

Table S1. Additional participant quotes for each pathway and mechanism

1. Pathway: Symbiotic nurturing
They're my everything ...they're [cats] always there, no matter what... if I'm having a bad day, I will thump and I will scream and I'll be like, rah. But they will come and sit next to me on the couch and if I'm crying, they'll come and, like, nudge my face...They never – they don't judge. (18-F-26)*
... a lot of people don't have the people in their lives to – that they have all that much in common with... So then having an animal can kind of probably make you feel less alone because you have something that you're taking care of. (12-F-22)
She's [cat] always really comforting if somebody's sick. (10-F-22)
I also really wanted to include a picture of my pets. ... they live at my dad's house. But, I still call them my pets... And there is just so much unconditional love that you get from him [dog]... The cat. He will just come up ... it's very relaxing. So he'll just come up and sit on your lap and you can just pat him and, there's just a comfort from that as well. (13-F-22)
I'll be sitting in my room doing something and she'll just come up and sit on my bed with me... And she's [cat] just friendly face... But she's a friendly face when I need her. (10-F-22)
I really wanted a cat because I wanted it to get fat and lazy and just lie with me when I felt lazy too. (15-F-20)
I think there's a certain responsibility that goes with it. And I think it's good to have a responsibility to be able to be there for something or someone else.... it's like it gives you a purpose. It's a good purpose... It's like you're needed to a certain extent ... I think that's good, doing stuff for each other and being responsible for something and – yes, teaches you a lot. (15-F-20)
The sense of responsibility, I think, is also really good for wellbeing because you're taking care of something and it's relying on you so you have to be there for it. So it's kind of like a reason to get up in the morning and it's a reason to go about your day because you have something that's relying on you, which I think is important. (12-F-22)
So that's really what I care for, other than her [girlfriend], of course. But it's the ability to attend to something, to make it grow, to help it. They [plants] fulfil that need to sort of nurture and grow. (8-M-25)
... it's really nice, because I buy my plants really tiny as little punnets. Like, I bought him when he was really tiny. (1-F-26)
It's just like having a little nursery inside your house. It's good...Plants just – they're relaxing, right? Isn't it like a proven thing? They, like, Zen you out. (12-F-24)
I'm not really a massive horse person, but [friend] is and I could see ... her love of taking care of this horse and that's ... a big priority in her life and then her teaching me all about it. So ... animals I think is another big part of wellbeing. I don't have any pets but I really would love - ... a dog. I just think animals are such a good mental and physical kind of companion to have. (12-F-22)
2. Pathway: Building social glue
I love being in nature and kind of getting lost with people, who also like the same thing, because you don't ever want to have someone along who's like, "I just want to go home and watch Netflix." (12-F-22)
And then a few months after that, me and my dad climbed Mount Kinabalu, which I think is the 20th tallest mountain in the world. (7-M-20)
But again it's just about leaving phones at home and really appreciating the beauty of where you are and, again, I have the people in it as well, because I do like to do it by myself, but I also like to do it with other

people... So finding people that enjoy the same kinds of things as you, you can just kind of de-connect ... (12-F-22)

So you kind of feel like you're doing something good for you that's really enjoyable and it was also the socialness of that which was really, really fun too. We had a really, really nice time together, kind of getting to know each other. (12-F-22)

...me and my girlfriend [name], once or twice a week we'll go for a big drive and we'll drive out to, say, somewhere we haven't been out of Brisbane. And we'll go for a massive hike or we'll climb a mountain or we'll go, you know, surfing for the first time or something like that. ... I don't drink at all. So to find a friend who is interested, in just hanging out and having fun without having to go out on a Saturday night, it's like – it's the best thing ever. (3-F-23)

I'd just got home and the next day my sister and Mum took a long drive out to a new water hole and that's something I've always done when I was younger (14-F-22).

I think de-connecting is also more about just really enjoying the moment rather than thinking, "I have to get the perfect picture so that this person will like it and see it. (12-F-22)

3. Pathway: Maintaining a positive outlook

3.1 Mechanism: Catalyst of positivity

... he's [dog] just the best thing we've ever had. He makes us so happy. And we're always laughing at him... He's so stumpy and he's just so funny. (1-F-26)

I think I could almost say that he's [dog] made me a lot less depressed ever since I've had him. (1-F-26)

I love being just in the water and just running into the ocean and for me it's very much like a cleansing kind of thing. ... So if you have a bad day, you just run into the ocean and go for a swim and you come out and you're like, "You know what, actually it doesn't really matter anymore." (12-F-22)

...the dog, he's just so happy. And there is just so much unconditional love that you get from him. So seeing him happy makes you happy (13-F-25)

"Oh my God, this is my place." Like, I finally felt like I had a place... I went diving with sharks and turtles and more baby fishes. I was so happy... They were, like, tiny and I was like, "That's the coolest thing ever." (18-F-26)

I like plants. I think it makes things more homely, lived in... I have plants everywhere in my house... It's good for my wellbeing. (17-F-24)

I can't be at the ocean and not be happy and not be feeling in a good mood and just kind of clarity and everything ... I just feel like I can't have a bad day at the beach. (12-F-22)

I love Brisbane because I can go outside... I'm a lot happier... I found that days like this I'm just ecstatic... But that's just blue skies, living in Brisbane, it's just to keep me happy. (3-F-23)

I think the beach is a very big thing for wellbeing for me, because the minute I even, like, stuck my toes on the sand, I just feel instantly I just kind of relax and get endorphins and happy feelings. (12-F-22)

I think there's something completely different about being outside. Whether you like nature or not, I think everyone can just feel at peace or, you know, just have that happy time in that place... (15-F-20)

It's just really calm and just I feel like every time someone goes to the beach they're always so happy and it just makes me feel really happy.... Like, every time I can I try to go to the beach. It was a really nice day, too, and it was just another day to like relax and forget about all the problems with uni or, like, work and stuff. (6-F-19)

Once I go outside and spend a few hours outside, I feel a lot more relaxed, less stressed and less nervous. (1-F-26)

When I see other people's dogs, I just love them and I really want one for myself one day... when I see other people's pets I have – this family, for example, they have, I think it's like two dogs, a cat, chickens, like, they have so much and that. I go to their house, not necessarily every weekend, but quite often and so whenever I do, then I always have to ... have a little cuddle with their dog and cuddle their cat and just kind of recharges you and makes you feel happy again... (12-F-22)

3.2 Mechanism: Gateway to happy memories and home

I went – I always go to the beach with my family as well and sometimes we don't get to go because my parents work and me and my siblings, we have university or work as well. So, it just brings up memories of my childhood as well... It's just a really calming place ... (6-F-19)

... just water and some of the things that I can always rely on to make me just reminiscent ... of just ... better times is water because just with things that I grew up with. (7-M-20)

It reminds me of childhood because I grew up there... It just really reminded me of home, that whole scene with the cane fields and the mountains is just home. (14-F-22)

I think actually more so it probably reminds me of my grandmother because my grandmother was massive into plants... (1-F-26)

Probably, because a lot of my childhood memories is in the garden with my dad. So probably there's definitely a link there between my, like, pleasure I gain growing plants and those early childhood memories. (8-M-25)

4. Pathway: Centreing yourself

4.1 Mechanism: Being in the zone

I get a lot of sort of meditative peace, I suppose you'd call it, in tending to plants... But it gives you time to reflect. (8-M-25)

You're getting exercise and it's amazing, yes, you just – you can walk slowly and just forget about things and it just de-stresses me. (13-F-25)

I think mentally and physically it aids you so much because, it's just getting away from everything, leaving things behind, realising that there's so much more to life than worrying about work and worrying about your career and worrying about your exams. And you realise there's actually a whole world out there that needs to be enjoyed ... I think as a society we're kind of losing the ability to enjoy simplicity and to enjoy just the moment because we're always like, "I have to go back and watch my TV show tonight," or, "I can't come hiking because I have video games to play," you know. (12-F-22)

But for me so much of wellbeing is just kind of shutting off from that for a little while and just going to the beach and just really, really being present in the moment (12-F-22)

You know, you see the little rays of light and it just looks so cool or like noticing the little butterflies and everything floating around. And really again it's like, really, really being present in that moment. So instead of walking and thinking about all the exam stress I have to do when I get home or all the blah. You're just like, "Right now I'm appreciating this." (12-F-22)

So I'll kind of go out in nature and it's almost like you're creating your own music video, because, you know, you're listening to the song and that way you're not thinking about all the things that, you know, you should be thinking about. You're just listening to the song and you're really, really enjoying where you are in that moment. Like, "In this moment I'm enjoying the song and I'm really getting the full effect of the song and I'm out in this beautiful, beautiful place and I'm happy." (12-F-22)

I love climbing up some rocks and just jumping in the water because it's just like a little rush feeling but it just makes you feel so alive and peaceful and happy and just jumping into the water. (12-F-22)

... this also reflects the fact that I love being outdoors. I love gardening and I love lots of plants and greenery in the house... I have plants everywhere in the house... I sound like an old nanna. I love – gardening is really relaxing and therapeutic. (1-F-26)

It's nice just to be able to go at your own pace and it just clears your head. (17-F-24)

Actually, 'burden' is a good word to use for this, because it's kind of like just letting go of some of the burdens and really enjoying that kind of peaceful moment of just happiness. I'm not worrying about the future. I'm not worrying about the past. I'm just really living the moment now. (12-F-22)

4.2 Mechanism: Episodes of solitude

It's so freeing. You're weightless. You feel like you're flying [Talking about scuba diving]. (18-F-26)

And we ended up walking up to there [beach]...and when you're standing there you can't even hear the person next to you... It's bliss... just felt happy and peaceful... Just really like to get away and just, phone goes off, or even the phone's not off, you just – you can't feel anything except the wind and the warmth. People just don't do that anymore. (18-F-26)

...when I was there it was the first time, really, I could remember just being very aware of the fact that all of the time you're dealing with this noise. It's always there. And it is always just at the very periphery of your consciousness, but you never get away from it. And when I first realised, "Hey, I'm away from that," I was out from under this impressive sound that I couldn't even remember being irritated at before... (7-M-20)

You could just be by yourself [beach] and do what you wanted and not have to be around crowds. (1-F-26)

I feel like your wellbeing, it can be affected by... stress levels, uni, work, friends, and so I feel like you never relax a lot and just enjoy time by yourself or, like, time doing stuff that you like to do. (6-F-19)

"Do you want to keep walking?" And I'm like, "No. I just want to stand here for a couple more minutes." So, you know, he went off and wandered a bit and then I sort of followed when I was ready and definitely feel better and more centred.... (18-F-26)

I'll just randomly start sprinting or I'll – to do with what I'm hearing in the song – just kind of dance around a little bit, because you're out there by yourself. No one's watching you. (12-F-22)

I thought, it's where I run and, being alone when I'm running and, I don't know, being able to run and doing that kind of thing. So, like, this is my normal route. I go along the coastline in the bushes... I love – I think it makes me happy and it relaxes me and it's nice and I don't – it's the only thing I like to do – need to do every week... (17-F-24)

You know, just go to the beach and sit on the sand just listen to the water, as opposed to, you know, going there because you're tanning or because you want to hang out with friends and stuff. You know, just a quiet moment wherever you can find it. (7-M-20)

So having a spot where I can just sit and think and not have sound, because we always have sound around us, all the time now. (7-M-20)

It was nice ... I could breathe... it wasn't so cramped, and you could just walk around, do whatever you want. It was a bit of freedom, you know. You didn't have to think about too much and you just got to be free... I think everyone needs a piece of time in their lives or a break where they can just be themselves completely and just not care. (15-F-20).

*Participant number, sex (F - female; M – male), age

S1: Participant recruitment

Emerging adults were recruited via a quantitative survey on wellbeing and health-related lifestyle behaviours. The survey instrument included socio-demographic questions and measures of wellbeing, namely Mental Health Continuum Long Form, which consists of emotional, social and psychological wellbeing subscales [82], measures of health-related lifestyle behaviours, including dietary behaviour, physical activity, alcohol and other substance use, road behaviour, unprotected sex and sun protection behaviours, and measures of perceived social support and health status. The survey did not include any questions related to nature. To achieve a diverse sample, multiple recruitment strategies were used including university's research volunteers email list, online advertisements (e.g., Facebook), distribution of posters and flyers across council libraries, coffee shops and similar locations where emerging adults are likely to congregate. Further, prospective survey participants were directly approached at train stations and local colleges and were provided with the paper survey or a link to the online survey.

Participants who completed the survey (N=1155) had the opportunity to express interest in participating in PEI on their conceptions and experiences of wellbeing. Recruitment materials did not mention nature. From 338 expressions of interest (EOIs), prospective participants were randomly selected and contacted to confirm their interest and make arrangements for completing the PEI. PEI data collection was restricted to six digital cameras (due to financial restrictions), only six participants could be recruited at the time, and the duration of participation took up to four weeks for each participant. While participants only had two to three weeks to complete the photo-assignment, in several occasions the timeframe needed to be extended upon participant request. Some of the reasons for this were unanticipated events such as illness or changed work schedule. Therefore, to avoid longer gaps between invitation to actual participation, only a limited number of prospective participants were contacted per week. The first author attempted to contact in total 116 prospective PEI participants. Emerging adults who responded positively to invitation were recruited in the study, with an exception of two individuals who withdrawn due to personal circumstances. There were fewer EOIs from males and they were also less responsive than females. Thus, to improve gender balance of the sample, purposively contacted more males. The first author stopped contacting new participants once saturation was reached. Saturation was achieved at 15 interviews and an additional three interviews were conducted to ensure no new themes emerged.

In total, 18 individuals participated in the PEI (14 females and 4 males). Of these 18 participants, 14 (78%) discussed nature as a supportive resource for wellbeing. From 135 photographs that these 14 participants brought into the interviews, 44 (33%), on average three per participant, were related to nature. Nature was not mentioned during the data collection, namely, orientation sessions where participants were offered guidance on the photo-assignment, meaning the responses about nature were unprompted and participants themselves chose to talk about it. It is the results of this sample of 14 interviews that are the focus of this paper.