



the good childhood

a national inquiry

launch report



The
Children's
Society



good childhood?

a question for our times



Foreword

There can be no doubt that the childhood experienced by today's children is significantly different from that of previous generations. While incomes in the United Kingdom have doubled in the last 50 years, research shows that the well-being of children in the UK is rated among the worst in Europe (Bradshaw et al 2006).

Our children and young people suffer from higher incidences of mental and physical ill-health than their European contemporaries. As a society we share a damaging ambivalence towards children: preoccupied with protecting our own children from harm, we often fail to reach out to those who need our attention most. And all the while our young people are continually subjected to pressure to achieve, behave and even consume like adults at an ever earlier age.

This year The Children's Society celebrates 125 years of working with disadvantaged children. As we reflect on our own experiences with children, it seems appropriate that we should invite society as a whole to do the same, to gain a clearer idea of what makes for a good childhood. *The Good Childhood Inquiry* is the UK's first independent national inquiry into the conditions that lead to a good childhood. We seek to open an inclusive debate about the nature of childhood today, with an inquiry that will help shape future policy and inspire all our relationships with children.

Last year, we asked thousands of young people what they think makes for a good childhood. Their answers, which were both direct and challenging, are the subject of this report. Over the next two years *The Good Childhood Inquiry* will broaden the scope of the inquiry yet further, asking more questions to an even greater number of children and young people, parents, experts and the wider public. We will combine their views and experiences with the findings of academic research, opening up a discussion about childhood that will be both ground-breaking and provocative.

We very much hope that you will take part in this debate.

Bob Reitemeier
Chief Executive, The Children's Society
September 2006

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1. Introduction

Research suggests that our wealth has not bought us the kind of childhood we want for our children. While average incomes in the United Kingdom have doubled in the last 50 years, people are no happier today, on average, than people were 50 years ago (Layard, 2005). In fact, for young people in particular, there is evidence to suggest that the opposite is true: that improved economic conditions seem to be associated with increasing levels of emotional problems. Depression and anxiety have increased for both boys and girls aged 15-16 since the mid-1980s, as have what are called 'non-aggressive conduct problems' such as lying, stealing and disobedience (Hagell, 2004).

According to important new research, the UK fares exceptionally badly in bringing about the well-being of its children. In comparison with other EU Member States, children in the UK are found to have poorer relationships, to engage in riskier behaviour and suffer from worse health than their European counterparts (Bradshaw et al op cit). While elsewhere in Europe there seems to be some correlation between a nation's wealth and the well-being of its children, the UK is a notable exception.

Given this background, in July 2006 The Children's Society commissioned the UK's first independent national inquiry into childhood¹. *The Good Childhood Inquiry* aims to renew society's understanding of childhood for the twenty-first century to inform, improve and inspire all our relationships with children.

The inquiry will bring together an independent panel of twelve experts and influencers, and will include Lord Layard, Emeritus Professor of Economics at the London School of Economics, Professor Sir Albert Aynsley-Green, Children's Commissioner for England, and Bishop Tim Stevens, Bishop of Leicester and Chair of The Children's Society's Board of Trustees.

As part of the development of *The Good Childhood Inquiry*, a process that values the views and experiences of children and young people, we asked a large sample of young people what they think makes for a good childhood in the UK today. Their answers, which are summarised in this report, have already shaped the inquiry's form and content. They will also be considered in evidence by the panel.

This report:

- identifies some of the important issues facing young people today, expressed in response to our survey
- places the findings of this survey in the context of other research and commentary on the well-being of children in the UK today
- provides more information on *The Good Childhood Inquiry*, its processes and opportunities to get involved, including a national call for evidence.

Childhood in the UK today

The state of childhood is one of the recurring topics of our times. Today's children and young people live in an era of rapid change, which poses particular challenges for their growth and development. In this climate, there is growing concern about the health and well-being of our children. Politicians, academia and the media alike ponder how best to bring up the nation's children.

Yet for all our concern, the way in which we view and value our children and young people is beset with contradictions and uncertainty. On the one hand we see children and young people as vulnerable and in need of protection. On the other hand, we see them as a threat to society.

This section considers the context in which we must understand childhood if we are to improve it for today's children. It considers how childhood has changed, is experienced and viewed in the UK today.

How childhood has changed

Childhood has changed significantly from that experienced by previous generations. New technology runs apace, while demographic changes mean that society today is increasingly diverse.

Family structures are changing. Between 1972 and 2004 the proportion of children in the UK living in single-parent families more than tripled to 24% (Summerfield and Gill, 2005). The UK leads Europe for the proportion of young people living in single parent or step families (Currie et al, 2004). Research shows that changes in family structure, and the major events that these indicate, are an important factor in the well-being of children (Bradshaw et al, op cit). Our recent study of young runaways, for example, reveals that children living with one birth parent are twice as likely to have run away and children in step families are three times as likely to have run away as those living with both parents (Rees and Lee, 2005). What can we do to support the family, and the children and young people at the centre of this important unit, when it breaks down?

Young people in the UK today are more ethnically, culturally and religiously diverse than previous generations. Black and minority ethnic groups continue to grow as a percentage of the general and in particular urban population. This is particularly true for children and young people (Office for National Statistics, 2005). How do we understand, affirm and celebrate the diversity of our young people in a way that encourages understanding and respect?

Today's children and young people are highly technologically literate. Some 64% of children aged 8-15 have access to the Internet at home, while 65% have their own mobile phone (Ofcom, 2006). Children and young people with access to computers, mobile phones and the Internet are becoming ever more free to communicate, learn and play on their own terms. With a sophisticated understanding of communication technology, children and young people interact directly with others in a virtual world that has few boundaries. Parents find it increasingly difficult to mediate this interaction.

Parents' alarm at the dangers young people face in using the Internet is reflected in the media and in research. A recent *Independent on Sunday* article alerts us that 1 in 12 teenage users has met a stranger via the internet, 6 in 10 have personal profiles on networking sites, and 50,000 paedophiles are online at any one time (*Independent on Sunday*, 6 August 2006). Research shows that children frequently encounter sexual material in the media and on the Internet aimed at both adults and children (Buckingham and Bragg, 2003). So how do we empower our young people to enjoy the freedoms that technological advances can bring while protecting them from the associated dangers?

That childhood has changed, there seems little doubt. Authors and commentators declare that childhood is 'under threat' (UNICEF, 2005), 'toxic' (Palmer 2006) or 'disappearing' (Postman, 1994). The Children's Society agrees that childhood is changing. But *The Good Childhood Inquiry* will focus on change only insofar as it impacts upon the quality and experience of childhood today. And to understand how childhood is experienced we will look to research, policy and what children and young people tell us.

How childhood is experienced

An important source of information about how childhood is experienced lies in the literature on children's well-being, a concept that has attracted growing interest in recent years. Well-being focuses on measuring multiple dimensions of a child's life. A comprehensive review of different approaches to well-being would merit a report in itself. However, here we will limit ourselves to commenting on a few important recent developments.

One such development is an attempt to compare children's well-being between countries, such as the international collaboration 'Multi-National Project for Monitoring and Measuring Children's Well-Being'² and the recently published 'An index of child well-being in the European Union' (Bradshaw et al op cit).



These two approaches share a firm commitment to child-centredness that takes into account children's present lives and 'well-being' as well as their development and future life chances, or 'well-becoming'. They also aspire to:

- Use the child as a unit of observation
- Accept the concepts of children's rights and childhood as a stage in itself
- Be based on a variety of sources of information
- Include positive indicators
- Be policy oriented.

(Source: <http://multinational-indicators.chapinhall.org>)

The Good Childhood Inquiry hopes to contribute to these important developments in thinking about children's well-being.

Alongside academic analysis of well-being there has been growing political interest in the UK in the concept and its application. The UK government, through its *Every Child Matters* agenda, is reframing responses to children in relation to their well-being. As part of its agenda for change, the Government has identified five outcomes for children's well-being: to 'stay safe', 'be healthy', 'enjoy and achieve', 'achieve economic well-being' and 'make a positive contribution' (*Every Child Matters*, 2006). This framework is becoming increasingly important in the way children's well-being is conceptualised and services for children and young people are structured and delivered.

Meanwhile other major government policies affecting children and young people focus on ending child poverty by 2020, addressing youth crime, and reducing anti-social behaviour. These flagship policies, alongside *Every Child Matters*, sketch out the current political thinking on how to improve the well-being of children and young people.

So how is the UK faring in the well-being of its children and young people?

Studies show that 20% of children and young people in the UK have mental health problems at some point, and one in ten have a clinically recognisable mental health disorder (CAMHS, 2004). A recent inquiry into self-harm reveals that up to one in twelve British children deliberately hurt themselves on a regular basis – the highest rate in Europe (Mental Health Foundation, 2006). Meanwhile, ChildLine reports an increase of 14% in calls from children feeling suicidal last year³.

The aforementioned study of children's well-being in 25 European countries, which used more than 50 different indicators, ranked the UK in 21st place, above the Slovak Republic, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. Although high in the league for educational attainment and housing quality, the UK scores poorly for the quality of children's relationships with their parents and peers, for child health, relative poverty and deprivation, for risky behaviour (cigarette smoking, drunkenness, the use of cannabis and inhalants, teenage pregnancy, underage and unsafe sexual intercourse) and for subjective well-being (children's own evaluation of how happy and healthy they are) (Bradshaw et al op cit).

How childhood is viewed

So how is childhood viewed and valued today? A brief scan of recent headlines in the UK press quickly illustrates our contradictory and dichotomous attitudes towards children and young people: our angels or demons, innocents or deviants. Our fear for children "Get these perverts off the street... or parents will" (*The Sun*, 14 June 2006), "Betrayal of innocence" (*The Mirror*, 27 July 2006) contrasts sharply with our fear of children, "Let's tame these feral children now" (*The Independent*, 29 April 2002), "A generation of young savages" (*The Mail on Sunday*, 17 April 2005), "Yobs are laughing off their Asbos" (*The Daily Mail*, 14 January 2006).

The UK legal system reinforces this ambivalence. At the age of ten, children are not deemed responsible enough to own a pet, and yet a ten-year old will be held criminally responsible for his or her actions. Under the reign of King Edward III (1327-1377) the ruling of *doli incapax*, or 'incapacity for guilt', stated that a child under 10 years did not know the difference between right and wrong and that a child aged between ten and 13 years would be presumed to be incapable of being criminally responsible unless shown otherwise. This presumption stood for 700 years until it was repealed in 1998.

These responses to children reflect our own uncertainty. On the one hand we want children to be agents in their own rights and choices, and on the other we recognise that there are limitations to their agency, and these will change as they grow up. While it may make sense to have different age restrictions on certain activities, these should be based on a clear, consistent rationale. This is not just a legislative issue. In August 2002 a survey undertaken by The Children's Society and the Children's Play Council showed that in some parts of the country children were prevented from riding bikes in parks, climbing trees or even, in one case, from making daisy chains as these activities were deemed too risky.

In 2003 The Howard League, supported by The Children's Society, won a partial victory in a ruling calling for The Children Act 1989 to apply to prisons. The Children Act 1989, designed to protect the welfare of the most vulnerable children in the UK, had hitherto not applied to young people in custody. The contrast between the desire to overprotect some groups of children while simultaneously neglecting others is indicative of a favouritism that benefits neither group.

Tragedies such as the death of Victoria Climbié or the residential care scandals of the 1990s have resulted in significant improvements in child protection. But these too come with a risk. Have we taken the lessons of child protection and applied them too broadly to create a culture of caution in other matters concerning children? Has our focus on protecting children made us too averse to risk in other areas of child-care, or even in parenting? These are some of the questions that the inquiry will need to consider.

The Good Childhood Inquiry

The brief contextual analysis in the previous section highlights a number of challenges and questions, which *The Good Childhood Inquiry* will address. These include:

- Why is the well-being of our children and young people so poor and what can we do about it? What is particular to the experience of childhood in the UK that so damages the well-being of our children?
- What changes in the way childhood is experienced by today's children and young people have the most impact upon their quality of life?

The Good Childhood Inquiry, managed by The Children's Society, is the UK's first independent national inquiry into childhood. The Children's Society believes that positive change for children and young people can only be achieved by observing the principles of child-centredness. By child-centred we mean that the child, and the best interests of the child⁴, should always be our focus. This obliges us to place the child, as an individual, in his or her relationships and surroundings, at the centre of *The Good Childhood Inquiry*.

The Good Childhood Inquiry will live out its commitment to child-centredness by employing a unique methodology that combines the views of children, young people and adults with rigorous analysis of academic research. It is our belief that calling upon such a diversity of evidence, which values views and experiences alongside more formal academic literature, will give the inquiry its strength, purpose and application.

The Good Childhood Inquiry will consider the following key questions:

- What are the conditions for a good childhood?
- What obstacles exist to those conditions?
- What changes could be made that would be likely to improve childhood?

At the end of the inquiry, the inquiry panel will produce an evidence-based report that will help improve the lives of children and young people in the UK today.

We hope that the material provided in the remainder of this report, focusing primarily on children's own views will provide a useful foundation for the development of the inquiry.



2. *Themes* from national survey of young people

Introduction

The material in this chapter comes from a national survey of a representative sample of over 11,000 young people aged 14 to 16 years. The survey was undertaken by The Children's Society, in partnership with University of York, in 16 areas of England in 2005. Further information about the sampling methodology is contained in Rees & Lee (2005).

We have tried to avoid 'over-interpreting' and creating complex concepts. As far as is possible, the approach we have adopted below is to present young people's views in a relatively straightforward way. This approach is reinforced by the use of numerous verbatim quotes, the text of which is presented exactly as written by young people on the questionnaire.

This also means that the style of presentation does not resemble that of a traditional social research report. For example, we have chosen not to reference the enormous body of previous literature that is relevant to the topics under discussion.

Given these introductory comments, we hope that the approach we have chosen provides an accessible and interesting summary of the views of a very large number of young people about what makes for, and prevents them experiencing, a good childhood.

At this stage we see this as still very much 'work in progress'. During the course of the inquiry we plan to do further analysis of young people's responses and to publish further information about the outcomes of this work. We also intend to undertake further consultation and research with young people through focus groups and a further survey of a younger age group.

The survey questionnaire

The two primary purposes of the survey were to explore some key issues affecting young people (including running away, anti-social behaviour, and discrimination) and to explore young people's views on the quality of their lives.

At the time when the survey was being designed, The Children's Society was beginning to develop an interest in the concept of a 'good childhood'. In view of this, it was decided to include some exploratory questions on the survey questionnaire to seek ideas from young people about this concept. After piloting and consultation with young people, the two questions on this topic included in the questionnaire were:

1. What do you think are the most important things that make for a good life for young people?
2. What things do you think stop young people from having a good life?

The phrase 'good life' was used rather than 'good childhood' because piloting suggested that young people in the age group covered by the survey did not perceive themselves as children.

The above two questions were on the final page of the questionnaire. This means that, when young people answered them, the topics covered earlier in the questionnaire would still have been fresh in their mind. It is impossible to be sure to what extent this may have influenced their answers to these two questions. As will be seen later, some topics on the questionnaire – e.g. bullying and discrimination – were commonly mentioned in young people's responses. On the other hand, other topics – e.g. running away and anti-social behaviour were not. There is, therefore, no clear circumstantial evidence that the earlier questionnaire content influenced the answers in a systematic way, but bearing this possibility in mind we have adopted a cautious approach to interpreting the material.

Not all young people chose to respond to the above two questions in the questionnaire. Almost four-fifths (79%) of young people wrote a response to the question of ‘What makes for a good life for young people?’ and a slightly lower proportion (77%) wrote a response to the question of ‘What stops young people having a good life?’.

At this stage we have only undertaken an overview analysis of young people’s comments. The data set also offers opportunities to compare the responses of young people on the basis of characteristics such as gender and ethnicity. We will be undertaking further analysis and ensuring that a full range of diverse views are represented in evidence which is provided to the panel and which is published in connection with the inquiry.

Analysis and presentation of material

The analysis was carried out by researchers at The Children’s Society national research team, which had been responsible for the design of the survey jointly with the University of York. The main work involved a detailed qualitative thematic analysis of a random 50% sample of the survey data set. Some details of the analysis process are provided in an Appendix to the report.

Independently of the above process, a content analysis was also carried out of word frequencies within young people’s responses and this provided a means of triangulation to ensure that the final set of themes identified adequately represented the issues raised by young people.

Most of the remainder of this chapter is spent presenting the outcomes of the thematic and content analysis. This presentation is divided into three parts.

- **Cross-cutting themes:** It became clear at an early stage during the thematic analysis that a significant proportion of young people’s comments did not fit neatly within one single topic. The large majority of these were cross-cutting comments relating to the quality of young people’s relationships, and to safety and freedom. We discuss these cross-cutting themes in the first section below.

- **Ten key topics:** We then move on to discuss the ten key topics which we identified through the thematic analysis – family, friends, leisure, learning, behaviour, the local environment, community, money, attitudes and health.
- **Key word analysis:** Finally, we briefly describe the key word analysis of young people’s comments in support of the thematic analysis.

Cross-cutting themes

The cross-cutting themes we have identified fall into three broad categories. We discuss these in this section, focusing here on comments made by young people which did not specifically relate to one of the ten key topics discussed later.

Quality of young people’s relationships with others

There were four key sub-themes in young people’s comments about the quality of their relationships with others – love, support, fairness and respect.

Love

As we will see later, love was an aspect which was particularly emphasised by young people in terms of family life. However, often young people commented on the importance of being loved and feeling cared for, but did not specify that this should come from family members or friends:

Love, safety, comfort, communication.

Love & care by the people they want to love & care for them & an easy life no stress.

Young people’s comments were not very specific in this respect, but the importance of these aspects are supported by the key word analysis (see later) which indicated that ‘caring’ and ‘loving’ were both in the top 20 most frequent key words used by young people.



“There are indications in the statistical data from the survey that many young people’s support needs may not be being met. Over a quarter of young people (29%) agreed with the statement ‘I often long for someone to turn to for advice.’”

Support

The significance of support is also confirmed by the high-ranking of this word within the key word analysis. This is reinforced by a number of more general comments about the importance of having help, support and someone to talk to:

Teachers washing their hands of you, bitchy “friends”, not having enough support, no cash.

Stress, aggravation, having nowhere to turn, bullies, People who don’t listen, people who pass judgement before they get to know you.

Some one to talk to and some one to listen.

The ‘support’ theme is evident in a number of the key topics discussed later – most notably family, friends and school.

Fairness

A third key relationship issue for young people related to being treated fairly by others:

*Having choices.
Being treated fairly.
Not having to worry.*

[What makes for a good life]

*Equal rights and equal opportunities.
Children getting heard.*

[What makes for a good life]

As part of this theme, many young people identified various forms of prejudice and discrimination as things which stopped young people having a good life:

Bullies, prejudice and other offensive [offenses] committed to prevent a young person having a good life.

[What stops young people having a good life]

Being picked on because of their colour or religion.

[What stops young people having a good life]

This issue was mentioned in relation to the local area and society in general, as well as in relation to the family and school.

Respect

Finally, and closely related to the above issue of fairness, the issue of respect also cropped up regularly in young people’s comments. There were a number of more general comments in this topic area, including those about mutual respect:

People respect other people in each community, people respect other religions, equality.

Teach young people respect so they are respected by elders. Give them independence but tell them when they are wrong. Family, friends and parties as well!!

Understanding parents, stable home, opportunities, people to speak to when in trouble, respect.

Safety, security and protection

Safety, security and protection were identified by young people as highly important issues in a number of respects.

As with other themes, some of the general comments just referred to feeling safe without any further details. However, fear of crime and the impact of drugs were two key themes to come through in many of the comments, and particular groups of people such as gangs and adults, who were perceived as a threat, were also identified:

Crime, bullying, drugs, anti social behaviour, racism, sexism, no money.

Living in areas with high crime rate. being in lessons with disruptive people.

Being treated right by adults. Not having to fear of druggies, drunks, gangs and kiddie fiddlers.

The issue of ‘safety’ connects with a number of the key topics discussed later in this chapter, including:

- Family – feelings of safety and absence of abuse
- Friends – bullying by peers
- Leisure and community – risk and safety within the local area.

Freedom

At the same time, many young people identified freedom, in a general sense, as being an aspect of what makes for a good life.

Some comments related specifically to freedom of thought, expression and decision-making:

To have freedom in what they think, say and do.

Being able to have freedom and not be told its wrong to do something or do something you believe in.

Let them enjoy their lives and make their own decisions, let them make their own mistakes so they can learn from them.

A larger proportion of comments referred more specifically to the desire to be free from certain restrictions and rules, either within the family or within society in general:

To be able to go out with mates.

Age restrictions and other young people, "stopping" freewill.

Nowhere to go and nothing to do. The age of having legal sex and drinking at a legal age.

At the same time there was often a recognition of the need for limits to freedom:

To be safe, allowed to go out as long as they be careful, to be treated equally + given the best education to help them after school.

Boundaries – laws are good, but there is a limit to how far you can go. Some parents are sooo overprotective because they stereotype the world and that effects their children because they won't be aloud to do things because the parents are shit scared paranoid people.

Things to do, freedom with certain restrictions.

Being able to be free in the choices they make and still have good discipline and feel safe and secure.

Finally, another key part of the 'freedom' theme were recurring comments about feeling under pressure:

Too much pressure.

Not enough free time.

Feeling insecure or unsafe.

Being bullied.

Having problems with weight.

Little pressure, encouragement in individuality, doing what you enjoy.

[What makes for a good life]

As we will see later, a significant amount of this pressure related to school work.

The identification of 'safety' and 'freedom' as key cross-cutting themes is indicative of one of the major tensions relating to children and young people – providing a safe environment whilst also enabling a growing amount of self-determination. This is likely to be a key issue to be explored throughout the inquiry process

Ten key topics

We now move on to a presentation of the ten key topics that we have identified in young people's comments. As discussed earlier, we recognise that arriving at a categorisation in this way involves interpretation and selectivity. However, we feel that the topics presented here are relatively comprehensive in their coverage. The material presented in this section, together with the cross-cutting comments identified previously, represent the large majority (more than 90%) of comments made by young people. It is also worth acknowledging at this stage that the boundaries between topics are inevitably blurred. We have tried to draw attention to some of the connections and overlaps between different topics wherever possible.

We present the topics in descending order in terms of the number of young people who commented on them. However, whilst this ordering has some interest, we also would not put too much store by it. A different method of categorisations would be likely lead to a different ranking of the key topics.

For this reason, also, we have chosen not to provide details of the number of comments within each topic and sub-topic. However, the criterion we used for inclusion in this section was that each sub-topic (identified in a bold heading within the topic) was mentioned by at least 1% of the sample.

1. Family

The family was clearly of paramount importance to young people, being the most common topic mentioned. Many of the comments focused on four of the above cross-cutting issues – love, support, freedom and safety. As we will discuss below there is potentially some tension between providing these conditions. In addition, young people identified the importance of stability and security in their home lives.



Love

The comments within this category broke down roughly evenly into 'loving' and 'caring' parents. Some young people drew links between these words and feeling 'safe' and 'secure':

A secure and safe atmosphere with a home and family that care about you. Friends are also vital and being able to get the chance to do more with life.

Families who 'don't care' were often identified as one of a number of factors that stopped young people having a good life:

Bullying, drugs, smoking, family that doesn't care.

One of the challenges is that this needs to be balanced with the importance of freedom for young people (see below):

*Friends.
Money.
Caring parents who let u do stuff!*

Support

A second important feature of family from young people's viewpoint was as a source of 'support'. The majority of comments on this topic were non-specific although there were some references to advice, guidance and having someone to talk to:

Having family and friends to turn to if you are upset or need advice.

Some of the comments on support also indicate the connections and tensions between the different qualities that young people valued in the family:

Supportive family that cares but gives you some freedom and trusts you. lots of close friends that you trust + have fun with. loads of activities in area to stop gangs hanging around bored. supportive + understanding teachers that are prepared to give extra help.

Freedom

Restrictive parenting was often mentioned in relation to what stops young people having a good life:

Parents trying to help kids to be safe and being strict. This affects teenagers when their on their teens because they want to go out late and have fun but parents wont let them.

[What stops young people having a good life]

"93% of young people felt that their parents/carers cared about them although a smaller proportion (63%) felt that their parents/carers understood them."

However, young people were also often quite realistic about the need for limitations to freedom:

** Parents allowing them to do stuff, but saying that, being strict as well.*

** Not putting so much pressure on us at school.*

Moreover, a minority of the comments within this category referred to parents who were not establishing appropriate boundaries:

Parents not have enough control kids disobeying too many people.

[What stops young people having a good life]

This particular category is one which may well be much more important to teenagers than to younger children.

Stability and security

Finally, although not as common as the above topics, a significant minority of young people mentioned the need for a stable and secure home life, including some discussion of the issue of family structures:

Structured family life. Two parents with clear values.

I think that a young person needs love from his/ her family & a divorce is not helpful. A decent area to grow up in & not growing up around smokers or addicts etc.

2. Friends

Friends were the second most important topic mentioned by young people. 'Friends' was also the most commonly mentioned keyword (see later). Within this category we have also included comments about boyfriends and girlfriends, most of which were of a non-specific nature.

Not surprisingly, friends were mostly mentioned in a positive sense. One aspect of this was having a social life, which we review in the next section under leisure. Friends were also seen as a key source of support. On the other hand, young people's relationships with friends and other peers could also have negative aspects. Many

young people highlighted the impact of bullying on their quality of life. In addition, comments about peer pressure were very common.

Friends as a source of support

Friends were seen as an important source of help and support, people to talk to and turn to, and people to be trusted:

Good supportive friends + family around you.

Having friends to rely on to talk when they need to.

Friends that you can trust, good education, caring parents.

Bullying

Bullying was a very prominent issue in young people's comments in terms of what might stop young people from having a good life. Some caution is needed because preceding pages of the survey questionnaire had asked about bullying so it was likely to be an issue that was uppermost in young people's minds at this point. However, this is unlikely to explain all of the very strong emphasis placed on this issue by young people.

Being bullied and are scared of life, to have nowhere to go where you feel safe, to not have anyone who understands them or they can talk to.

Peer pressure

After bullying, peer pressure was the only commonly mentioned negative aspect of peer relationships:

If there friends are bad, they might be forced or do something they don't want to do, just to impress their friends.

Peer pressure. If young people grew spines and decided to think for themselves for once, there would be no problem. Alcohol and drugs are practically forced on people by their peers, and hardly anyone has the mentality to think for themselves. It's sad but true.

"The survey questionnaire asked whether young people had specifically been bullied or picked on because of who they were. Around 7% of young people said that this had happened often and a further 24% or so said that this had happened sometimes."

3. Leisure

Leisure was seen as the third most important ingredient for a good childhood. This prominence in the thematic analysis is reinforced by the fact that 20 of the list of most common keywords in the comments linked in some way with leisure, namely – do, go, fun, time, places, activities, social, hang, sports, leisure, sex, clubs, hobbies, music, place, bored, streets, socialising, football, facilities. The significance of the first two of these words will be explained below.

This is quite a complex topic to summarise, and it also has considerable overlap with the 'Friends' and 'Local environment' topics. However in broad terms the comments in this category can be viewed as focusing on:

- Leisure activity
- Place of leisure activity
- Having free time.

Activity and place are obviously closely related. For example, when mentioning swimming, some young people might focus on the activity and say 'swimming' whereas others might focus on the place and say 'swimming pools'. For this reason we deal with both these issues in this section, even though the provision and quality of local leisure facilities can also be considered as an aspect of the local environment as discussed later.

Activity

Comments about 'something to do' and 'nothing to do' were made by almost 1,000 of the young people in the survey in terms of what made for a good life and what stopped young people from having a good life respectively.

The longer comments in this category related to:

- Practicalities (the cost of activities and the location)
- Purpose (e.g. to provide fun and enjoyment or distraction)
- The consequences of not having anything to do (e.g. becoming bored or hanging around and getting into trouble).

More things to do that are cheap and accesable.

Lack of activities in local area.

Plenty to do, then even if you've got shit in your life you can take your mind off it.

Things to do in your area so you don't get into trouble because you're bord.



“Three-fifths of young people (60%) agreed with the statement ‘I often hang about with my friends doing nothing in particular.’”

There were also many other comments in the ‘activity’ category focusing on:

- Having fun/a laugh/a good time
- Socialising
- Specific activities such as sport, music, cinema, sex, shopping, playing computer and video games.

Place

This second sub-category includes comments about young people having:

- Somewhere to go
- Places to have fun and places to socialise
- More specific comments about clubs, sports facilities and so on.

As for ‘activity’ above, some of the longer comments about ‘somewhere to go’ related to practicalities and consequences.

In terms of practicalities – young people again noted a need for places to go that were free or did not cost much and that were local.

The perceived consequences of having nowhere to go were again hanging around, particularly on the streets, and causing trouble. Another consequence of having nowhere to go and hanging around was that young people might then be ‘hassled’ by other people in some way.

Places to be able to go without adults telling them to move on.

Not having nowhere to go then being moaned at.

Safety was also sometimes mentioned in connection with the general ‘places to go’ comments and the more specific ‘places to have fun’ and ‘places to socialise’.

Places to go, which aren’t dangerous.

A place for kids to go and have a laugh but are still safe from other drunk gangs.

Places to hang out. (not too many rules but safe).

Having free time

The third and final sub-category within ‘Leisure’ consists of references to ‘leisure’, ‘leisure time’ and ‘free time’.

Longer comments focused on quantity, activity and schoolwork. Quantifiers used in relation to free time were ‘more’, ‘enough’ and ‘not too much’. Regarding activity, free time was said to be important so that the young person could socialise, take part in some other particular activity or just relax and do nothing.

Enough free time for hobbies.

Having time to do nothing & relax.

Schoolwork was presented as a thief of free time.

Too much revision or homework from school – although it can be beneficial in the long-term, the amount of work you have to do in the short-term really swamps your free time – especially since you should be relaxing more in your “youth years” before you get a job & family.

These issues were also summed up by young people in terms of the balance of their lives:

Doing well in school and having a good social life, getting the balance right.

4. School, education and learning

Whilst, as discussed above, young people emphasised the need for leisure and fun in their lives, there was also a strong recognition of the short- and long-term importance of school, education and learning. The words ‘school’ and ‘education’ were common words in the key word analysis. Whilst ‘education’ was generally used in a positive sense, the word ‘school’ was much more evenly split in its usage, with a significant proportion of comments citing it as something that hindered young people having a good life, for reasons discussed below.

Within this broad heading there were four specific areas which were highlighted by young people:

- Quality of school/education
- The importance of working hard and achieving
- School-related stress
- Teachers.

Although not as common as the above issues, there was also comment about the importance of wider learning about life and the need for positive role models.

Quality of school/education

This was a very commonly mentioned category but unfortunately in most cases young people did not provide detailed information about the precise ingredients of a good school, although support, a range of activities and opportunities to enjoy learning were all mentioned by some young people. The importance of a good education for the future was also recognised:

Friends, family and a good education so you can have a good job and have the things you like.

Working hard and achieving

There was also considerable comment on the importance of working hard and achieving at school, linked to considerations of future well-being:

To get good grades, to get a good job and get paid!

School-related stress

Despite the broadly positive attitudes to education discussed above, an important issue emerging from young people's comments as stopping them from having a good life was school-related pressure and stress:

Exams – stress – too many exams.

The trouble of school and homework and peer pressure, and wanting to be like everybody else, basically, they worry too much.

To much coursework to do at home, I think school should stay at school so the stress doesn't travel home.

Depression, school work (to much).

Teachers

There were both positive and negative comments about teachers. Positive comments emphasised support, help and understanding:

Love and support from your parents. Support from teachers who believe you can do well in your exams.

Where teachers were mentioned negatively this often related either to pressure at school:

Teachers, school, rules, dumping worries, problems and stress on to you.

“Over half (58%) of young people surveyed were worried about their exams at school, and almost half (47%) said that they often worried about school work.”

“Around 5% of young people in the survey self-defined as having a problem with drugs, and 8% as having a problem with alcohol.”

5. Behaviour

Young people recognised that their own behaviour makes a major contribution to their experience of childhood. In this section we discuss two of the major categories of behaviours which young people identified which mostly, but not always, were seen as preventing them having a good life.

Substance use

Substance use was a topic of considerable comment. The words 'drugs', 'drink', 'alcohol' and 'smoking' were all in the fifty most common keywords in young people's comments (see later). Within this broad category, drugs was the most commonly identified issue, followed by alcohol and then smoking.

Drugs and alcohol were mostly mentioned by young people as something which was perceived as stopping them having a good life:

If they think smoking or doing Drugs is a good part of there life it should be stoped. and they should think about what they are doing.

But a significant minority of the responses identified substance use as something which could contributed to a good life for young people.

Having loyal budz, having a good smoke.

Getting into trouble

The second broad category of comment about behaviour related to getting into trouble, including involvement in crime:

Getting into trouble with police / family. Becoming addicted to substances.

Hanging around the streets with the bad people cause there's not enough leisure places around.

As the quotes above show young people made connections between these issues, substance use and lack of facilities in the local area:



“Less than a third (32%) of young people agreed with the statement ‘There are places for young people to go in my area, whilst 19% were ‘not sure’ and almost half (49%) disagreed.”

Having nowhere and nothing to go and do as this means they hang around the streets in gangs and getting into trouble, when people think they are causing trouble and call the police for no reason that's when we kick off as we don't want to get into trouble for nothing, and the police never listen to us and always believe the other older person.

6. The local environment

Building on the discussion above, another one of the ten most important topics identified by young people was the quality of their local area. As we have already seen under ‘Leisure’ there was significant comment about the shortage of facilities and places to go in the local area.

In addition two other key issues were the general quality of the local environment, and safety within the local area.

Quality of the local environment

There were a number of comments about the significance of the local environment for young people's quality of life

Brought up in a safe and quiet area.

[What makes for a good life]

Living in poor, depressing, bleak places.

[What stops young people having a good life]

Safety in the local area

Safety within the local area was another key issue for young people:

A good and safe environment, a place to go and play and to enjoy your selves. People need respect and they need to be treated fairly mainly in school or at home.

[What makes for a good life]

“Three quarters of young people (75%) said that they liked living in their area.”

Parents don't trust them. Drugies [big guys frightening] little children. Feeling unsafe to go out.

[What stops young people having a good life]

7. Community

Young people also focused on their relationships and encounters with other people – young people and adults – in their local community.

Two of the key issues raised here by young people were the impact of the attitudes and behaviour of other people within their local area towards them; and the way in which this was seen to link with more general societal attitudes towards young people.

The impact of other people

Comments on community included the negative impact of specific categories of people including – police, neighbours, adults who were seen as a threat, older people/adults in general, and specific groups of young people.

Some examples illustrate the range of comments here:

Teachers, nobheads, neighbors.

Drunk people fighting on the street, setting a bad example. Police, stopping people from skateboards.

Mean and Anti social people.

Irresponsible people, bullies. worried about pedophiles and rapists.

Bullying, chavs, gangs.

Keus – people who walk around with burbery hats pointing in the air like penguins: they start fights on random people and usually don't live to see 30.

Adults don't want you to play there – they are being unsocialable to us.

“In response to specific questions, 18% of young people said that they did not feel safe when they were out alone in their area, and 29% felt that violence was a growing problem in their area.”

“In response to questions in the survey questionnaire, 36% of young people felt that gangs were a growing problem in their area.”

General societal attitudes towards young people

As the quotes above illustrate, young people were concerned about some of the attitudes which adults displayed towards them. Links were made between these individual attitudes, and a perception of general societal attitudes towards young people and of stereotyping:

Bullying and scared of crime which is exaggerated by media who overestimate the figures and levels of crime. Also young people in general are blamed for Britains “rising crime” (according to media) this makes people scared and frightened of young people.

To socialise and not to be discriminated against because we are young. We all are not thugs or vandals.

[What makes for a good life]

People thinking we are all the same e.g. a teenager might have been rude to someone, elderly, person etc. So they think we are all like that and then be rude to other teenagers.

[What stops young people having a good life]

Within this category some young people specifically mentioned the issues of anti-social behaviour and ‘respect’:

The police are introducing more measures to tackle anti social behavior but often get the wrong people like with this football card thing where you get a penalty for being in a large group.

[What stops young people having a good life]

Equality + respect from adults eg. Freedom to go out when we want.

[What makes for a good life]

This whole topic area was a major focus for comment by young people.

“Fewer than one in five (17%) young people agreed with the statement ‘My area cares about its young people’. 40% were not sure and 42% disagreed.”

8. Money

Money was regularly mentioned by young people in their responses to the two Good Childhood questions and it was the twelfth most common keyword on the list in Figure 1 (on page 19).

Most of the comments made by young people in this thematic category were very brief – simply listing ‘money’ as one of the things that made for a good childhood, and ‘no money’ as one of the things that stopped young people having a good childhood.

The more detailed quotes on this theme, however, do suggest a few important aspects in young people’s thinking about this topic.

Having ‘enough’ money

First, there was more emphasis on having ‘enough’ money than on being rich. There is some suggestion here that young people perceive poverty and low family socio-economic status as hindering factors more than that substantial wealth improves quality of life:

Having close friends – a loving family, a nice home, enough money for food and things wanted and good schoolwork.

[What makes for a good life]

Having a nasty mum or dad. Being bullied. Having a really Poor family.

[What stops young people having a good life]

The cost of leisure activities

Second, a number of young people made links between the amount of money they had available and the cost of activities:

Give them more opportunity. things to do. watching a film costs around 8 quid for 1 person and that is the only money people get.

Being able to be safe when out at night. more places for young people to go when we have no money.

[What makes for a good life]

The psychological benefits of earning one’s own money

Third it would seem that the ability to earn their own money can be an important aspect of well-being for young people. This suggests that, for some, the psychological aspects of the source of money may be as important as the amount of money available.

Having their friends with them nearby, having own freedom, being able to earn money, young people can’t get jobs easily because you have to be 18.

[What makes for a good life]



“Two-thirds of young people felt that their life had a sense of purpose”

*Independence – able to earn own money.
Independence – go out on my own.
Independence – get a bus or other mass transit to other places.
[What makes for a good life]*

At this stage these are relatively tentative themes which we hope to explore further during the research to support the inquiry process.

9. Attitudes

This topic refers to comments which related to how young people’s own attitudes and approaches could affect their quality of life. As with the ‘Behaviour’ topic, many young people recognised the relevance of their own attitudes and approach to life for the way in which they experienced life:

*Live life as if its your last day and to get along with others.
[What makes for a good life]
Moaning.
[What stops young people having a good life]*

The emphasis here was on young people taking responsibility and control for their quality of life.

*Growing up and taking responsibility.
[What makes for a good life]
Nothing, if people want to have a good life then they can.
[What stops young people having a good life]*

10. Health

Health is the final item on the list of the ten key topics we have identified in young people’s comments. The comments within this category tended to focus more on mental and emotional health than on physical health.

“78% of young people agreed with the statement ‘I find life really worth living’.”

Mental and emotional health

There were a considerable number of specific mentions of stress, worry and anxiety being key factors that prevented young people having a good life:

*Less stress, less pressure, more well respected, social life.
Irresponsible people, bullies, worried about paedophiles and rapists.*

Sometimes the link with school-related stress was implicit in young people’s comments:

The trouble of school and homework and peer pressure, and wanting to be like everybody else, basically, they worry too much.

Physical health

Comments about physical health were less common. However there were a number of comments about healthy behaviours including exercising and diet.

*Good, close friends.
A loving family/carers.
Lots of things to do in area.
Healthy diet.
Eating.
Exercise.
Lots of love from parents.*

There was also some recognition of the impact that ill-health and disability can have on quality of life:

*Prejudices, disabilities, bad homelife.
Drug abuse, alcohol abuse, being overweight/health issues, having a disease (i.e. cancer/diabetes/kidney problems), parents who don’t care, a rubbish school that doesn’t care.*

Key word analysis

In this section we briefly present some results of an analysis of a frequency count of the words used by young people in their responses in order to supplement the more detailed thematic analysis described above. The main purpose of this in the current context was to provide a check that we had not missed out any key issues mentioned by young people through the process of structuring and restructuring the thematic framework.

Our initial word count analysis identified a number of words which appeared in several different forms – e.g. ‘love’ and ‘loving’. In order to make the final presentation as clear as possible, we therefore grouped words with a common root, taking into account incorrect spellings.

There were also a significant number of words that had no intrinsic meaning once taken out of context. These included common linking words and adjectives. We removed these words from the main list, but for information they are listed in a footnote to the table.

The results of the analysis are shown in Figure 1. The list includes all words occurring 80 or more times (and thus used by at least 1% of the young people who responded to the questions), with the exception of those excluded as above.

Two of the key words that we chose to leave in this list warrant a little further explanation:

- The appearance of ‘Do’ as a commonly occurring key word is predominantly in relation to leisure time. There were almost 1,000 occurrences of the phrase ‘thing(s) to do’ (including ‘something to do’ and ‘nothing to do’) in young people’s responses
- Similarly the appearance of ‘Go’ in the list is partly attributable to over 400 occurrences of phrases such as ‘somewhere to go’, ‘places to go’ and ‘nowhere to go’.

This kind of analysis has a number of limitations. In particular it faces the problem that individual words are taken out of their context. For this reason, it would be a mistake to place too much store on this analysis method. However, it can be seen to identify some important patterns in the data. For example, the most common word in the list was ‘friends’ which was mentioned 4,164 times – more than five times as often as the word ‘money’.

Figure 1: The most common key words in young people’s responses⁵

Friends	4164	Violence	226
Family	3091	Exams	220
Bullying	2311	Understanding	204
Do	2106	Leisure	203
Parents	1710	Strict	202
School	1582	Trust	201
Drugs	1182	Respect	198
Go	1090	Gangs	196
Home	945	Trouble	192
Fun	897	Work	192
Education	886	Job	174
Money	825	Fairness	167
Caring	767	Sex	158
Loving	723	Relationships	158
Support	516	Help	157
Freedom	501	Stability	155
Time	496	Security	144
Police	494	Learning	141
Places	494	Homework	141
Activities	466	Health	136
Pressure	465	Rules	134
Happiness	458	Clubs	131
Safety	423	Behaviour	130
Treatment	413	Hobbies	129
Social	406	Chavs	116
Feelings	360	Girlfriend	111
Drink	357	Food	110
Area	348	Prejudice	105
Adults	342	Opportunities	96
Problem	329	Close	95
Hang	320	Music	94
Abuse	312	Place	94
Teachers	298	Bored	92
Want	292	Streets	92
Alcohol	290	Racism	91
Smoking	288	Group	91
Nice	268	Socialising	88
Talk	264	Football	88
Enjoyment	262	Play	86
Mates	254	Worries	85
Environment	245	Turn	85
Sports	237	Unfair	84
Crime	237	Facilities	80
Stress	230	Laughter	80



The word count analysis tends to support the conclusions of the thematic analysis.

First, the cross-cutting themes are all in evidence in the list of keywords in Figure 1 as follows:

- **Safety:** the words ‘bullying’, ‘safety’, ‘abuse’, ‘violence’ and ‘security’ all appear in the list
- **Care/Love:** the words ‘caring’ and ‘loving’ are both in the top 20 keywords in the list
- **Support:** the word ‘support’ is a frequent keyword, and other related words such as ‘help’ and ‘talk’ (often appearing in relation to someone to talk to) are also in the list
- **Freedom:** ‘freedom’ and ‘pressure’ were frequent key words
- **Fairness:** the words ‘fairness’, ‘prejudice’, ‘racism’ and ‘unfair’ all appear in the list
- **Respect:** the word ‘respect’ is also present.

Second, most of the other ten key issues identified earlier are also in evidence with words relating to substance use, mental well-being, health, money, leisure, education and the local area all being prominent in the list.

Third, very few of the words in the list cannot be linked with one or another of the topics discussed earlier – the possible exceptions being ‘food’ and ‘opportunities’.

In summary then, our comparison supported the themes and topics identified in the thematic analysis.

We hope that the views expressed by children have confirmed the importance of ensuring that their voices are at the heart of discussions about children’s well-being and quality of life.

3. *Summary* and way forward

In this final chapter of the report we summarise some of the key points which have emerged from young people's comments. We have translated these into a number of questions and issues, which will be incorporated into the inquiry process.

We then conclude the report with some further details about *The Good Childhood Inquiry*; how to contribute your views and where to get further information.

What young people's views tell us

So, to what extent can the views of young people contribute to the wider debate about childhood and children's well-being?

There was evidently a risk, in asking children what constitutes a 'good life', that they would answer purely in terms of their current happiness. But, in fact, it is clear that young people thought about this issue both in terms of their present and future well-being. Whilst friends and leisure were very important to them, so also was education. Young people's views have indicated the importance of bearing in mind both the experiences of 'being' a child or young person and of 'becoming' an adult in thinking about a good childhood.

Gathering children's views in this way can play an important role in both supporting and complementing other work on well-being.

The UK Government has identified five key outcomes for children – 'stay safe', 'be healthy', 'enjoy and achieve', 'achieve economic well-being' and 'make a positive contribution' (*Every Child Matters*, op cit). The comments from children in the survey mostly confirmed the importance of these outcomes. Safety was one of the most prominent cross-cutting themes highlighted by young people. Health, education and money were all amongst the ten key topic areas we identified. Young people did not appear to put so much emphasis on 'making a positive contribution' in their comments. This issue requires further consideration, particularly as the survey has highlighted ways in which young people do not feel included in their community and in society.

Young people's comments also draw attention to the impact of adults on their quality of life. This is an issue which stands outside of an outcomes-based approach focusing on children themselves. Many comments related to the issue of adults' and society's attitudes towards young people. Respect and fairness were identified as important 'quality of life' issues for young people. At a time when the concept of 'respect' is being debated, these comments reinforce the need to ensure that respect is a mutual concept and that there is a shared understanding of what it means. Many young people felt that their local area did not care about its young people and it is a cause for concern that they felt marginalised and excluded in this way.

Some issues were also notable in their absence from young people's comments, such as technology, for example. This may reflect the fact that young people take technology for granted, or it could indicate that at a fundamental level they do not see technology as having a major impact on their quality of life. Similarly, discussion of national and global political issues was relatively scarce, as was the spiritual dimension of young people's lives.

Other issues, by their nature, are unlikely to be identified by young people. This is not to say that they are not important to consider. In order to build a complete account of childhood we need to gauge what children and young people are feeling now and understand that their experience of childhood is a valid one in itself, rather than seeing childhood as a preparation for adulthood.

Yet if we concentrated exclusively on children's perceptions of childhood, the inquiry would be manifestly incomplete. We would, for example, have no understanding of the crucial first three years of a child's life. We need to combine the subjective, lived experience of children with an objective, statistical and research-based analysis of childhood. Only by combining children's first-hand account with scientific rigour can we build the truly authoritative account of childhood the project requires.



Our commitment to being child-centred means that we will give due attention to both the issues voiced by children and young people as well as to those that expressed by adults and implying adult responsibilities. The strength of *The Good Childhood Inquiry* is in the diversity of the evidence base that will combine the views of children, young people and adults with the findings of academic research.

Questions raised by young people's comments

- How can parents, carers and society in general reconcile children's needs for safety and freedom; and at the same time meet their needs for love and support?
- How can we ensure that children feel treated fairly and with respect?
- How can we ensure that children have a good childhood within the context of the rapidly changing face of family life?
- How can we reduce peer bullying and its impact on children?
- How can we support children to resist negative peer pressure?
- How can we provide a high quality of education for all young people?
- How can we ensure a healthy balance between enabling children to achieve their full potential and not placing excessive pressure on them?
- How can we tackle the issue of substance use which many children have identified has a negative impact on their lives?
- How can we support children to avoid 'getting into trouble'?
- How can we provide the kinds of local environments where children feel happy and safe?
- How can we respond to children's comments about a lack of leisure opportunities and facilities within their local areas?
- How can we respond to children's feelings that they are often mistrusted and stereotyped within their communities, and by society as a whole?
- How can we better understand and minimise the impact of poverty on young people?
- How can we enable young people to have a positive attitude to life and a sense of purpose?
- How can we tackle the issue of young people's mental health and reduce their feelings of depression, stress, worry and anxiety?

This list of questions from a single survey of young people is another illustration of the challenges and opportunities that are faced in debating the issue of childhood in the UK today. We now go on to describe how *The Good Childhood Inquiry* will hope to contribute to this ongoing debate.

The inquiry

How the inquiry will work

The inquiry will bring together an independent panel of twelve experts and influencers, and will include Lord Layard, Emeritus Professor of Economics at the London School of Economics, Professor Sir Albert Aynsley-Green, Children's Commissioner for England, and Bishop Tim Stevens, Bishop of Leicester and Chair of The Children's Society's Board of Trustees. Dr Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, is Patron of the inquiry.

The inquiry panel will meet regularly to consider written and oral evidence, which will be drawn from a national call for evidence, survey research, and a review of the academic research and other literature. The first inquiry panel meeting will take place in early 2007 and a final report with recommendations will be published at the end of the inquiry in 2008.

While *The Good Childhood Inquiry* is managed by The Children's Society, the inquiry panel and their proceedings will be independent.

Inputs to the inquiry

Call for evidence

In September 2006 The Children's Society will make a national call for evidence on behalf of the inquiry panel to ask children and young people, professionals working with children or with specialist knowledge, and the general public what they think makes for a good childhood in the UK today. We hope to initiate a wide-ranging debate about the reality of childhood today, and to hear the views and experiences of a broad range of individuals and organisations.

The evidence that we receive will help to define the scope of *The Good Childhood Inquiry* and enrich the evidence base. We will gather, review and summarise the submissions in a series of briefing papers, which will be made available to the inquiry panel ahead of each meeting. On the basis of their submissions, the inquiry panel will invite individual children and young people, adults and experts to give oral evidence directly to the panel.

Survey research

To support the evidence-based nature of the inquiry process, The Children's Society's research team, in partnership with academic institutions, will continue to undertake research into the concept of a 'good childhood' over the next two years. This will include further analysis of the survey data set described in this report; focus group work with children; and another national survey during 2007.

The findings from this research will form one of the contributions to each panel meeting, and will also be published and disseminated by The Children's Society.

Literature review

The Good Childhood Inquiry will situate its thinking in the context of existing academic research and other evidence. The inquiry will review the findings of social science and other evidence on a range of issues that pose conditions or obstacles to a good childhood.

Participation

Children and young people will be given a number of opportunities to participate in *The Good Childhood Inquiry*. The inquiry will benefit from the advice of a group of young advisors to the secretariat to help us keep the participation of children and young people alive and real. We will also invite children and young people all over the country to take part in the national call for evidence and convey their views and experiences using words, pictures, new technologies and other forms of expression. We will support children and young people in our projects to give evidence in ways that suit their interests and needs, so that the experiences of the children we work with every day – children in trouble with the law, disabled children, children at risk on the streets, and refugee children – are heard by the inquiry panel. We will also provide training for a group of young spokespeople so that they can have their say in the media.

These various inputs to the inquiry will combine to provide a rich and diverse evidence base for *The Good Childhood Inquiry*, which we hope will encourage fresh thinking, help renew our understanding of childhood today, and inspire our relationships with children and young people for years to come.

Further information

For further information about *The Good Childhood Inquiry*, please visit our website at www.goodchildhood.org.uk or write to us at *The Good Childhood Inquiry*, The Children's Society, Edward Rudolf House, 69-85 Margery Street, London, WC1X 0JL.

For further information about the work of The Children's Society, please visit our website at www.childrenssociety.org.uk.

How you can have your say

You can have your say on what makes for a good childhood by taking part in our national call for evidence, which will open in September 2006 and run for eight weeks. We encourage children and young people, parents, professionals and other adults to take part in the debate. Please visit www.goodchildhood.org.uk to tell us what you think.

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Appendix: Details of thematic analysis process

The purpose of the analysis was to summarise young people's responses by identifying key themes.

The first stage in the process of devising a thematic structure was a detailed analysis of a 10% random sample of responses. Every key word or topic identified by young people was included in an initial list which was then organised into a tree structure by grouping related categories.

This proved to be relatively straightforward for the majority of the structure. One significant group of exceptions were comments which young people made about aspects of relationships with other people in a general sense. Thus it was recognised that some of the very general comments made by young people such as 'love', 'someone to turn to', and so on did not fit neatly into one thematic category and were cross-cutting themes. As a consequence, the tree structure was reorganised to include provision for these cross-cutting comments.

The revised structure was then tested out on the same 10% sample by two researchers working independently of one another. Once this dual testing was completed, a comparison was made of these two analyses. This highlighted a number of inconsistencies and differences in interpretation. The two researchers then worked jointly on producing a further revision to the structure and guidelines aimed at reducing these differences.

This final structure was then used to categorise a random 50% sample of responses. This work was undertaken by three members of the research team. Once this categorisation process was complete, a frequency analysis of responses was undertaken to identify key topics. These were then organised and grouped in the way presented in Chapter 2.



Footnotes

- ¹ It is worth mentioning that when we talk about childhood we are referring to the period from birth to the age of 18, as is consistent with United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and UK legislation. Of course, our experience of working with young people reminds us that many teenagers do not consider themselves children or to be experiencing childhood. For this reason, in our research and interaction with young people we often use the expression 'life' instead of 'childhood' since this resonates with them more strongly.
- ² See <http://multinational-indicators.chapinhall.org/>
- ³ In the year 1 April 2004-31 March 2005 1,039 children and young people called ChildLine primarily about feeling suicidal. This represents an increase of 14% compared to 910 children calling primarily about suicide during the year 2003/4, see www.childline.org.uk/SharpriseinsuicidecallswarnsChildLine.asp
- ⁴ One of four core principles set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The principle of the best interests of the child, demands that 'In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.'
- ⁵ For reasons explained in the text, the following commonly occurring words are not included in the above list – a, able, about, age, all, also, an, and, are, as, at, bad, be, because, but, by, can, don't, etc., e.g., for, from, getting, good, have, I, if, in, is, it, just, keep, less, lots, more, much, my, nice, no, not, of, on, or, other, should, so, stuff, that, the, their, them, there, they, to, turn, up, us, want, we, what, when, where, who, with, you, your, yourself.



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