

BEST PRACTICE BRIEFINGS: UPSTREAM CYMRU

Llamau

UPSTREAM CYMRU



Upstream Cymru is a collaborative, early intervention initiative that works in partnership with schools to get to the heart of how youth homelessness systems need to be designed. The aim is to identify young people at risk of homelessness long before they reach crisis point or are threatened by homelessness.

The initiative asks pupils to annually complete a survey developed by Cardiff University, in conjunction with international partners, which allows for identification of known risk factors for homelessness; mental wellbeing, resilience, educational engagement and propensity to both family and youth homelessness. As the survey enables early identification, experienced, school-based Upstream Cymru staff can intervene accordingly; referring to either school based prevention services specifically for housing, family mediation or Llamau's EMPHASIS scheme, or support for non-housing related issues such as bullying.

Upstream is based on the principles of:

Early Identification: via the survey which enables upstream intervention

Community of Schools and Services: so nobody is identified and then left unsupported.

Universal Screening: meaning nobody is missed

Partnership: between academia, the service provider, the schools and Local Government.

What does the scheme hope to achieve?

Intervention at school provides an obvious opportunity to ensure that young people who are either demonstrating a risk of disengagement from education or experiencing difficulties in their personal or family life are picked up, have their needs met and gain the chance to either re-engage with education or receive the support they need.

Research spanning decades has highlighted that alongside family breakdown, school disengagement is one of the primary indicators of vulnerability to later homelessness. Whilst this will remain true for many young people, research from the pilot schemes carried out so far in Wales highlighted that of those pupils deemed to be at 'high risk' of youth homelessness, 65% showed 'none' or 'low' risk of school disengagement. It is evident therefore that our current systems are only 'capturing' a number of pupils at risk of youth homelessness and Upstream Cymru works in tandem with the current processes to provide a far more nuanced and deeper understanding of the situation.

Furthermore, one of the most important principles of Upstream Cymru is 'youth voice'. Rather than wait for the Young Person to demonstrate that they are in a crisis, Upstream Cymru allows the Young Person to self-identify and ensures that once identified they are matched to appropriate primary-preventative support.

Location

The scheme has successfully been trailed in the Geelong region of Australia, and has led to 40% reduction in youth homelessness and a 20% reduction in the number of young people leaving school early. Pilot schemes are also currently taking place in the USA and Canada.

Wales is the first European country to trial this approach. Despite the difficulties of establishing a school-based scheme in the middle of a pandemic, currently, Upstream Cymru is being rolled out in five schools across two local authorities.

Implementation

In preparation for the survey, parents are informed that a wellbeing survey is taking place and are given an understanding of the service and the support on offer should it be needed, as well as an opportunity to opt-out if there is any concern.

The digital survey holds no personal identifiable information on pupils. However, school staff maintain a hard copy of each anonymised username and the corresponding pupils so any child needing support can later be identified by teachers.

Upstream Cymru project design, with the survey only taking 35 minutes to complete, aims to minimise the project's impact on teaching time and the workload of schools staff.

"Live" results of the survey are available to the school and project staff, meaning discussions on pupils who may need additional support can take place. Working with teachers, Upstream Cymru work to identify potential referrals, both for Upstream Cymru's support and where there may be need to collaborate or refer young people to school pastoral staff, local youth services or statutory services.

Upstream staff work on site at the schools at each school throughout the year. For pupils identified as potential Upstream Cymru referrals, teachers and project staff will engage with pupils on site and make contact with parents, families and other support agencies who already provide support to explore what Upstream staff can offer.

Rerun each year, the survey will build a meaningful insight into pupils experience as they progress through school, giving pupils an opportunity to receive support before crisis is reached, as well as offering inside into the changing needs of young people, and the support they require from schools and the participating local authorities.

Results

Although Upstream Cymru is still in its relative infancy, there is still a lot to be taken from the roll out of the Upstream Cymru pilots so far. A full report on the initial findings is to be published by Cardiff University in the Autumn, however some of the headlines findings are as follows:

- 31% of pupils are recorded as having 'low' wellbeing compared to the population average of 15%
- 21% of pupils experience bullying at least once a month, with 7% of pupils reporting being bullied 'almost every day'.
- 11% of pupils are recorded as having 'low' resilience, with 7% of pupils reporting that they do not have trusted adult and a further 13% reporting that they only sometimes have a trusted adult.
- 13% of pupils are recorded as being at 'high' or 'immediate priority' risk of family homelessness with 10% of pupils recorded as being at 'high' or 'immediate priority' of youth homelessness.
- As aforementioned, and contrary to previous assumptions, **of those pupils deemed to be at 'high risk' of youth homelessness, 65% showed 'none' or 'low' risk of school disengagement**, and thus were probably not on the 'radar' of the school.

This approach is an internationally recognized model for reducing youth homelessness. A 40% reduction in Youth Homelessness in Australia coupled with the preliminary findings of the Upstream Cymru pilots highlight both the undoubtable utility of the scheme and how our current systems still allow young people to go unidentified until they are at crisis point.

More Information

At EYHC, we will offer any help or support for organisations to understand more about Upstream Cymru. If you'd like to get in touch please contact:

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Similarly, you can get in contact with:

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