



# Wellbeing: the importance of belonging

Summary report

In 2013, Barnwood Trust commissioned a county-wide survey to understand what drives wellbeing in Gloucestershire and explore whether residents living with an impairment have equal access to known determinants of wellbeing.

This report summarises the findings which relate to the importance of feeling that you belong.

# Summary

Analysis of the survey data highlighted:

## **The importance of belonging**

People who felt a sense of belonging in the places where they lived had:

- higher levels of overall life satisfaction
- higher levels of mental wellbeing

## **High levels of belonging in Gloucestershire**

Levels of belonging in Gloucestershire were high; higher than the national average.

## **Not everyone felt the same sense of belonging**

Levels of belonging varied between groups of respondents: age, housing tenure, ethnicity, health and employment status appeared to have an influence.

## **Respondents living with an impairment were less likely to feel a sense of belonging**

Of the different types of impairment, people living with mental health challenges were the least likely to feel a sense of belonging.

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# Background

Over recent years there has been a growing interest in the measurement of wellbeing. Correspondingly, a large body of evidence now exists on the determinants of health and wellbeing as well as a range of widely tested measures and indicators.

Research evidence demonstrates that a strong sense of belonging is positively associated with wellbeing and mental health. Feelings of belonging are understood to influence an individual's identity and the extent to which they feel accepted, valued and able to take on a role in society. It is in this sense that belonging is closely related to the concept of social inclusion. Miller and Katz (2002) present a common definition of an inclusive value system:

*“Inclusion is a sense of belonging: feeling respected, valued for who you are; feeling a level of supportive energy and commitment from others”<sup>1</sup>*

Keen to explore some of these issues further in the Gloucestershire context, in 2013 Barnwood Trust commissioned a large-scale, representative survey of Gloucestershire residents. The overall aim of the research was to better understand what drives wellbeing in the county and to explore whether residents living with impairments have equal access to known determinants of wellbeing. This report summarises the findings generated by the study which relate to the importance of belonging.

A total of 1134 Gloucestershire residents took part in the study, 284 of whom were living with an impairment. This report uses the term ‘living with an impairment’ to refer to individuals who responded ‘yes’ the following question:

**“Are your day-to-day activities limited [either a lot, or a little] because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?”**

<sup>1</sup> Miller, Frederick A. and Katz, Judith H. (2002). The Inclusion Breakthrough: Unleashing the Real Power of Diversity. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers

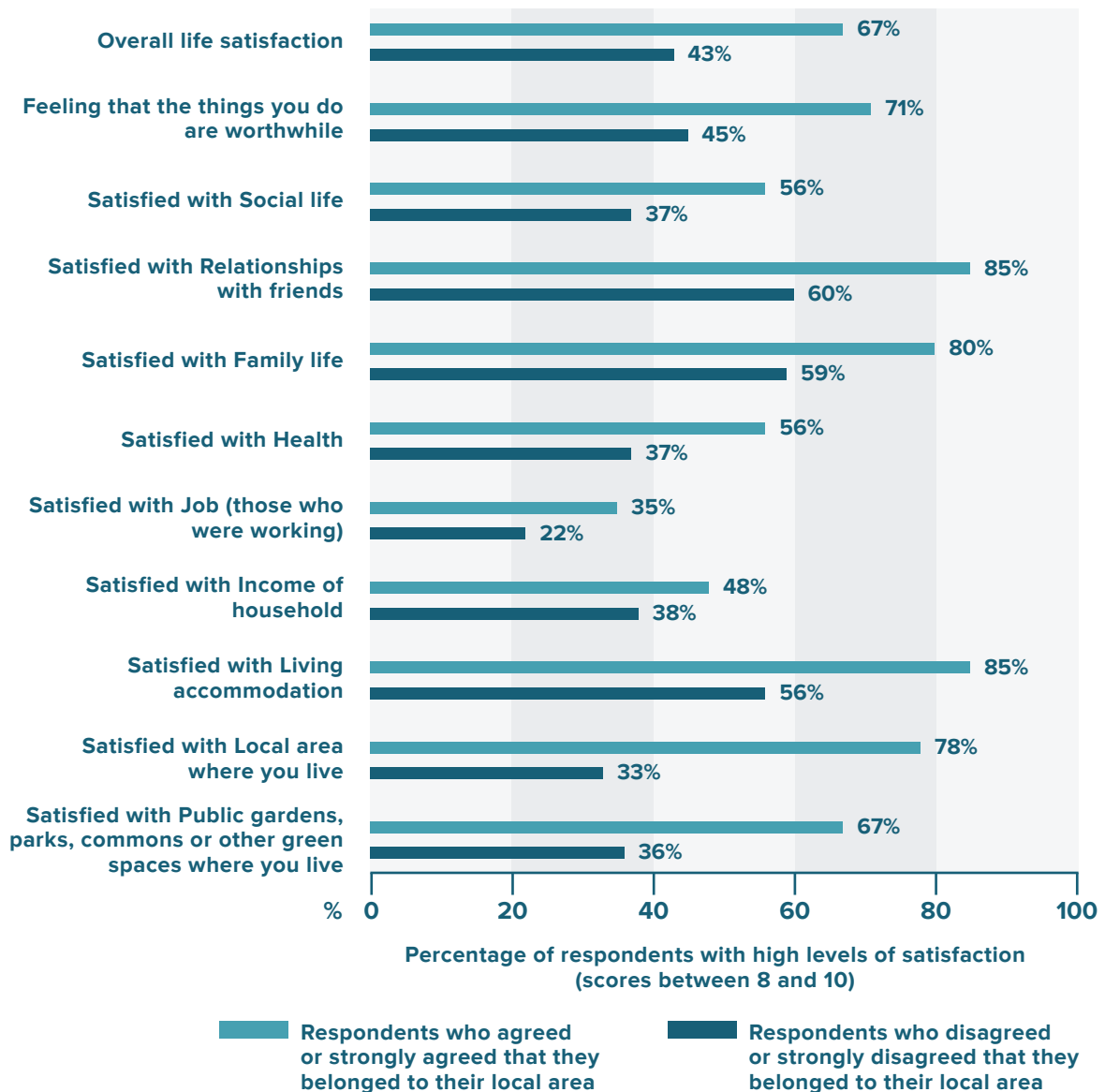
# Findings

## 1. The importance of belonging

### 1.1 Overall life satisfaction

In this study, respondents who felt a sense of belonging to the local area in which they lived demonstrated higher levels of life satisfaction, across a range of domains, compared to those who did not feel a sense of belonging.

Figure 1: Personal wellbeing indicator. By level of belonging

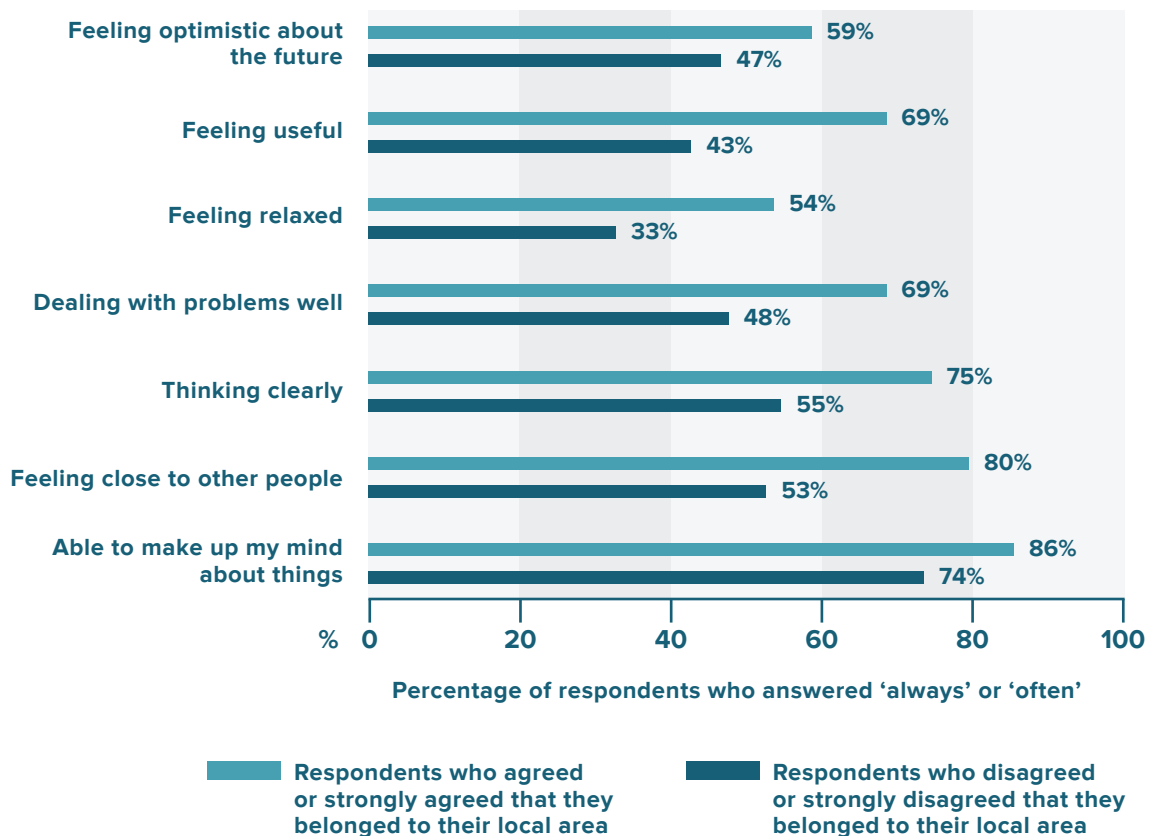


In this analysis, belonging appeared to be most strongly associated with the physical and material environments in which we live: our living accommodation, the local area, and public spaces such as parks, gardens and other communal green spaces.

## 1.2 Mental wellbeing

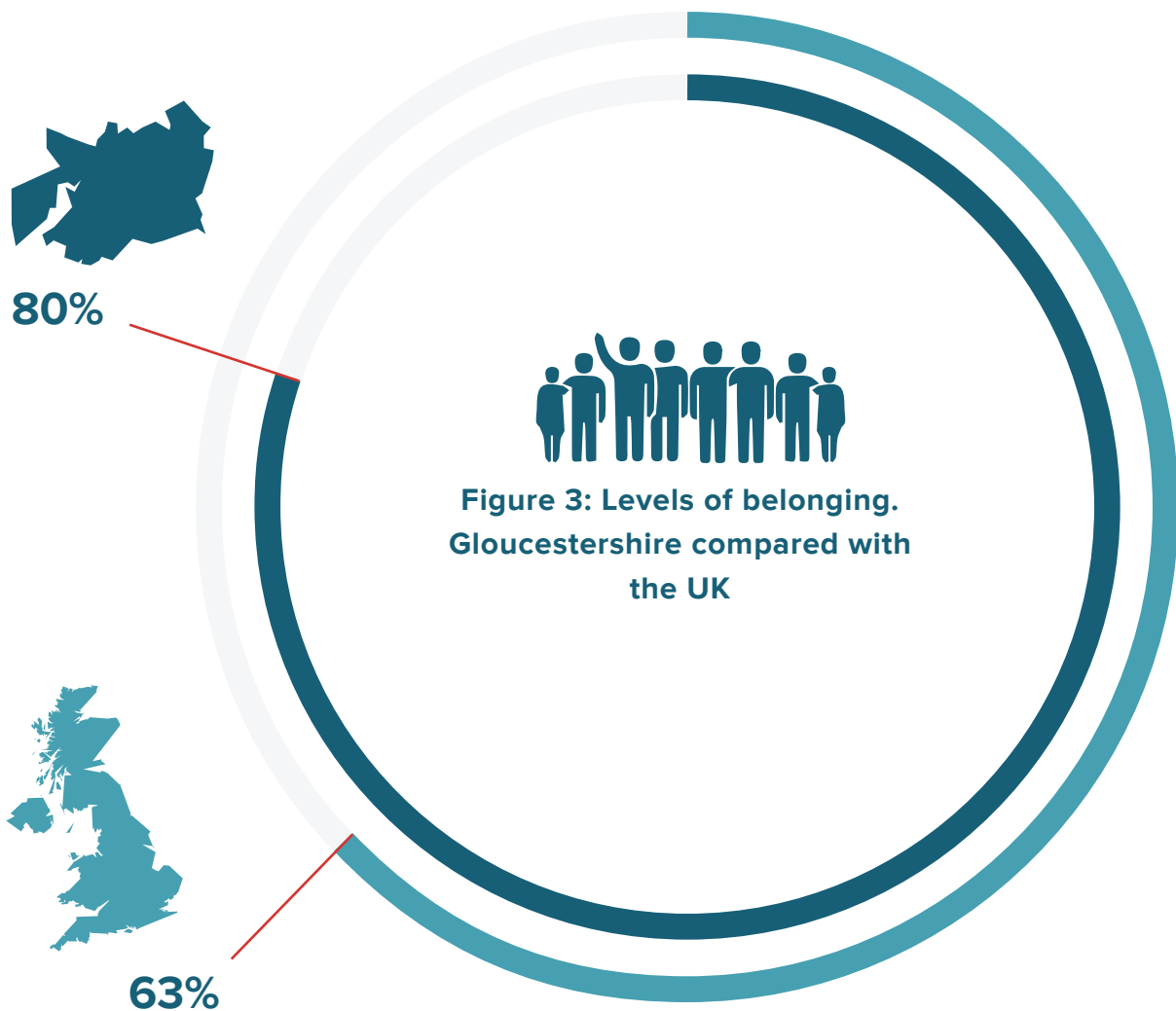
Respondents who felt a sense of belonging to their local area demonstrated higher levels of mental wellbeing than respondents who did not feel a sense of belonging.

**Figure 2: Mental wellbeing indicator. By level of belonging**



## 2. Gloucestershire vs. UK

A comparison with national data gathered by the Office for National Statistics demonstrated that levels of belonging in Gloucestershire were higher than the national average: 80% compared to 63%, nationally.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup>These comparisons should be viewed as indicative only due to slight variations in methodology used in the respective data collection exercises.

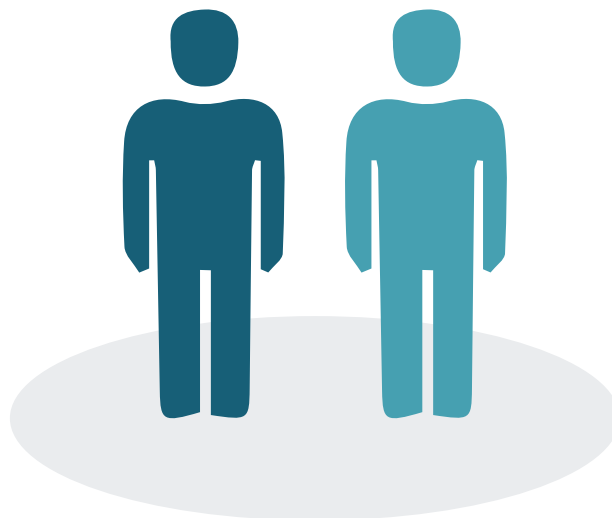
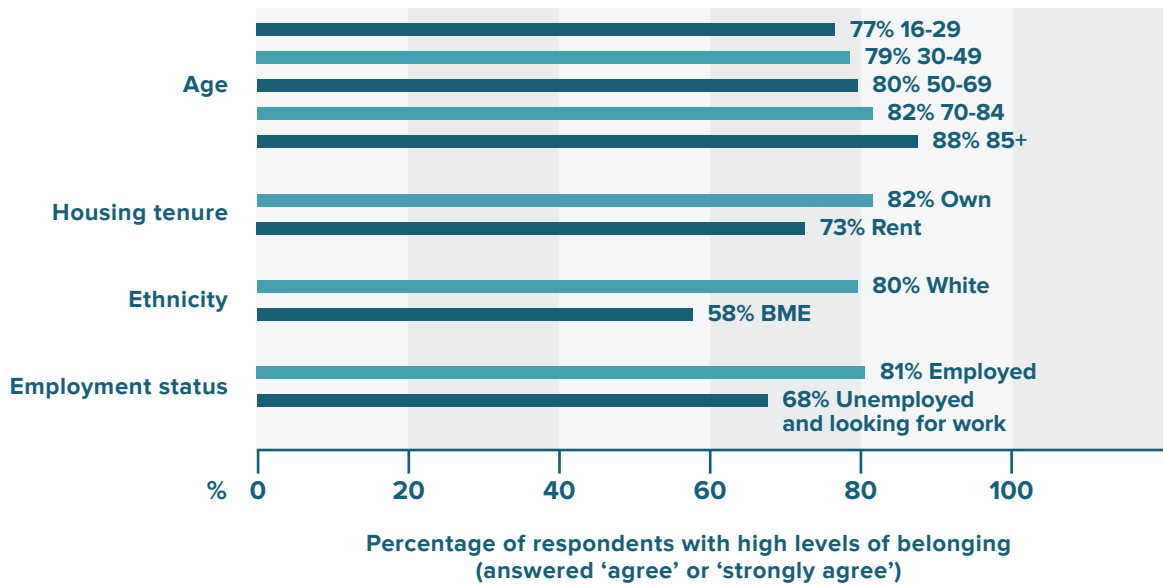


### 3. Who belongs?

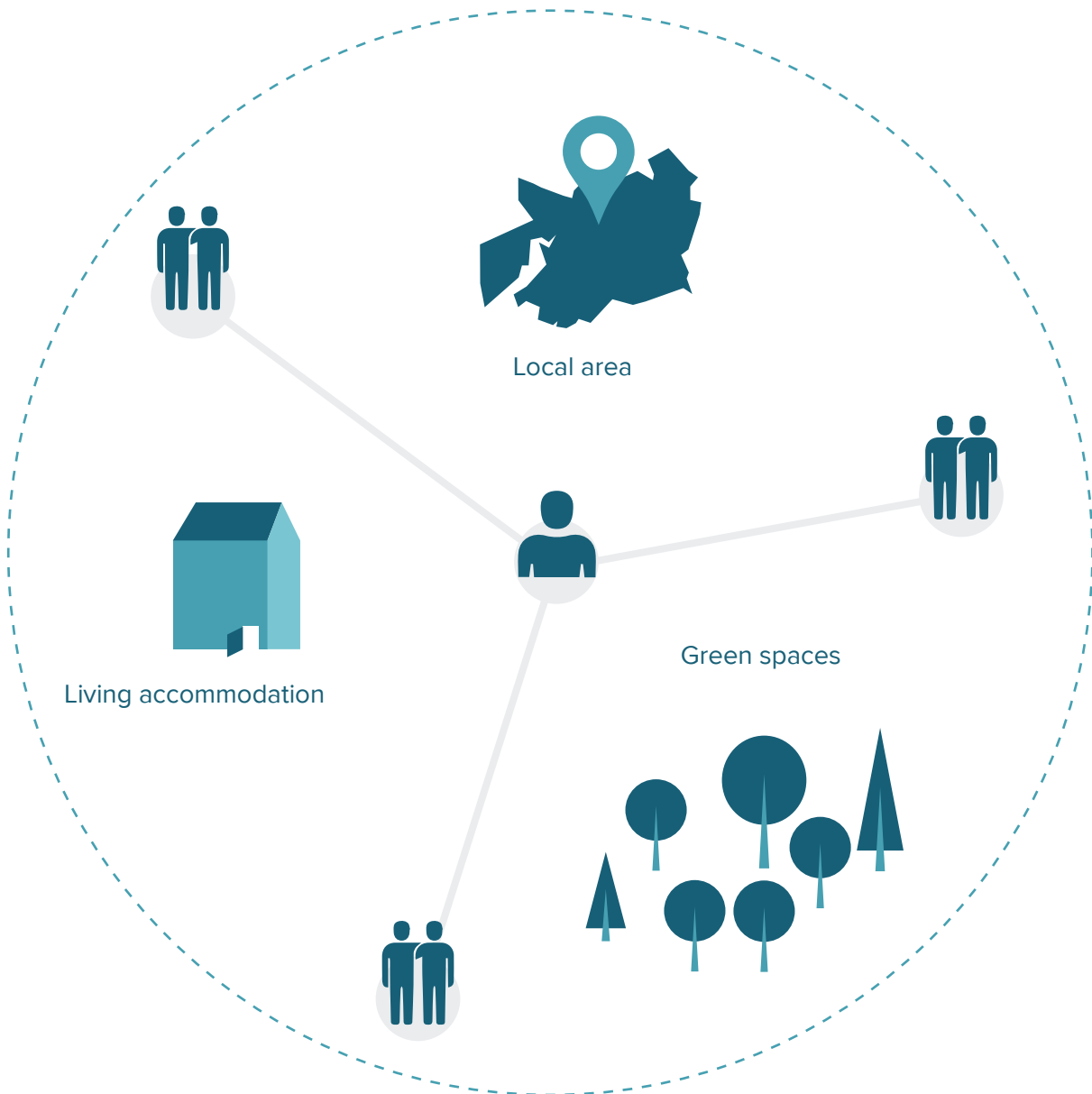
Analysis of the survey data revealed that levels of belonging varied between different groups of respondents.

As the figure below demonstrates, respondents who were more likely to feel a sense of belonging to their local area were older (belonging appeared to increase with age); home owners; ethnically white; and in employment.

**Figure 4: Levels of belonging across demographic groups**

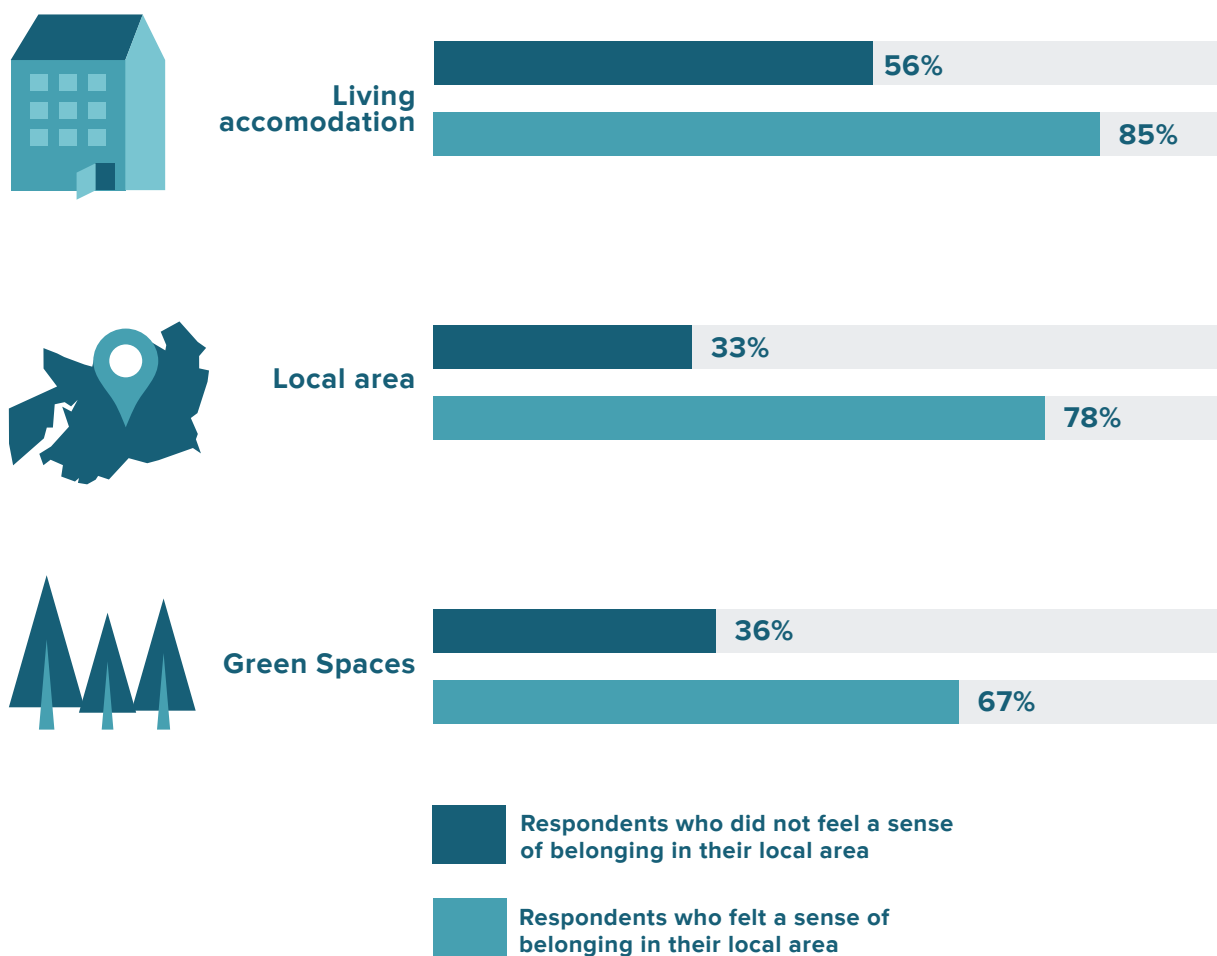


Respondents who demonstrated high levels of belonging tended to also have high levels of satisfaction with the places they lived.



By comparison, respondents who didn't feel a sense of belonging were less likely to be satisfied with aspects of the places they lived.

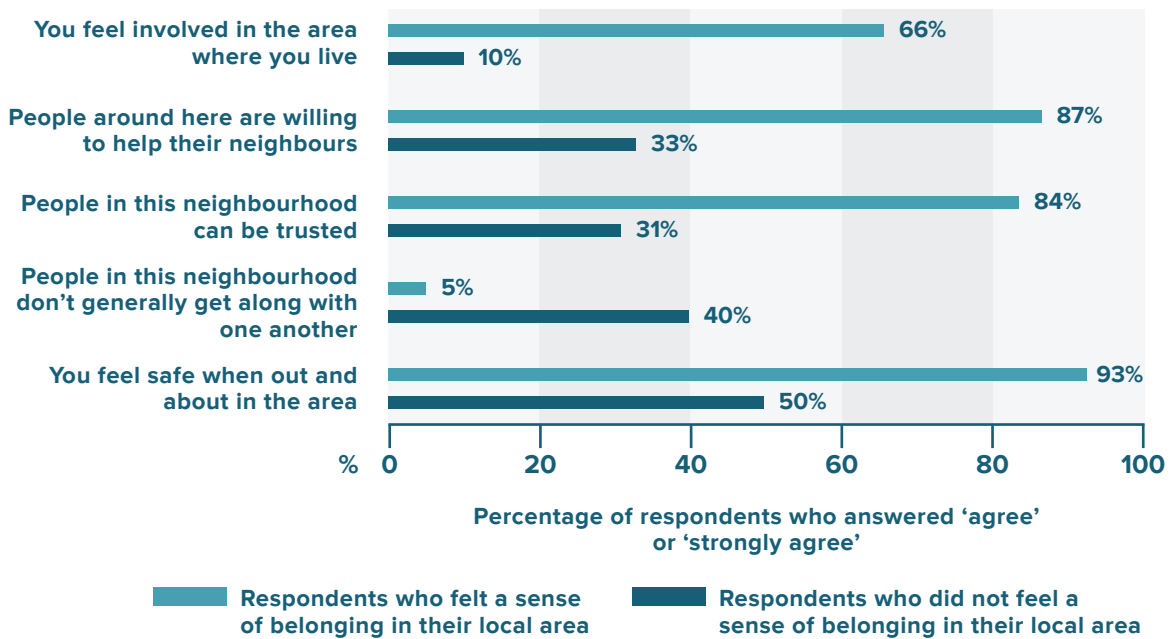
**Figure 5: Satisfaction with the places they lived. By level of belonging**





High levels of belonging tended to coexist with other elements of social capital, suggesting that they are mutually reinforcing. Respondents who felt that there were high levels of community safety, and reciprocity and trust between neighbours, also felt a greater sense of belonging.

**Figure 6: Social capital indicator. By level of belonging**



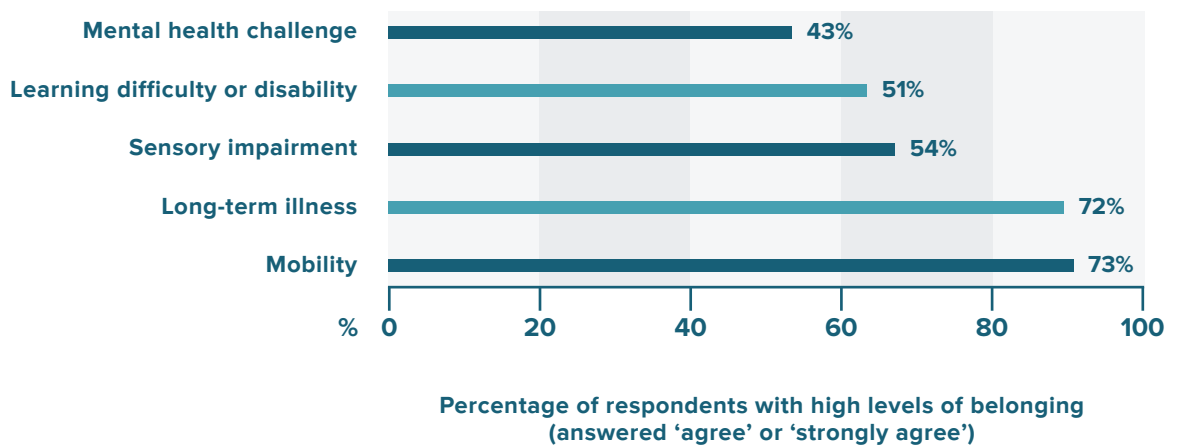


## 4. The impact of living with an impairment

Respondents who were living with an impairment were less likely to feel a sense of belonging: 73%, compared to 83% of respondents who had no impairment.

As the figure below demonstrates, there was also variation between respondents living with different types of impairment.

**Figure 7: Level of belonging. By impairment type**



# About Barnwood Trust

Barnwood Trust is a charitable foundation dedicated to creating the potential in Gloucestershire for people with disabilities and mental health challenges to make the most of their lives.

Barnwood Trust's current strategy - You're Welcome - is all about creating more welcoming and inclusive communities across Gloucestershire; places in which everyone can participate fully, realise their potential, have a say in the decisions that affect them, and live well overall.

For more information about the Trust and its programmes of work, visit: [www.barnwoodtrust.org](http://www.barnwoodtrust.org)

# Further information

The research was carried out by Qa Research on behalf of the Trust.

These research findings were generated by a larger study which sought to explore aspects of wellbeing in Gloucestershire. It was commissioned as part of the Trust's wider programme of research and evaluation.

Other summary reports in this series:

- Personal wellbeing in Gloucestershire
- The impact of living with an impairment in Gloucestershire
- The places we live in Gloucestershire

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