultation partners, inviting all Australians to have their say on what matters most to them, along with their needs and priorities for the wellbeing of children and young people.

iii. Communication activities to promote and build *The Nest*, including a dedicated website and social media pages, publicity materials, and media coverage.

Further information about the project is available on *The Nest* website: [www.thenestproject.org.au](http://www.thenestproject.org.au).

1.2 Consultation aims and objectives

The purpose of *The Nest* consultation is to ensure a national action plan is developed which is grounded in the views and experiences of children and young people, and the communities around them. This is enabled by an open and inclusive consultation process which allows participants to identify the things that are important to them and what they feel is needed for the future wellbeing of children and young people.

1.2.1 A guiding framework

The consultation design is guided by a Results-Based Accountability (RBA) framework. Used widely in a public policy setting, RBA applies an outcomes-based approach to improve quality of life in communities, cities, countries, states and nations.\(^1\) Essentially RBA takes an ‘outcomes first’ process, starting with ends (i.e. the outcomes or ‘population measures’ we want to see) and working backwards, step by step, to identify the most appropriate means (how we get there).

This logic shapes the consultation questions and themes, with approaches used to explore what outcomes people would like for children and young people (results), what these results look like (experience, indicators), how we are currently faring and perceived to be heading (baselines), and how we get to where we want to be (what works, who is involved in making this work, what other criteria do we need to consider).

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1.2.2  Examining Key Result Areas

Adding to the RBA framework, a number of Key Result Areas (KRAs) are explored through the consultation. These KRAs were established under the Change for Children initiative in 2010, a precursor to The Nest which was informed by the Every Child Matters work from the United Kingdom. A principal consideration of the KRAs is the context of the outcomes that people would like to see for children and young people in Australia (i.e. the results).

The KRAs used in the consultation are:

- Children and young people are loved and valued
- Children and young people are healthy
- Children and young people are safe and supported
- Children and young people are able to learn and develop
- Children and young people are able to have a say
- Children and young people are part of a community, and
- Children and young people are achieving material basics.

The KRAs are based on a positive model of the desired outcomes to be achieved. However, in some cases existing indicators and measures may be more focused on a deficit model or gap measurement. Analysis of the data from The Nest consultation indicates that participants are considering both positive and negative factors when evaluating the health and wellbeing of children and young people. Therefore, ways to measure both deficits and merits may be an important factor in progressing towards achievement of each KRA.

These KRAs were tested during the preliminary consultation process and form the basis of many consultation activities and tools. They also provide a structure for the analysis in this report.

1.3  Consultation activities

The Nest consultation is designed to be open and accessible for anyone who wishes to contribute to the discussion on child and youth wellbeing. In this sense it differs from a structured research study, with no ‘set targets’ or limitations in place for sample and methods. The focus of the design is on providing multiple opportunities and access points for anyone to be able to provide their input. This is supported via three main pathways:

1.3.1  The Nest survey

A core online survey, developed by ARACY, collects a combination of quantitative data and qualitative verbatim responses about child and youth wellbeing.

The survey was run:

- On The Nest website, open to anyone aged 6 or over to complete from 28 February 2012. Links to the survey were promoted to youth and community sector organisations, schools and tertiary institutions, government departments, and the public via media and social media.
• Through a promotion on *Student Edge*, a membership based website (with over 500,000 members) offering services and promotions to young people across Australia. The survey was open for any member aged 6 or over to complete between 13 June and 5 August 2012.

• As part of the *Australian Attitudes to Young People Survey*, carried out by ARACY and the Australian National Development Index (ANDI), with the support of Bupa Health Foundation. The survey included several (but not all) questions from the core *Nest* survey and was carried out in May 2012 with a representative sample of 1,000 Australians aged 18+.

In total, 3122 respondents took part in the survey through the channels outlined above up to and including 5 August 2012. The respondent group is comprised as follows:

**Table 3: The Nest survey statistics (1)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The Nest website (n)</th>
<th>Student Edge (n)</th>
<th>Australian Attitudes to Young People (n)</th>
<th>TOTAL (n)</th>
<th>TOTAL (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>963</td>
<td>1159</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>3122</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>1115</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>805</td>
<td>681</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 – 24 years</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>1086</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>1445</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 years +</td>
<td>692</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>912</td>
<td>1677</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>1036</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>887</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro</td>
<td>718</td>
<td>730</td>
<td>607</td>
<td>2055</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-metro</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>1067</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The consultation is intentionally open and the surveys as a whole are not designed to deliberately achieve a representative sample; however, the responses received are near to the national population profile. The respondent group reflects a broad spread by gender, age and across geographic location. Almost one half of survey responses (46%) were received from children and young people (aged 24 years or less), with three in ten (30%) provided by those aged 17 or under. Geographic representation appears to fairly closely reflect the overall population distribution in Australia, across state and territories. The metropolitan/non-metropolitan comparison rate also reflects the national demographic profile.

As noted in Table 4 below, the survey engages specific cohorts of the population. Around one in five respondents are born overseas and/or from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background, and two per cent identify as being of Aboriginal or of Torres Strait Islander descent. Approximately
six per cent of respondents have a disability. Over one quarter (27%) of survey respondents were parents of children aged 18 or under. Seven per cent of respondents report being a carer of children who are or are not related to them.

Given the profile of *The Nest* and the active engagement of the community and youth sectors, a high percentage of both paid and voluntary sector workers were expected within the respondent group. Approximately three in ten (30%) survey respondents indicated that their work involved working with, or in relation to, children and young people.

**Table 4: The Nest survey statistics (2)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The Nest website (n)</th>
<th>Student Edge (n)</th>
<th>Australian Attitudes to Young People (n)</th>
<th>TOTAL (n)</th>
<th>TOTAL (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal &amp; Torres Strait Islander*</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born overseas</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>605</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALD</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With disability</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents (total)</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>634</td>
<td>1189</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents of children aged 18 or less</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>856</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carer of children</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in youth sector</td>
<td>606</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>926</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: A customised survey has been designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and remains open at time of analysis. A separate summary of findings from this survey will be subsequently produced.*

1.3.2 Partner-facilitated consultation

*The Nest* sought to engage the support of consultation partners to undertake activities with people in their area. Approximately 150 partners expressed interest in supporting *The Nest* consultation. Many organisations supported the consultation by promoting *The Nest* survey via established networks, to client groups or in their local area. Others provided support for children and young people to complete the online survey, such as making a computer and internet connection available.

A number of organisations conducted face to face consultation activities utilising a resource tool-kit produced by ARACY. This toolkit offers a series of activities and supporting materials to enable consultation with children, young people and adults. These were based around survey completion, qualitative discussion groups, role play exercises, and creative activities.

Similar materials were adapted for schools to use as lesson plans, tailored to the age cohort of students involved. It is anticipated that the resources will continue to provide organisations with materials to continue to engage with children, young people and the community beyond this specific period of consultation for *The Nest*. Several organisations have expressed an interest in using and adapting the materials for ongoing consultation in their area.
Partners who directly facilitated activities include:

Table 5: Face-to-face activities undertaken by *The Nest* consultation partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Approx no of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Churchill Central Pre-school</td>
<td>La Trobe, VIC</td>
<td>Group discussion and creative activities with children aged 5 &amp; under</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaf Children Australia</td>
<td>Melbourne, VIC</td>
<td>Group discussions and creative activities with children who are deaf or hearing impaired aged 12-17yrs</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Beginnings</td>
<td>Katherine, NT</td>
<td>Creative activities for children aged 4-12yrs</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Beginnings</td>
<td>Palmerston, NT</td>
<td>Creative activities for children aged 9-11yrs</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Beginnings</td>
<td>Ryde, NSW</td>
<td>Creative activities for children aged 5 &amp; under</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Beginnings</td>
<td>Western Sydney, NSW</td>
<td>Creative activities for children aged 6 &amp; under (assisted by 3 parents)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Beginnings</td>
<td>Townsville, QLD</td>
<td>Creative activities for children aged 5 &amp; under (assisted by 3 parents)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Beginnings</td>
<td>Brighton, TAS</td>
<td>Creative activities for children aged 5-6yrs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Beginnings</td>
<td>Hobart, TAS</td>
<td>Creative activities for children aged 5 &amp; under</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Beginnings</td>
<td>La Trobe, VIC</td>
<td>Creative activities for children aged 3-5yrs (assisted by 9 parents)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Beginnings</td>
<td>Hakea, WA</td>
<td>Creative activities for children aged 11 &amp; under</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestart</td>
<td>Eastwood, NSW</td>
<td>Group discussion with persons aged 25 &amp; over who are parents of children with special needs</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestart</td>
<td>Pennant Hills, NSW</td>
<td>Group discussion with persons aged 25 &amp; over who are parents of children with disability</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murray Road Pre-school</td>
<td>La Trobe, VIC</td>
<td>Group discussion, role play, creative activities and storytelling with children aged 5 &amp; under</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensational Kids</td>
<td>Melbourne, VIC</td>
<td>Creative activities with child with disability aged 6-11 yrs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southside Education</td>
<td>Brisbane, QLD</td>
<td>Group discussions and creative activities over an eight week period with young people aged 12-17 yrs</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yallourn North Kindergarten</td>
<td>La Trobe, VIC</td>
<td>Creative activity with children aged 5 &amp; under</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.3.3 ARACY-led activities

Members of The Nest team at ARACY worked in liaison with several organisations to carry out consultation activities directly with children and young people. These principally involve group discussions about aspects of wellbeing, issues they face, and solutions, using activities developed in The Nest consultation toolkit. The following table summarises this activity:

**Table 6: Face-to-face activities undertaken by ARACY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Approx no of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dec 2011</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>3 day online forum with young people 18-24yrs</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 2012</td>
<td>Canberra ACT</td>
<td>90 minute discussion with local students 18-21yrs</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2012</td>
<td>Brisbane QLD</td>
<td>One hour discussion with young women (including 1-2 young parents) at Southside Education</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2012</td>
<td>Melbourne VIC</td>
<td>Engagement with young people (16-24 yrs) at UN Youth Social Justice Fair</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2012</td>
<td>Wynyard TAS</td>
<td>One hour forum with young people from three towns at Waratah-Wynyard Council</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2012</td>
<td>Hobart TAS</td>
<td>Five 20-30 minute sessions, each with 4-5 Year 9 and 10 students at Geilston Bay High School</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2012</td>
<td>Hobart TAS</td>
<td>One hour discussion with young people aged 13-19yrs at Glenorchy Youth Taskforce meeting</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2012</td>
<td>Sydney NSW</td>
<td>Two 90 minute discussions each with NSW Student Representative Council leaders (Year 10 / 11) from across the state</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2012</td>
<td>Shellharbour NSW</td>
<td>Three 30 minute discussions with high school students at Lake Illawarra High School</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2012</td>
<td>Shellharbour NSW</td>
<td>Short discussions and feedback from young people at local skate parks and community centres</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2012</td>
<td>Shellharbour NSW</td>
<td>Short discussions and feedback from young people at local shopping mall</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2012</td>
<td>Shellharbour NSW</td>
<td>Drawing activities with children at preschool and local park and play activity</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Nest project actively engages organisations and communities via social media, including Facebook, Twitter, and via a regular blog on The Nest website. These channels provide opportunity for people to contribute views and follow other articles. It also links to news features on topics of child and youth wellbeing. As at the end of July 2012, The Nest has approximately 350 followers on Twitter and over 200 Facebook ‘likes’.
1.4 Interpreting the findings

The findings in this report are based on feedback submitted by people across Australia via The Nest survey and face-to-face consultation exercises. While a large number of participants contributed to the consultation through the range of activities provided, the findings are not necessarily representative of the Australian population as a whole. However, as noted in the previous section, the consultation included engagement with both children and young people and adults, across states and locations, and included contribution from diverse subgroups of the population. The results therefore provide a robust picture of people’s views and experiences across Australia.

This report includes data from The Nest survey, chiefly broken down by results for children and young people and adults. For the purposes of this report, the term ‘children and young people’ includes anyone aged between 0 – 24 years\(^2\), while ‘adults’ refers to those respondents aged 25 years or more. The data is, unless otherwise stated, shown as a proportion (%) of the population group (e.g. '50% of adults said...'). In some cases, all responses for any one question will not necessarily add up to 100% due to rounding and/or multiple responses being allowed from a survey respondent (i.e. they could pick more than one response option).

Where notable or significant differences exist in survey data between different groups of the population these are noted in the body of the report (e.g. 'males are more likely than females to report...'). Differences were tested for significance using a standard two-tailed test of significance (a ‘z-test’) at the 95% confidence level.

Feedback from face-to-face consultation activities is incorporated throughout the report, identifying and adding weight to key themes and issues that emerged. Comments and materials were reviewed and analysed, including verbatim comments from the survey, and grouped into common 'like' themes. Illustrative verbatims and materials are shown throughout the report to support the findings.

The consultation includes children of all ages. Activities and materials were adapted by consultation partners and ARACY to be appropriate to age. Responses therefore inevitably reflect the developmental stage of the individual child.

\(^2\) This is aligned to the development of a national action plan for children and young people aged 0 – 24 years

The Nest consultation report
2. What is important for children and young people?
In order to shape the development of a national action plan for children and young people, the consultation sought to establish and examine the key factors that are perceived to be vital so that children and young people can have a ‘good life’. Therefore, spontaneous, unprompted responses and feedback was gathered relating to the **things that people consider important for wellbeing** in Section 2.2. Further, an **assessment of the relative importance** of different aspects of wellbeing was made through the survey (Section 2.3). Each of these aspects is subsequently explored in terms of ‘**what they mean**’ to people and how they manifest in real life (Section 2.4).

### 2.1 Concepts of wellbeing

The concept of wellbeing used in *The Nest* project contains a number of dimensions, including health; personal relationships; safety; quality of life; economic security or stability; opportunities to learn and achieve, inclusion and participation. This concept, within an Australian context, is informed by a number of authoritative research reports, as listed below:

**Table 7: Acknowledgement of key resource material**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisational Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Report Name</th>
<th>Link</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
2.2 What makes for a ‘good life’?

Throughout the consultation, participants were asked to spontaneously identify the things that they consider to be important in contributing to a good life for children and young people. Their responses broadly reflect the ‘key result areas’, though there was considerable overlap and subjective interpretation of exactly how aspects of wellbeing relate to the pre-defined KRAs.

The major aspects considered to make for a good life are summarised in the following figure, which also depicts the relative prevalence of themes that emerged in all consultation, including verbatim responses in *The Nest* online survey.

**Figure 3: Areas and themes contributing to a good life**

Detailed examination and discussion of these themes and what they mean to participants is provided in Section 2.4. Before that, we look at further survey findings which examine the perceived relative importance of these features.
2.3 Which areas are most important?

Participants in The Nest survey were presented with seven pre-defined aspects of wellbeing and asked to record which one they feel is most important, second most important and third most important. The cumulative proportion of survey respondents rating each aspect as important (i.e. first + second + third), is illustrated in figure 4 below.

Figure 4: What is important for children and young people to have a good life? (Total mentions)

As with the spontaneous feedback, the theme of children and young people being ‘loved and valued’ is considered the most important aspect for their wellbeing. Almost eight in ten (78%) children and young people and nine in ten (88%) adults rank this theme as the most, second most or third most important aspect. Related to this, ‘being safe’ also features prominently (46% of children and young people and 55% of adults rating this as important). Similar levels are recorded for ‘being healthy’ (55% and 45%) and ‘being able to learn and develop’ (46% and 51%).
There are lower proportions who consider ‘being able to have a say’, ‘being part of a community’, and ‘having material basics’ as being an important consideration. This lower priority may be a reflection of existing standards of living and systems supporting democratic participation in Australia. Some participants in the consultation also make comment to the effect that they consider access to ‘material basics’ available for most people in Australia, therefore they do not consider it as an unmet need or priority area for attention.

Adult respondents place significantly higher importance than children and young people on being ‘loved and valued’, ‘being safe’ and ‘being able to learn and develop’. By contrast, children and young people are more likely than adults to record ‘being healthy’, ‘participating in the community’ and ‘being able to have a say’ as important factors for a good life. Yet, overall the general ranking of factors from most important to least important was similar between the two groups.

Other notable differences can be observed among respondents. Females are more likely than males to consider being ‘loved and valued’, ‘safe’, and ‘achieving material basics’ as important issues. This same pattern is evident for carers compared to non-carers, parents to non-parents, and those involved with children and young people (i.e. working with, involved in the community/youth sector etc) compared to those not involved in the sector. Male respondents place greater emphasis than females on ‘learning and developing’ and the contribution and participation aspects of ‘having a say’ and ‘being part of a community’.

Contribution and participation appears to be of greater importance for those who may face additional social or structural barriers to participation. Respondents living in regional areas, people with disabilities, Indigenous respondents, and respondents from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background are all more likely to rate ‘having a say’ as important. Respondents from a CALD background are also more likely to rate ‘being part of a community’ as important.

There were relatively few differences in the level of importance placed on these aspects across different geographical regions of Australia. One notable exception is respondents from the Northern Territory, who are significantly more likely than those in many other states and territories to report ‘being safe’ as an important feature of wellbeing.
2.3.1 What’s most important among children and young people?

The breakdown of responses from children and young people is shown in the following figure, with almost one half (46%) indicating that ‘being loved and valued’ is the most important aspect contributing to a good life. Around one in ten feel that being healthy (13%), being able to learn and develop (12%) and being safe (8%) are the most important factors.

**Figure 5: What is important for children and young people to have a good life? (Responses from children and young people)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is Important</th>
<th>Most Important</th>
<th>2nd most important</th>
<th>3rd most important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being loved &amp; valued</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being healthy</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being safe</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to learn &amp; develop</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to have a say about things that affect them</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being part of a community</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having the material basics they need</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q2. Other people have said the following things are important for a good life. We know that all are important, but we would like to know what you think...

(a) In your opinion, which is the most important for making a good life?
(b) And what is next most important for making a good life?
(c) And what is next most important for making a good life?

Base: All children and young people 0-24 (n=1445)

There are a few variations across different age groups of survey participants in terms of the overall level of importance of these factors. Young people aged 18 – 24 years are more likely to note ‘being loved and valued’ and ‘achieving material basics’ as important. Respondents aged between 11 – 17 years place greater emphasis on ‘being able to have a say’. This sentiment is supported by comments in face-to-face consultation activities, and encompasses a sense of disengagement in decision-making and cynicism over the extent to which they are ‘being heard’:

"Adults in general listen to kids when they’re little, but once teenagers provide their own opinions and stand up for themselves, the adults use all they have to prove us wrong."

High school participant, NSW consultation

Qualitative responses from younger children in face to face activities reflect the developmental stage of the child. Children aged 5 and under mostly have a concrete focus that is egocentric, i.e. centred
on self, home and family. Examples of what is important to them include parents, family, pets, special toys and blankets, places and friends to play with, things they have made or activities they had done. Many children also cite things from nature as being important to them and making them happy, such as ponies, rainbows, flowers or turtles.

“I painted an egg. I had a baby chicken I made too. It makes me happy because I made it.”

Pre-schooler, VIC consultation

2.3.2 What’s most important among adults?

Among adults, again, being loved and valued is prominent, and more so than among children and young people. Just over six in ten adults (62%) consider being loved and valued to be the most important aspect contributing to a good life for children and young people (compared with 46% of young people saying this was the case). Around one in ten adults also believe that being able to learn and develop (11%) and being safe (9%) are the most important aspects for wellbeing.

Figure 6: What is important for children and young people to have a good life? (Adults)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>1st Most Important</th>
<th>2nd Most Important</th>
<th>3rd Most Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being loved &amp; valued</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being healthy</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being safe</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to learn &amp; develop</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to have a say about things that affect them</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being part of a community</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having the material basics they need</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q2. Other people have said the following things are important for a good life. We know that all are important, but we would like to know what you think...
(a) In your opinion, which is the most important for making a good life?
(b) And what is next most important for making a good life?
(c) And what is next most important for making a good life?
Base: All adults 25+ (n=1677)

It should be noted that while the survey results provide an indication of relative importance of features, in the extent they are considered to contribute to a good life, it does not mean any are unimportant. Respondents were asked to effectively choose their 'top three' during face-to-face
consultation activities it became clear that many different things were considered to contribute to wellbeing. These different factors are often interrelated and cumulative in their nature and effect.

2.4 What do aspects of wellbeing look like?

To further understand wellbeing and how this manifests for individuals, participants in the survey and other consultation activities were asked to articulate in their own words what the seven different pre-defined aspects of wellbeing ‘looked like’. The main elements expressed in relation to each aspect are outlined in the table below:

Table 7: Key descriptors of different aspects of wellbeing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KRA</th>
<th>Aspect of wellbeing</th>
<th>Key descriptors of what this ‘looks like’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being loved and valued</td>
<td>Having loving, trusting, unconditional relationships with family and friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being accepted for who you are, listened to, and respected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Having support networks and someone to turn to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being taken care of, nurtured and provided with security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being safe</td>
<td>Being with family, people who love you and you can trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being free from harm, abuse, conflict, and free from the fear of harm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being responsible and making safe decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being cared for and provided with basic rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being healthy</td>
<td>Eating well and nutritiously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being physically active, involved in exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Having a good state of mind and being happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being in a healthy environment where you are loved and supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Having a balanced life (work, study, fun)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning and developing</td>
<td>Having access to and participating in formal education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Having freedom to learn and find things out for yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being able to see new things, experiences and surroundings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Engaging and interacting with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Having a say</td>
<td>Being able to have a say in things that affect you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Having the confidence to speak out and express oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being listened to and taken seriously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Having opportunities – e.g. forums – to express views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being part of a community</td>
<td>Getting involved and contributing to communal events and activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being connected and able to socialise with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being supported by the community around you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Having a ‘sense of belonging’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Achieving material basics</td>
<td>Food and water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Housing and shelter which is safe and secure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Access to education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Health and sanitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Basic goods, such as toys, clothes, computers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further examination of these themes, and the language participants use to describe what is important for a good life, follows below.
2.4.1 Being loved and valued

The connections and relationships that people have with one another, in various forms, are considered of primary importance for a good life and a key feature of ‘being loved and valued’. While immediate family relationships (parents and siblings) are undoubtedly felt to be important, many participants indicate that other relationships could be as or more important – such as grandparents, friends and peers. In essence, this is ‘being surrounded by loved ones’ who provide children and young people with relationships that are unconditional.

Friendships are frequently mentioned by young people in particular as something vital to their wellbeing. While it is acknowledged that peer relationships can be sources of angst and conflict, they are also viewed as essential. They serve multiple purposes: offering a source of mutual support, fun, happiness, social interaction and engagement, and helping to build self-development and relationship skills.

“All you need is just one friend. At least one good friend.”
Youth participant, Tasmania consultation

The strength of relationships in a young person’s life are considered to foster an environment of nurture, safety and support – these words are used often in describing what it meant to be ‘loved and valued’. Elements of care and nurture are linked by respondents more to family and the family home environment – being looked after, looked out for, supported and encouraged to grow and develop as an individual. Issues of safety and support are seen to relate to contact with a wider network, of friends and the community as well as family, who can be there to guide, share and support at times of need.

“Children and young people are loved and valued when they have a home to go to with family that loves and cares for them and they have friends to talk to no matter the situation.”
Survey participant, VIC, 18-24 years

The other main theme that is described in relation to ‘being loved and valued’ focuses more strongly on children and young people as valued and contributing members of society. Responses on this theme tend to overlap with features of ‘having a say’ and ‘being part of a community’. They embrace a sense of acceptance, being able to have a voice, and for this voice to be respected and listened to seriously by others (typically ‘adults’). This dimension of ‘being loved and valued’ appears to go beyond the more individual and personal manifestation of love, relationships and support. It encapsulates wider community and/or social values and includes attitudes towards the value of children and young people.

“[Children and young people are loved and valued when they] are heard. We feel most rebellious and unloved when our point of view has not been effectively put across, or we haven’t been understood.”
Survey participant, WA, 18-24 years
2.4.2 Being safe

There is considerable overlap between the concept of ‘being safe’ and ‘being loved and valued’. Both include an emphasis on family relationships and the home environment. It seems that perceptions of safety are underpinned by being in a stable, secure home environment with care and provision from those around you. If this is not the case, then participants indicate that ‘being safe’ means having somewhere else to go where you could feel safe instead.

“Live in safe, stable accommodation with people who care for them and love them and who are able to protect them and tend to the needs of the child.”

Survey participant, ACT, 35 – 44 years

Many participants consider safety in terms of the domestic environment and the absence of negative features, i.e. conflict, abuse, harm. Importantly, it is also described as meaning being free from the fear of abuse and harm. Notably, young people in particular discuss safety in relation to the school environment and the issue of bullying – ‘being safe’ therefore means also being free from bullying or victimisation at school and outside of school.

“(Being safe means) children and young people aren’t victims of bullying. Their home is free from violence.”

University student, ACT consultation

Overall, it appears that less emphasis is placed on public safety when participants consider what it means to ‘be safe’. While some note safety in relation to ‘being safe on the streets after dark’ – particularly if this was of concern in their area – more prominent is the idea of individuals ‘not taking risks’. In this respect, ‘being safe’ means individuals being sensible and minimising certain risky behaviours and situations (e.g. avoiding areas after dark, safe driving, self-restraint etc).

2.4.3 Being healthy

The notion of ‘being healthy’ incorporates two main components – clear and precise features related to physical health, and more diverse associations with state of mind and sense of self. Across both are underlying factors of being in a ‘healthy environment’ and having ‘a good balance’ in life.

“Young people are healthy when they eat the right foods and keep up with lots of exercise. Also, when they have friends so they can hang out with them and to have a good time as it is very unhealthy to be depressed, so it’s the friends job to keep them happy.”

Survey participant, VIC, 11 – 17 years

Most obviously, ‘being healthy’ is commonly linked to exercise and nutrition. Exercise includes participation in sports, both in and out of school, and often crossed over with informal or leisure activities, such as skateboarding and surfing. More widely, there is often a relationship evident between health, exercise, and ‘playing outdoors’. For many children and young people it seems that open space is of high value to them and their propensity for physical activity.

Nutrition also features frequently when considering what it means to ‘be healthy.’ Participants’ talk of ‘eating well’ and this often brings up mentions of fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as less ‘fast
food’ or ‘junk food’. It appears that concepts of balance are resonant here, with ‘healthy’ eating habits incorporating an idea of ‘everything in moderation’. For instance, in a number of face-to-face activities, participants depict fruit and chocolate at the same time when considering things that they believe are important for a ‘good life’.

**Mental health** is less prevalent as a theme than physical health, though many participants talk about ‘being healthy’ in relation to a positive, happy state-of-mind and sense of self-worth. For others, healthiness involves the absence of specific things, such as depression, anxiety and self-harm. Being healthy is thought to involve a positive outlook and ‘inner happiness’ with oneself, and typically this is believed to enhance wellbeing in general.

> “Have not only physical health, but are also emotionally healthy. For example, to love life and to think positive. When they are in a good state of mind.”
> 
> Survey participant, NSW, 11 – 17 years

Related to this, a concept of **mental stimulation** is raised by some participants as a dimension of ‘being healthy’. In essence this is about keeping the mind active as well as the body, by continually developing and fuelling the brain with new experiences and challenges.

### 2.4.4 Learning and developing

The theme of children and young people ‘being able to learn and develop’ is interpreted by many as encompassing access to and participation in **formal education**. However, it is frequently considered to extend beyond this, embracing concepts of **self-learning and development** through experiences, interactions and independence.

Emphasis on school is considerable (more so than further education). **Participation in school** is considered to be highly important by children and young people and adults alike. In face-to-face activities it is often evident that even though some students do not enjoy and are fairly disengaged with school, they still recognise education and schooling as something which is important for their (future) wellbeing. Essentially, education at school is considered by respondents to be something that could have a major influence on future pathways, employment opportunity and standard of living.

> “Going to school, getting a job, creating a future for themselves.”
> 
> Survey participant, NSW, 11 – 17 years
Yet, ‘being able to learn and develop’ is seen to mean more than formal education. It is described as a continual process. It requires children and young people to be able to discover things themselves, to be exposed to different environments and situations, and to have the opportunity and freedom to do this. In some cases, this is expressed in the context of perceptions of overprotective or over-regulated environments. In effect, ‘learning and developing’ requires sufficient freedom to allow young people to explore independently and learn from their own experiences.

“Our able to explore and experiment, make discoveries and mistakes and be supported through these processes.”

Survey participant, SA, 45 – 54 years

Having social connections and interactions are considered important aspects of ‘being able to learn and develop’. This includes interactions with peers at and outside of school, in the family home environment and others in the community around them. Such connections (particularly with friends) are important for children and young people in many other ways (e.g. support, love, positive frame of mind). In terms of learning and developing, connections and interactions are felt to allow young people the chance to learn about life and its practicalities, as well as to develop strong values and morals, such as respect for others, right from wrong, compassion etc.

2.4.5 Having a say

For many participants in the consultation ‘being able to have a say’ is interpreted fairly literally, i.e. being able to speak out and provide input into something that affects you. Underlying this though are factors around opportunities for having a say, confidence in speaking out, and receptiveness of others to your opinion.

‘Being able to have a say’ means more to respondents than just speaking out about something. To be truly having a say requires others (i.e. typically adults) listening and taking seriously what is said. A number of children and young people feel quite passionately about this, driven primarily by a sense that their opinion is not taken seriously because they are young.

“Our opinions and views are considered, rather than having decisions made for them or better still, rather than being disregarded or treated without respect by the older people in society simply because they are young.”

Survey participant, VIC, 11 – 17 years

Providing opportunities for children and young people to have a say is considered to signify that their views are being taken seriously. The availability and access of such opportunities – structured or unstructured – is an important dimension associated with ‘being able to have a say’. Examples of opportunities include forums and other such channels (including the example of The Nest consultation), and, for older participants, their right to vote. It is also acknowledged that such structured channels are not accessible for all, and may not appeal to more disengaged children and young people or to those who are not confident to do so. In this case, ‘having a say’ may involve more informal means by which young people can raise views, concerns and speak out.

“Everyone should have a say. You should be asked in a way that makes it easy to speak up, rather than being put on the spot.”
2.4.6 Being part of a community

Participant views of ‘being part of a community’ encapsulate a reciprocal relationship, where children and young people are active, contributing members of the community but are also supported and valued by the community around them. There are also some parallels with ‘being able to have a say’ in respect of children and young people being valued and integrated into community activities and community development.

“Acknowledged and feel they belong. They are part of a community when they are involved in the decision-making that occurs within the community.”

Survey participant, QLD, 45 – 54 years

Literal interpretations of this theme tend to focus on the involvement of children and young people in communal events and activities, and their contribution towards these (e.g. community days, festivals, community meetings etc). Yet, ‘community’ is also described as being something more internalised, in terms of connection with others and a sense of belonging – everyone’s community being a different composite of people and places to which there is attachment, understanding, and engagement.

In this sense, ‘being part of a community’ embraces some similar themes to interpretations of ‘being loved and valued’, notably a network of support and provision. This is particularly important for children and young people who do not receive strong support in their immediate home environment.

Beyond this, many young people identify ‘being part of a community’ as involving themselves in activities and leisure pursuits with their peers and others around them in their local area. For instance, involvement in local sports teams, youth clubs, and socialising at local places such as parks, beaches and shopping centres. Such activities are commonly raised in face-to-face consultation with young people as playing a key role in their wellbeing and ability to ‘have a good life’. In fact, ‘having things to do’ is not just an aspect of community involvement, but is considered to contribute to other themes of health and wellbeing, learning and self-development and feeling valued.

“It’s important for young people to have more places (especially for under 18s) to go during the afternoon / weekend to meet with friends.”

Youth participant, Tasmania consultation
2.4.7 Achieving material basics

The area of ‘achieving material basics’ is more easily articulated by participants in the consultation using examples of the types of things this concept embraces. Typically these are food and water, housing and shelter, health, and sanitation. Some comments include the provision of ‘basic’ services, such as health, education, and welfare. Others touch upon material goods, such as toys, phones, and computers/access to the internet.

“Have food, water, bed to sleep on, and a roof over their head, meaning they have a shelter or home.”

Survey participant, WA, 11 – 17 years

An interesting point to note here is how the theme of ‘achieving material basics’ is not at the forefront of many participants’ responses when considering what was important for a ‘good life’. During face-to-face activities it typically comes up after other issues or with prompting. Yet, when raised it is acknowledged as an area which is vital for wellbeing and survival. The fact that it is so often overlooked reflects a sentiment that people in Australia already have access to ‘material basics’ and/or a perception that all people can access a welfare/charity ‘safety net’ to obtain food, water and housing.

“To tell the truth people have lived days when they didn’t have all the materials we have nowadays. We don’t need computers, laptops the newest clothes etc, we only need shelter, food, water and simple clothing.”

Survey participant, WA, 11 – 17 years

Many of the comments also overlap with other areas that are considered ‘essential’ for wellbeing, i.e. being loved and valued, in a safe, stable environment, having good health and receiving a minimum standard of education. Thus, ‘achieving material basics’ is interpreted as something of a ‘catch-all’ for the various elements that are required as a minimum for children and young people to have a ‘good life’.
3. How are we faring and where are we heading?

This is me and mummy. We are going to Sydney and we are happy.

Hannah.
An important consideration for the development of a national action plan is the extent to which the wellbeing of children and young people is considered a priority by the community. The consultation therefore examines how people perceive Australia is faring in relation to child and youth wellbeing, and why this is the case (Section 3.1). Furthermore, it is important to capture a sense of where people believe we are heading, and whether action is considered a priority for particular issues (Section 3.2).

### 3.1 How is Australia perceived to be doing?

At an overall level, the majority of survey respondents consider life for children and young people in Australia today to be ‘good’ or ‘very good’. Children and young people are more likely to report this perception than adult respondents (67% compared to 53%). Around one quarter of children and young people feel that life is ‘okay’ and five percent that it is ‘bad’ or ‘very bad’. In contrast, more than a third (35%) of adults believe life for children and young people is ‘okay’ and a further one in ten (9%) that it is ‘bad’ or ‘very bad’.

**Figure 7: Perceptions of life for children and young people in Australia today**

Q4a. Overall, how good or bad do you think life is for children and young people living in Australia today?

Base: All respondents (n=3122) / All children and young people 0-24 (n=1445) / All adults 25+ (n=1677)
3.1.1 Perceptions of why life is good or bad

Survey respondents are asked why they feel life is good, okay or bad for children and young people in Australia today. A summary of the main responses is provided in the table below.

**Table 8: Why life considered good / okay / bad for children and young people in Australia**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good / Very good</th>
<th>Okay</th>
<th>Bad / Very bad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Access to services (e.g. health, education)</td>
<td>- Inequity and gaps in wellbeing</td>
<td>- Parenting issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Opportunities available to children and young people</td>
<td>- Parenting issues</td>
<td>- Tough economic conditions and lack of opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Australia compares well to other countries</td>
<td>- Safety concerns and fear, crime, and bullying</td>
<td>- Safety concerns and fear, crime, and bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Have the basics in place (food, shelter etc)</td>
<td>- Pressure on children, growing up too fast</td>
<td>- Lack of respect, responsibility and discipline of children and young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Support and a ‘safety net’ provided</td>
<td>- Health issues faced by children and young people</td>
<td>- Pressure on children, growing up too fast</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those who consider life to be ‘good’ or ‘very good’ are most likely to provide comments relating to provision and resources in place that allow for opportunities and support children and young people in Australia. This includes access to services, such as health and education, provision of material basics, and the ‘safety net’ in place for welfare and support.

“We are very, very lucky to have access to education, healthcare, support and resources. There may be family problems but there is always someone to talk to, teachers (if you are in high school/primary school), psychologists, friends, or 24 hour call services (like lifeline).”

Survey participant, NSW, 11 – 17 years

Within this context, many participants make **positive comparisons between Australia and other countries** that they consider to be less fortunate.

“We are very, very lucky to have access to education, healthcare, support and resources. There may be family problems but there is always someone to talk to, teachers (if you are in high school/primary school), psychologists, friends, or 24 hour call services (like lifeline).”

Survey participant, WA, 11 – 17 years

“Majority of young people in Australia have access to everything they need for a good life – education, support, health, family and friends. We’re a lucky country and many people do not realise this.”

Survey participant, WA, 11 – 17 years

“In comparison to other countries, Australia’s children are healthy, safe and have access to education.”

Youth participant, NSW consultation
In contrast, many of those respondents who rate life as ‘okay’ indicate that, while many children and young people in Australia were supported and provided for, there are notable levels of inequity. Essentially, they point out that there are gaps where some groups of children and young people do not fare as well as others. Often this is linked to relative material wealth, with wellbeing seen to be determined by the economic circumstances in which children are raised.

“I do think the majority of children live in good circumstances in Australia, but there are many living in poverty and in unhappy and even violent family situations.”

Survey participant, ACT, 45 – 54 years

“Children who are well off have a lot of opportunities, but there are many families that don’t have the money or resources to give children a good education or the support they need.”

Survey participant, NSW, 25 – 34 years

A number of respondents, both in the survey and in face to face activities, raise concerns about specific groups of children and young people who have much lower wellbeing. Groups identified include Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children and young people, those who are in out of home care, persons with disability, and teenage parents. Overall, it is perceived that children and young people in these groups often experience complex and multiple disadvantages and are less likely to have good health and wellbeing than other children and young people in Australia.

There is a high level of concern evident about children and young people who are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. A number of survey respondents discuss issues such as poor health, higher risks for injury and early death, lower education outcomes and barriers to achieving secure and meaningful employment. Cultural identity, discrimination and language preservation are also raised by some participants. The complexity and specificity of such issues requires further investigation beyond the scope of this consultation. ARACY is working with organisations including the Healing Foundation and SNAICC to gather additional knowledge through an extended consultation process which will contribute to the development of culturally appropriate and feasible plans to improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Consultation partners conducted a number of face to face consultations with children and young people with disability or with parents of children with disability. These partners are able to elicit valuable insights due to their expertise in the topic area and their existing trusted relationships with these groups. Children and young people with disability consider support to enable inclusion to be their paramount need to achieve comparative levels of health and wellbeing, and to realise their individual potential. Other issues of concern include developing self-identity, access/barriers to education and work, social isolation and discrimination, and the right to enjoy family life. Parents of children with disability worry about the safety of their child, a lack of infrastructure to support access to education and inclusion, access to therapy and technological supports, support for the whole family, and transition support (both at diagnosis and at times of change throughout the life course).
Other suggested solutions on ways to improve the health and wellbeing of children with disability include the need for employer flexibility, greater focus on developing communication and coping skills, family-centred practice, improved GP and specialist training on disability, improved resourcing of schools so that disability support is not perceived to be draining funds from children with no disability, and better access to flexible respite support. Awareness campaigns are raised by a few respondents. Positive campaigns such as 'Deaf Pride' and the 'International Year of Disability' are considered to be of value in educating the wider community and overcoming ignorance, prejudice and intolerance.

A group not well-identified through the online survey is young people who become parents in their teenage years, however face to face consultation with a number of teenage mothers was conducted by a consultation partner. A good life to this group included family, shelter, chocolate, clothing/fashion, culture, friends, food, school/learning, money, relationships and health. They consider it important that more schools be enabled to support and encourage teenage mothers to help them complete their education and care for their children. Specific needs included access to onsite childcare, education in child health and safety, parenting skills, support to deal with money matters such as child support payments and the taxation system, liaison support for dealing with government departments, and support at times of stress such as family break-up or divorces. This group also reports experiencing a high level of discrimination, especially relating to their appearance (e.g. tattoos, piercings, clothes and hair styles). Strategies to overcome long term poverty are a core priority for this group.

Many other issues that underpin ratings of life for children and young people as ‘okay’ are also shared by those who believe life is ‘bad’ or ‘very bad’. One such issue relates to parenting and the many aspects of this. Typically comments are raised in relation to bad parenting practices (even if these are not intentional practices) and the impact of these on children’s wellbeing. One such example is in the perceived lack of time that parents are able to spend with their children due to work and monetary pressures. Other factors include unstable family environments and the potential for neglect and conflict this may cause, which are seen to be detrimental to child and youth wellbeing.

“Parents not spending quality time with their children instead choosing to work and this is because we have to, to support our lifestyles.”
Survey participant, NSW, 35 – 44 years

“I think the high rate of family breakdowns in Australia means our children and young people fall through the cracks. There is too much juggling going on between parents trying to work and manage a family.”
Survey participant, ACT, 35 – 44 years

Wider safety concerns are also prominent among those who feel life for children and young people is ‘okay’, ‘bad’, or ‘very bad’. Issues encompass aspects of personal and public safety, crime, violence, and bullying. More broadly, some respondents consider safety in the context of an unsafe or unstable world in which children and young people are growing up. Concerns over safety are more likely to be raised by children and young people than adults. Comments about bullying underpin this concern for many children and young people.
Bullying is also an issue of concern for a number of participants with disability. For younger children it is usually discussed in the context of school or play environments. It is evident from some comments that bullying and fear of bullying adds significantly to the stress experienced by children and young people with disability.

"(Things which I don’t like are) people who bully me, and not being able to finish my homework."

Male with disability, VIC, 6 – 11 years

Parents of children with disability also express concerns about bullying. Many participants in face to face consultations express fears for the safety of their child, both within school and in the wider community. They articulate a strong need for safe play spaces to be available within local communities.

As well as bullying, a number of participants who believe life is ‘okay’, ‘bad’ or ‘very bad’ feel that children and young people face other pressures too early in life and are ‘growing up too fast’. These pressures are varied and multifaceted, but include weighty expectations to succeed at school, achieve in a career, earn money, conform with trends, have the latest material goods, and engage in risky behaviours to ‘fit in’ with peers.

"There is a lot of pressure from older people with schooling and uni, quite often making some young people shy away from what they really want in life (e.g. to be an artist instead of a lawyer)"

Survey participant, SA, 11 – 17 years

Other challenges and issues are often considered in comparison with ‘the past’. For instance, some comments indicate that children and young people face greater health challenges nowadays, with a decline in health being perceived. Issues such as rising obesity and lower levels of exercise are often highlighted. Others discuss economic challenges and their perceptions of a tough economy and high cost-of-living at present. It is felt that economic challenges may lead to fewer employment opportunities for future generations, as well as greater challenges in affording such things as housing, transport and other basic goods.
3.1.2 Perceptions of specific aspects of wellbeing

At an overall level, *The Nest* survey examined perceptions of how seven different aspects of wellbeing (based on the KRAs) are faring (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Perceptions of aspects of wellbeing for children and young people in Australia**

As can be seen, children and young people generally hold a more positive view of wellbeing than adults aged 25 years or more. Children and young people are significantly more likely than adults to rate each aspect as faring ‘well’ or ‘very well’. They are also less likely than adults to rate each aspect as ‘badly’ or ‘very badly’. For both groups, children and young people ‘being able to have a say’ is the aspect considered to be faring the least well, followed by ‘being part of a community’. ‘Learning and developing’ and ‘achieving material basics’ are considered the better performing aspects of wellbeing at present.

As well as between children and young people and adults, there are some other notable variations in perceptions of wellbeing across different subgroups of the population:

- **Male respondents have a more positive view than female respondents**: a higher proportion of males than females rate aspects of wellbeing as doing ‘very well’ or ‘well’, while more females than males rate aspects of wellbeing as ‘okay’ or ‘badly’.

- **Respondents living in rural or regional areas** are significantly more likely to consider Australia to be doing ‘very well’ for making sure children are loved and valued than those...
living in metropolitan areas. They are also significantly more likely to rate learning and developing and making sure children are part of a community as faring ‘very well’.

- **Respondents who identify as speaking a language other than English** at home have a more positive view of child and youth wellbeing than respondents who speak only English at home – being significantly more likely to select ‘very well’ for each aspect of wellbeing.

- **People with disability** are significantly more likely than people with no disability to consider Australia to be doing ‘badly’ or ‘very badly’ in all aspects of wellbeing for children and young people. Inclusion (ensuring children are part of a community) and safety (making sure children are safe) are particularly strong issues of concern for these respondents.

### 3.2 Where are we heading?

Survey respondents were asked to consider how they imagine the same aspects of wellbeing to be faring in five years time. Results are illustrated in Figure 9 below. Children and young people responding to the survey overwhelmingly have a more optimistic view of their future health and wellbeing, being typically two or three times more likely than adults to believe that these aspects of wellbeing will be better in the future. Correspondingly, adults are significantly more likely than children and young people to believe that health and wellbeing will be ‘about the same’ or ‘worse’. In most cases, more adults believe health and wellbeing will be worse in five years than better.

**Figure 9: Expectation for aspects of wellbeing for children and young people in future**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% say will be better in future</th>
<th>% say will be worse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children &amp; Young People</td>
<td>Adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loved &amp; Valued</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning &amp; developing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to have a say</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of a community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material basics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Expectations for the future tend to reflect patterns of current thinking on health and wellbeing. Overall, respondents who feel these aspects of wellbeing are faring well at the moment are more likely to also believe they will be better in the future. This pattern is also reflected in the significant differences between subgroups:

- **Male respondents** are more likely than female respondents to anticipate improvements in child and youth wellbeing across most aspects. The exceptions are ‘having a say’ and ‘access to material basics’ where there are no significant differences observed.

- **Respondents living in rural or regional areas** continue to be more optimistic about child and youth wellbeing than respondents living in metropolitan areas. They are more likely to believe that aspects of health and wellbeing (children and young people being loved and valued, being safe, being part of a community, and having the material basics they need) would be better in the future.

- **Respondents who identify as speaking a language other than English** at home are again significantly more likely to believe that all aspects would be better in the future than respondents who speak only English at home.

- **People with disability** are significantly more likely than people with no disability to predict that children and young people will be worse off in five years time in all aspects, except for health. While a substantial 33% of people with disability do believe health will be worse off, this figure was not significantly different to the 25% of people with no disability who shared this opinion.
4. Where to and how?
The consultation was designed to provide input into a national action plan by hearing what people think is important and identifying perceived strengths or challenges. It aims to capture the ‘voice of the people’ in development of priorities and strategies for a plan. Importantly, participants were therefore given a chance to raise ideas and suggestions for improving the wellbeing of children and young people. These ideas and suggestions will be considered alongside other evidence being gathered and explored as part of *The Nest*.

This chapter includes additional analysis of survey data to establish some of the priority areas based on what people see as important and how Australia is perceived to be ‘performing’ (Section 4.1). Further input is then examined in terms of the responsibility and delivery for future solutions and actions to address child and youth wellbeing (Section 4.2). Finally, participants’ own ideas and suggestions are explored in terms of the main areas and themes that are raised (Section 4.3).

### 4.1 Needs and priorities

As reported in the preceding chapters, *The Nest* survey assessed the perceived importance of seven different aspects of wellbeing, as well as how well or badly they are perceived to be ‘performing’ in Australia. These results provide a framework to identify some priority issues, by a simple mapping of importance against performance (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Importance – performance matrix**

The ‘importance – performance matrix’ basically plots the level of importance placed on each of the seven aspects of wellbeing measured in the survey against its perceived current performance. Thus we have a relative sense of:
• **Priorities**: issues that are considered more important and are not performing strongly. Given their importance and weaker performance, they can be considered priority issues to address.

• **Areas to monitor**: issues which are less important, but are performing relatively weakly. Such issues, if they continue to ‘underperform’ can become priorities because of their sustained weaker performance.

• **Things to maintain**: the issues which are less important, but are performing well at the moment. Given their relatively lower importance, they are less likely to be ‘priority issues’ in general and given they are performing well are unlikely to become problems in the near future. They should be maintained and monitored over time.

• **Areas to capitalise on**: the issues which are considered more important, but are performing pretty well and meeting the demand that is placed on them. While they should be monitored to ensure performance does not decline, they can also be capitalised on, marked as ‘successes’ or areas in which momentum can more easily be achieved.

Two matrices for children and young people and adults are depicted in Figure 11. Each matrix broadly demonstrates the consensus on where issues fit in terms of priority and impact. It is evident that many measures are ‘borderline’ issues as they do not neatly fit clearly in one matrix quadrant or another. In summary:

• **Being loved and valued** is clearly considered the most important issue, but in terms of performance it is somewhat underwhelming. Given the weight of importance on this issue, it should be considered something of a priority to address or continue to address in the future.

• **Being safe** comes with a reasonable level of importance assigned and is again seen to be performing fairly averagely. It does not fit in a clear quadrant, but is in fairly close proximity to the ‘priority’ zones. This may suggest some dimensions of safety are a priority, while others need to be maintained.

• **Healthy** rates at a similar level to being safe, though it is a priority area for children and young people. Among adults it is perceived to be of less importance and also performing better. So work in this area may need to be maintained and – in some aspects – capitalised on.

• **Learning and developing** is also of reasonable importance but is mostly considered to be performing well, and is therefore a potential area on which to capitalise.

• Both **having a say** and **being part of a community** are of low relative importance. Yet, performance-wise they are not strong and they should therefore be monitored to ensure they do not become more of a problem for wellbeing in future.

• **Achieving material basics** is perceived by respondents as not highly important, but this is probably because it is considered to be performing well. Therefore it is clearly something to be maintained.
Figure 11: Importance – performance matrices

Priority matrix – Children & Young People

Priority matrix – Adults
This analysis provides an indication of where certain dimensions of wellbeing fit in terms of their relative priority, based on what people perceive to be important, and what the current situation is deemed to be like. Further examination of the types of ideas and solutions that consultation participants expressed is made in Section 4.3. First, in terms of taking action, we look at the expectations of responsibility and delivery that people have for enacting change.

4.2 Responsibility and delivery

The Nest survey asked respondents to indicate who they expect to help children and young people to have a better life, with the option of selecting their ‘top three’ picks from a list of options. The total proportion of respondents selecting these options in their top three is illustrated in Figure 12 below. Overall, this shows that expectations of responsibility are shared across different areas of society. While parents and families do bear a large proportion of responsibility, it is clear that future health and wellbeing is seen to rely on multiple avenues of input or contribution.

Figure 12: Who should help children and young people have a better life? (Total)

Q6. And who should help children and young people to have a better life? In your opinion, which of these should help you have a better life?
(a) Who would you expect to help most?
(b) Who would you expect to help second most?
(c) Who would you expect to help third most?
Base: All children and young people 0-24 (n=1357) / All adults 25+ (n=765)*
* Question not asked in Australian Attitudes to Young People Survey
Expectations placed on parents are considerable, with 75% of children and young people and 87% of adults indicating parents and families should help children and young people to have a better life. More formalised arrangements – education providers and government – are also prominent, with children and young people placing greater emphasis on schools, colleges and universities (71%, compared with 56% of adults), and adults more likely to indicate that government has a responsibility for helping children and young people to have a better life (66%, compared with 54% of children and young people). Around one half of respondents also consider that the community sector has a responsibility for making life better for children and young people.

The lowest number of mentions in terms of who was expected to make life better for children and young people was children and young people themselves. Interestingly however, significantly more children and young people (36%) mention this, compared with adults (20%). This reflects the view in several consultation activities around young people taking (and being allowed) greater freedoms, especially from high school onwards. Such perceptions are accompanied by statements about also accepting greater responsibility for themselves.

### 4.3 Solutions and approaches

During the consultation, participants were given the opportunity to put forward ideas and suggestions as to what they believe could or should be done to ensure the wellbeing of children and young people in the future. The main areas and issues emerging involve:

- Provision and administration of services, programs and support, particularly for those 'in need'
- Improvements in health and strategies to ensure children and young people are healthy
- Education provision and service quality
- Improvements and opportunities for 'better' parenting
- Enhancements in safety and protection, and
- Increased participation and independence.

Figure 13 overleaf presents the main themes within these areas and the relative prevalence in which they are raised in consultation activities, particularly in *The Nest* survey, by children, young people and adult respondents. The size of the box in the figure indicates the frequency of observation, i.e. the biggest boxes reflect the topics most frequently mentioned.

Typically, adults mention a greater number of issues for consideration. While there are many similarities in the themes raised by children and young people when compared to adults, a few differences stood out. Adults place greater emphasis on the role of education and schooling, issues relating to parenting, some areas of provision, and self-regulation and discipline of children and young people. In contrast, children and young people are more likely to focus on issues relating to participation, community involvement, and safety concerns.
Figure 13: What think should be done to help children & young people have a better life

**Children and young people**

- More support, resources and services for those in need
- Better funding, programs and policies
- Lower cost of living, better economy etc
- Provide more jobs and access to jobs
- Improve health
- Greater involvement in sport and exercise
- Engage in fun and play
- Reduce access to technology, social media etc
- Teach self esteem and to value oneself
- Better education and schooling
- Improved parenting & time for parenting
- Show greater love and understanding
- Greater public safety and security
- Greater protection from abuse & bullying
- Protection & prevention for drugs & alcohol
- Greater freedom & opportunities to develop self
- Opportunities to engage in community
- Teach discipline & respect

**Adults**

- More support, resources and services for those in need
- Better funding, programs and policies
- Lower cost of living, better economy etc
- Provide more jobs and access to jobs
- Improve health
- Greater involvement in sport and exercise
- Engage in fun and play
- Reduce access to technology, social media etc
- Teach self esteem and to value oneself
- Better education and schooling
- Improved parenting & time for parenting
- Show greater love and understanding
- Greater public safety and security
- Greater protection from abuse & bullying
- Protection & prevention for drugs & alcohol
- Greater freedom & opportunities to develop self
- Opportunities to engage in community
- Teach discipline & respect
4.3.1 Provision and equity

The most frequent area of response from children and young people and adults alike concerns the provision of support, services and programs. Notably, many suggestions do not merely take a ‘blanket approach’ for extra funding or services, but are largely based on better targeting of resources and improvements which address inequity by focusing on those most in need. Commonly mentioned groups who are considered disadvantaged and needing additional or more targeted support included homeless youth, people with disability, low income families, people in remote locations, children and young people in care and those who are subject to abuse.

“*Australia should work on minimising the gap between those who receive less opportunity and those who do.*”

Survey participant, NSW, 11 – 17 years

“*More help should be provided to people in remote areas and people with mental or physical disabilities as well as people who are disadvantaged by things that aren’t their fault.*”

Survey participant, NSW, 11 – 17 years

The need for reliable and accessible information is a core part of many solutions. For example, parents of children with disability propose a disability helpline or web-resource, where families, health practitioners, community workers and educators can access specific information on particular disabilities, compare options for therapy approaches, and obtain referral to specialist services where required. Building local capacity is also seen as a critical pathway, especially for families in outer metropolitan, regional and rural areas where there is lower access to infrastructure. Flexibility of programs is vital to enable supports to be adapted to meet the needs of the individual child or young person and fit with family circumstances. The need to be part of a community which is accepting and understanding of difference is an important goal for many children, young people, and their families.

The specific role of government – and its policies and programs – are often mentioned with regards to the provision of services and addressing inequity. For some, there is a general frustration at government and politics more broadly, regardless of political party or level of government. There is sentiment that certain policies are misguided or detrimental to wellbeing. Respondents cited high profile cases of government spending over recent years as leading to question marks over the effectiveness of funding and programs. Suggestions for redress of perceived problems focus on more efficient and better targeted use of funding and the programs in place.

“*Funding is not the blatant answer, campaigns usually go to waste (money is wasted too), PROPERLY audit programs the government currently has. Perhaps brush up youth allowance and funding AND criteria for foster homes.*”

Survey participant, NSW, 11 – 17 years

In broader economic terms, some consultation participants make suggestions in relation to the cost-of-living and affordability in Australia at the present time. These comments tend to push for approaches which can decrease the cost-of-living, and/or increase income, particularly for low-income individuals and households. Having money to meet costs is an issue more frequently raised by young
people, particularly older teens and young adults who were starting to earn their own income. Improving access to employment opportunities, addressing perceived employer discrimination against young workers, and equity in award rates for younger employees compared with older ones are all raised as suggestions.

"Employment – open more spaces for younger people. It’s hard to get cash, especially without government help."

Youth participant, Tasmania consultation

“We have to pay adult prices, like at the cinema and things. But we don’t get paid the same as older workers. You can use your student discount, but that doesn’t make up the difference, if you get what I mean.”

Youth participant, Tasmania consultation

4.3.2 Improving health

Many suggestions, particularly in The Nest survey, encompass a broad desire to improve the health of children and young people. Interestingly, greater emphasis is placed on activity and exercise over nutrition and mental health in comments where specific aspects of health are mentioned.

In terms of exercise, some comments focus on sport, especially improved access and opportunities for organised sport. Suggestions include free/low cost entrance to facilities, transport to sporting areas, and/or regular/compulsory sport within school. Others take a wider view, expressing a desire for children and young people to be encouraged and allowed to be active, play outdoors and have fun. This is frequently mentioned with the sentiment that children and young people are engaged too heavily in sedentary pursuits, such as watching television, spending time on computers and mobile phones.

"Make sure they are all involved in some type of physical activity and make sure they all know how to be healthy.”

Survey participant, VIC, 11 – 17 years

"I know it sounds horrible but all these man-made objects are what is destroying our lives. It will stop people getting out playing in the park, kicking a football around. People will end up just being stuck on their computers like I am right now.”

Survey participant, WA, 11 – 17 years

In terms of food and nutrition, most suggestions centre on access to ‘junk’ food, food advertising, and education about nutrition and healthy foods. Suggested solutions involve minimising access to fast food while increasing availability (and reducing cost) of fresh fruit, vegetables, and healthier options. For instance, during consultation activities in NSW, a group of young people report that they have little choice in where they can go out to eat, with fast food outlets the only nearby option. They express a desire for healthier choices in their area. More broadly there were concerns about the pervasiveness of outlets and advertising for fast food, and comment that this should be regulated.
“With nutrition and health – change TV laws for advertising and what constitutes health and nutrition.”

Survey participant, NT, 55 – 64 years

While less commonly raised than aspects of physical health, some comments focus on addressing and improving the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. Typically, these comments are passionate, detailed, and predominantly service-focused. Suggested solutions involved provision of more specialised services, access to mental health practitioners and improved facilities. There are also suggestions about building a broader level of awareness and developing informal community/peer supports for children and young people with mental health challenges.

“Mental health facilities NEED to be more widely available. Suicide is the leading cause of death for young people *THIS INCLUDES ROAD FATALITIES!!* Those in rural areas are often isolated. Mental health needs to be included in the curriculum. Young people must know that help is available.”

Survey participant, TAS, 11 – 17 years

Issues about young people with care roles for people with disability or chronic health conditions are raised in some face to face activities. While care responsibilities were not specifically prompted for in the survey or consultation, several survey responses express concerns about issues such as expectations of care, impact of a care role, access to respite and support for care role.

“It is important to recognise that those that find themselves in a caring role for a family member do NEED tangible supports to not only carry out the role but to also be able to be a child and have all the opportunities that other children take for granted.”

Survey participant, NSW, 18-24 years

It is evident that even very young children are aware when a parent or sibling or other family member is not well. Issues of illness and/or stress within the family are an issue of concern for a few children responding to the survey and in face to face activities.

“Of interest was the book of one child who cut out many pictures of band aids and sick people. This child’s mother is suffering from a terminal illness. Dad commented that the child is ‘very helpful in looking after Mummy’.”

Early childhood worker, QLD

Health services are also discussed more generally in terms of ensuring accessibility, both in terms of what is available and reducing any cost barriers to healthcare. While Medicare is often noted as providing a positive ‘safety net’, respondents note this does not cover all costs. In particular, respondents consider more could be done to reduce costs for dental health and vision care, particularly for those who could not afford it.

4.3.3 Education standards and services

A prominent issue generating a number of ideas and suggestions relates to education, focusing primarily on education standards and accessibility. Adults in particular believe that education
standards are in decline. They attribute falling education standards to things such as teacher quality and consistency, school facilities, class sizes, and gaps between public and private schools. Suggestions for reversing this perceived decline involve increased or more evenly distributed funding, nationally consistent frameworks, and better training, recruitment and retention of teachers. Others believe that the structure of formal education needs to adapt to be more flexible to individual learning styles and personalities.

“Change schools to adapt with the times, the learning environment could be more plastic & accommodate for the different learning styles of young people.”
Survey participant, NSW, 18 – 24 years

Other suggestions about education relate to accessibility, both in terms of location and services available, and cost. In regional and remote areas, participants in face-to-face consultation activities expressed difficulties in accessing particular courses due to what was available in their area. Lack of access is perceived to impact on potential career pathways and courses in life. Ideally, they want improved access to all courses and subjects. More widely, the cost of education is considered a strong barrier, especially in relation to further education for those without financial support from parents. In these cases, free education, or improvements in funding and support are strongly advocated.

“Making it easy for people to access education and opportunities, not necessarily based on knowledge, both in and out of school. Bring everyone an equal chance to learn, with free education, within or outside of school, being educated in a number of ways.”
Youth participant, NSW consultation

4.3.4 Parenting roles and issues

Adults taking part in the consultation place significantly stronger emphasis than children and young people on suggestions relating to the role of parents in child and youth wellbeing. For many, this seems to reflect their own experiences as parents and some of the challenges they face. More widely, however, participants also comment on the ongoing need to ensure children and young people are safe and protected from conflict and abuse.

One of the biggest issues relates to time. Respondents are concerned about the impact of busy schedules and/or working parents on the time available to be spent with children. Solutions regarding this are acknowledged as being complex, but there is an overall desire for parents to have the opportunity to spend more time with their children, particularly in the time between school and bedtime. A number of children and young people also express this view and value the importance of spending time with their parents.

“One girl wished her mum didn’t have to work so much.”
Pre-school teacher of under 5 year olds, VIC

Things such as flexible/supportive work practices and opportunities for greater affordability or improved income are most frequently mentioned suggestions to allow parents to have more time with their children.
Some participants feel that they have little choice in terms of having to work and being unable to spend as much time as they would like with their children. This is seen to be particularly challenging in the early years. There are a number of comments relating to childcare access and the possibility of other options that can allow children to be cared for at these ages.

Many participants, particularly parents, comment on education and advice for parents. Generally it is considered that better education is needed for all parents with some believing this should be compulsory. Respondents typically say that parents should be encouraged and engaged to seek information and support. Programs (typically informal gatherings, such as at a local park) are considered an effective example of how parents can come together and share ideas, experiences and learn from one another. Other ideas include providing more one-on-one support or relate to specific programs for areas related to children’s wellbeing.

Some respondents consider that parental support and education should place strong value on the role of parents and emphasise the role that parents play in their child’s wellbeing from an early age. Informing parents of their influence and the contribution they can make to their child’s development, is considered to be an important part of engaging and shaping positive behaviour towards their children.
“Parents need a better understanding of the valuable contribution they make in developing young people who are resilient with basic language and problem solving skills to negotiate their way through an increasingly complex world. Spending quality time with children really has to be quality time. Parents need to understand what that means.”

Survey participant, QLD parent, 45 – 54 years

The role of education, information and support programs for parents is also considered in the context of child welfare. This involves allowing parents to be connected with services, and authorities to be engaged with the child and family unit. While there appears to be mixed views on ‘appropriate’ intervention by authorities in child welfare (though clearly if the child is considered at-risk then intervention is typically seen to be warranted), there is a general sense that informal, community-based approaches are the most appropriate so that parents and families did not become isolated or overlooked.

“I think Australia should have more parenting programs, so that parents are more informed about how to raise a child the best they can, thus eliminating many accidental accidents, injuries or emotional problems for the children. Schools should make sure they check up on families, especially those from poor, broken backgrounds just encase the young person has been mistreated and misunderstood.”

Survey participant, VIC, 11 – 17 years

“Encourage more groups for children not just the mother’s group for first time mothers, but also for those who have had children so they have friends for life who can help them through hardship and give them a break when they need it so that the parents are well rested. If the parents are well rested they will not take their tiredness or other issues out on their children (hopefully).”

Survey participant, VIC, 25 – 34 years

4.3.5 Addressing safety issues

A range of ideas are expressed about safety and security of children and young people. The main themes arising here involve public safety, substance abuse and bullying.

Concerns over public safety vary, depending on the individual experiences and environments of respondents. For many young people, focus is placed on more activities they (and others) could get involved in. They want ‘something to do’ rather than ‘hanging around on the streets’. Certain areas of their community are often considered threatening and intimidating, particularly after dark. Issues like crime, antisocial behaviour and substance abuse are also of concern. Suggestions to rectify these issues include improved urban design (e.g. lighting, safer pathways, open spaces), better protection and crime enforcement (e.g. more police, strategies to restrict antisocial behaviour etc).

“Improve safety. Especially around clubs bars and pubs. The street fight culture is very dangerous and scary.”

Survey participant, VIC, 18 – 24 years
More widely, concerns with **drugs and alcohol** abuse are commonplace among children and young people. Suggestions to tackle these issues include providing alternative things to do for young people and supportive, reinforcing environments. Positive messages continuing to reinforce the perils of excessive alcohol and drug use are also advocated. Coupled with education and messages, there are also calls from respondents for improved enforcement and regulation of these problems.

"Something to 'replace' the use of drugs and alcohol, like after-school activities. Make things cheaper or free. Have youth activities that have a positive message and discourage drugs, alcohol, and hanging around.”

Youth participant, Tasmania consultation

"A lot is being done for the majority of youth in Australia. But even for these, alcohol and even drugs is a huge problem. Binge drinking is a significant problem and needs to be dealt with quickly. Not just through education, it needs to be policed harshly as well.”

Survey participant, WA, 11 – 17 years

**Bullying** is a more frequent concern for children and young people. Bullying is a major focus for a number of respondents of all ages. In face to face activities children often report fighting, teasing or bullying as a thing they did not like.

"I don't like people being mean to me.”

Pre-schooler, 4 years

A number of ideas and suggestions are made on ways to tackle this issue, especially by survey respondents and youth in face to face groups. Often there is a feeling that bullying is not, in practice, treated seriously enough within school and that more action is required on the part of teachers and other adults.

"I think they should have teachers patrol school grounds during recess, lunch etc. Because too much goes on and the teachers don't give a damn and the parents hardly ever know, and then one day the kid suicides, and only THEN do people usually bother!”

Survey participant, NSW, 11 – 17 years
Other comments emphasise that bullying needs to be tackled more holistically – being a shared responsibility of adults, the community and young people. In this sense, it is more related to values and morals, in terms of what behaviours society considers ‘unacceptable’ and how to self-regulate this as a community. Examples include building social norms so that victims of bullying are not afraid, concerned or embarrassed to speak out, and strategies to make people engaged in bullying aware of the impacts and consequences of their actions.

“Tell people the harsh consequences of bullying, what happens when people are bullied!”

Youth participant, Tasmania consultation

Despite such ideas and suggestions, there is a perception that a certain level of bullying is always going to occur. This is seen to require ongoing protection and support for the vulnerable/victims, and appropriate action or discipline to deal with perpetrators

4.3.6 Participation and independence

A strong theme, more resonant among children and young people than adults, encompasses suggestions to enhance their participation and contribution in the community, relative freedoms, and independence. Typically, young people talk about having greater freedom and fewer restrictions, though they also acknowledge this should be balanced by some regulations in place as well as being able to self-regulate their behaviour. Examples include a lower age for driving, voting, fewer imposed curfews, and more choices in things like education and activities.

‘Having a voice’ is considered a marker of freedom and independence and is frequently raised as something to improve. Generally, suggestions focus on providing more opportunities for children and young people to have input into decisions. Equally important, for both children and young people and adult respondents, is the need for a change in thinking so that adults take the views of children and young people seriously.

“Listen to them for once! Stop shoving things down their throats. Ask them what they want/want to achieve.”

Survey participant, NSW, 11 – 17 years

“Give them more of a say in what is happening with Australia. Although we are the ones that will have to live with many of the political, economic and environmental decisions being made currently, our opinions on these matters are never taken seriously. This leads to Australian youth feeling powerless and weak.”

Survey participant, NSW, 11 – 17 years

The other aspect to participation encompasses involvement in the local community. On the whole, most suggestions were about activities and things to do in the community. Feedback in The Nest survey and during face-to-face consultation suggests significant value is placed on venues, facilities and services for young people to engage in social activities, sports, exercise, leisure and hobbies. Comments are frequently made about specific facilities required in individual communities, such as skate parks, shops, sports halls and so on. For many children and young people, it is just
about having somewhere to go after school to hang out with other young people, and the benefits associated with this.

“Have more free and fun activities after school and on the weekends so that they can be doing something in the community and making friends.”

Survey participant, WA, 11 – 17 years

“I think they should be given the opportunity to join as many new activities as they want to allow young people to explore new things and create hobbies which will give them happiness in doing what they love to do but also doing something productive with their time. Also gives a way to meet new people who will have the same hobbies, making it easier for them to get along with one another.”

Survey participant, WA, 11 – 17 years

This is also reflected in consultation with younger children. Participants in both the 6-12 and under 5 age groups frequently talk about places to play as making them happy. There is also a strong theme of places and opportunities to play with siblings and friends throughout much of the face to face activities with this group.

“(Things that I like are) playing soccer, climbing trees, playing at the skate park, playing at the park, eating.”

Consultation participant, 8 years

“(Things that I like are) going bush, going fishing, going to school and learning, playing with friends.”

Consultation participant, 10 years

Both having a voice and being provided with opportunities to participate in the community are considered to engender a more cohesive, integrated environment. This is perceived to benefit young people and everyone else within a community. Indeed, while many participants look at national or big-picture challenges or issues about wellbeing, solutions are more often focused at the community level.

“Make everyone involved in a community. Whether it’s a local community, religious community, school community - it really doesn’t matter. But get them interacting with those around them and create a sense of togetherness and belonging.”

Survey participant, VIC, 11 – 17 years

Indeed, involving and empowering children and young people in community decisions, activities and services is a recurrent theme throughout the consultation, and one that is considered important to their wellbeing in the long-term.
Taking this forward

The Nest consultation demonstrates intrinsic value in engaging children, young people and the community in local and national issues and coming up with solutions for things that affect them. Not only is there inherent value in engaging people in decisions, providing them with a voice and sense of empowerment but, as we have seen, such activities are shown to yield rich, detailed findings and outcomes from which to shape future direction. Importantly, the consultation means that The Nest can progress with a sound grounding of what we know to be important for children and young people (rather than just assuming we know), develop actions based on reality and experience, and take heed of some of the major issues and concerns that exist.

The findings from The Nest consultation, along with other initial work undertaken for the project, is to be used to inform national discussion and goal setting among key players in the child, youth, community, education and health sectors. A summit at the end of 2012 will look to develop and define a set of ‘game changers’ which can improve and sustain child and youth wellbeing in the future. These will be taken forward into 2013 and further consultation is likely as these ideas become cemented and practical solutions are developed.

Without doubt, the input from infants, children, young people, and adults from all walks of life has been incredibly valuable in shaping The Nest so far. It will continue to remain that way as we all look to ensure the wellbeing of children and young people remains a national priority.