GENERATION NEXT

Gold Coast
Friday 4th September

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What kids have to say about wellbeing

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Overview of the Presentation

1. Children and Young People - vulnerability and agency

2. Snapshot findings from *Wellbeing in Schools* study

3. The findings and recognition theory

4. Implications of the findings

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Wellbeing Study

wellbeing

Listening to the Voices of Children and Young People

- Phase 1: Analysis – how is wellbeing conceptualized

- Phase 2: Interviews with teachers and Principals (n=89); focus groups with primary and secondary students (n=606 students) across 3 states

- Phase 3: On-line survey with students and teachers (n=9975)

Research partners: Centre for Children and Young People · Southern Cross University · uclan · interrelate family centres · good grief

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Policy

- Wellbeing is a frequently used term in policy, but it is generally not defined

- Recent attention to wellbeing evident in education policy-related documentation eg. some wellbeing-focused frameworks, wellbeing webpages and cross-sector initiatives - but these activities are not coordinated or broadly applied

- Wellbeing mainly linked to problem-focused discourses of safety/harm and mental health - less emphasis on broader universal conceptions that apply to all children

- Lack of consistency at a state level and between government and non-government schools

- No national educational policies focusing on wellbeing

Is wellbeing important?

- "*Wellbeing lacks definition, both as a concept and in practice… there is little or no consensus about what it really means or looks like and therefore to produce and reproduce it, and to know that it is there, proves highly difficult except in the most general of terms*" (Dinham, 2006, p.3).

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Vulnerability and Agency

- Passive recipients of experiences / Vulnerability
  ➔ Emphasis on protection

- Recognition of agency / capability
  ➔ Focus on participation

Student Focus Groups and Staff Interviews

What is wellbeing?

In the focus groups the **primary students** suggested a range of concepts relating to wellbeing.

These centred around:

Being
- Physical
- Healthy
- Happy
- Loved
- Safe

Having
- A say
- Support
- Friends
- Fairness

Doing
- Making good decisions
- Helping others
- Laughing
- Faith
- Playing

The secondary students expanded on the thoughts

Being
- Trusted
- Free & safe
- Connected
- Hopeful
- Energetic
- Visible
- Courageous

Having
- Positive relationships
- Enough sleep
- Fun
- Equality
- Privacy
- Justice
- Rights Respected
- Morals
- Your views taken into account
- Responsibility

Doing
- Looking after yourself
- Being nice
- Saying yes to Challenges
- Accepting yourself
- Keeping a positive outlook
- Being good

Wellbeing is Multi-Dimensional

Being
- Trusted
- Free & safe
- Connected
- Hopeful
- Energetic
- Visible
- Courageous

Having
- Positive relationships
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## In the staff survey data

- Staff placed different emphasis on the importance of relationships. This was dependent upon their beliefs about wellbeing.

- Wellbeing = academic success or physical and mental health → less importance on relationships.

- Wellbeing = emotions, spirituality, connection with people and place → more importance on relationships.
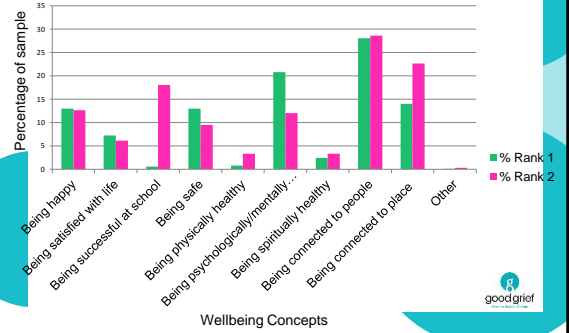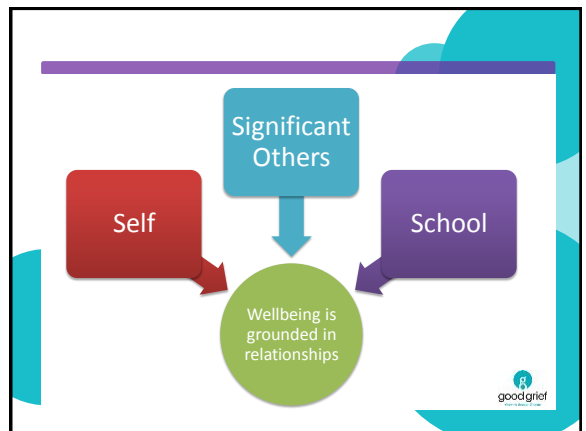
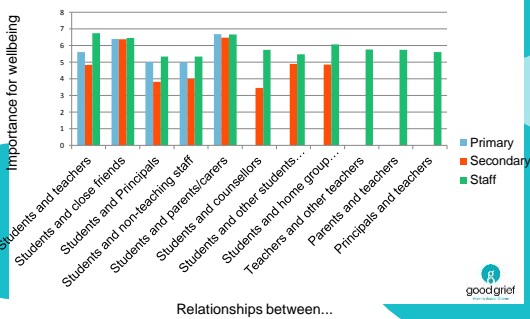### Primary Students' Conceptualisation of Wellbeing
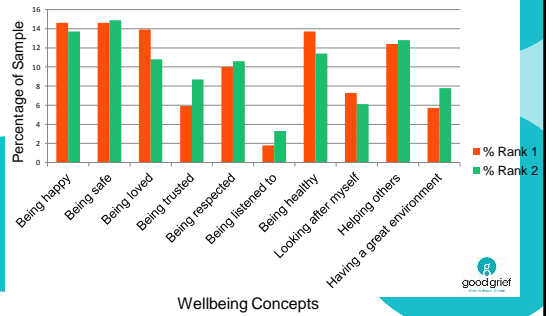
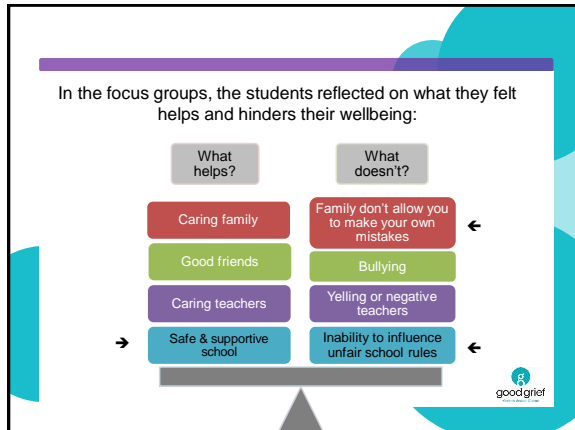### Secondary Students' Conceptualisation of Wellbeing
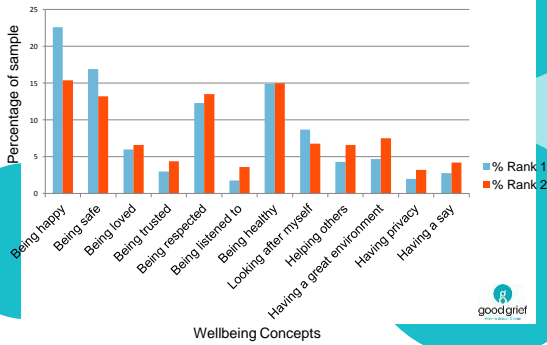
Staff Conceptualisation of Student Wellbeing

The importance of relationships for wellbeing: Primary student, Secondary student and Staff views.

Slide 1

In the focus groups, the students reflected on what they felt helps and hinders their wellbeing:

What helps?	What doesn't?
Caring family	Family don't allow you to make your own mistakes ←
Good friends	Bullying
Caring teachers	Yelling or negative teachers
→ Safe & supportive school	Inability to influence unfair school rules ←

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Slide 2

Recognition Theory

"Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people, it is a vital human need" (Taylor, 1995, p. 226).

Recognition is simply defined by Bingham (2003, p.3) as "*the act of acknowledging others, and coming to be acknowledged by others.*"

In the Wellbeing in Schools study we drew upon the work of Axel Honneth.

A framework for wellbeing:

- Cared for
- Respected
- Valued

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Slide 3

A Framework for Wellbeing

- **Being cared for** is about how we are there for each other. When we are cared for we know and trust someone enough to ask them for help. → **CARED FOR (love)**

- **Being respected** is about the way we treat each other. For example, it means that we all should respect each other's rights to be listened to and treated fairly. → **RESPECTED (rights)**

- **Being valued** is about our abilities being noticed by people important to us. When we are valued we feel encouraged to work together to make things better. → **VALUED (solidarity)**

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Slide 4

Children and Young People described their needs and desires:

- to be *"known:"*
- to be *"noticed"*
- *"visible"*
- *"everybody knowing you"*
- *"everybody knowing you are there"*
- *"people not forgetting about you"*

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Slide 5

Participation through Conversation

Students wanted teachers to take the time to "*really listen*" and did not want just "*one-off*" conversations:

"Talking to someone – helps you when you are down – you know you have someone there to look after you"

"[Also] you can just have a normal conversation with [the teachers], which I think is important."

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Slide 6

Having a Say

"Having a say so people actually listen to you"

"I think having things forced upon you can make you feel that your decisions don't matter"

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Key Messages

Children and young people feel more cared for, respected and valued when:

- Time is spent with them
- They are listened to and valued in their own right
- They are "known" well
- They can have a say

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Power & Reciprocity

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4. Implications of the Findings

Wellbeing programs must acknowledge:

- Relationships are key
- The routines of school / family can work against relationships
- Time for conversation really matters
- Opportunities to have a say and make decisions that count are critically important

- And policy … …look after staff first

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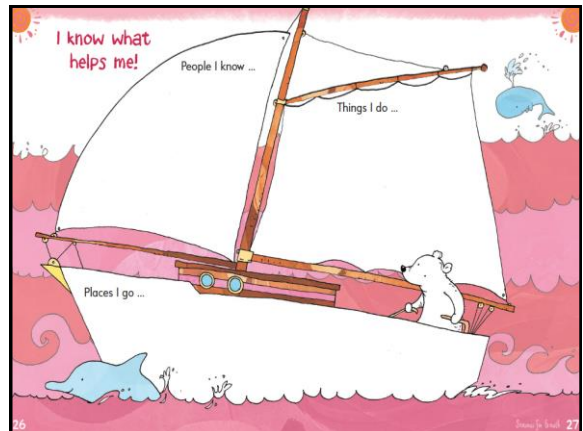
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"Children are not the people of tomorrow, but are people of today. They have a right to be taken seriously, and to be treated with tenderness and respect" (Janusz Korczak, 1929).

Thank you

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