

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Gwasanaethau i blant sydd wedi bod mewn gofal: archwilio diwygio radical | Services for care experienced children: exploring radical reform

Ymateb gan Llamau | Evidence from Llamun

Briefing Document: Upstream Cymru



Executive Summary: the first of its kind in Europe, Llamau's early intervention project **Upstream Cymru** aims to identify children and young people at risk of future homelessness through running bespoke surveys within the general population of participating secondary schools in Wales. The project's key aim is to **develop a deeper understanding of the underlying factors influencing youth homelessness in Wales** in order to work with partners to prevent it from happening in the first place. The results of the data collected facilitate the appropriate support for families before they hit crisis point. This process, already trialled successfully in a number of other countries, has seen a dramatic reduction in those needing crisis interventions in their later teens and adulthood.

Why Upstream Cymru?

In 2017 Carwyn Jones (former First Minister of Wales), allocated funding via the [WCPP](#) to conduct research on youth homelessness prevention. This included an international evidence review. One of the conclusions from the review was the effectiveness of youth-centred, school-based prevention, which incorporates screening for the early identification of housing insecurity. This evidence included [The Geelong Project](#) in Australia.


Utilising this research, a partnership was established between [Cardiff University](#) and [Llamau](#), Wales' leading youth homelessness charity, [Do-It Profiler](#), [End Youth Homelessness Cymru](#), and three local authorities, to pilot this preventative approach. This model has been rigorously tested by academics in Australia and Canada with the Australian model showing a **40%** reduction in youth homelessness and a **20%** reduction in the number of young people leaving school early. The initial pilot was launched in January of 2020, within 4 schools in Caerphilly and Rhondda Cynon Taff. In 2023, Upstream Cymru is delivered in 11 secondary schools across three local authorities; Caerphilly, Cardiff and Neath Port Talbot.

How does it work?

The first step is universal population screening: every pupil in years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 is asked a short series of questions, at least once a year, to identify key risk indicators of homelessness, as well as risks relating to educational disengagement and levels of wellbeing/resilience, providing a vital starting point for conversation and allowing colleagues to offer appropriate support directly to young people and their families.

Parents are informed and may opt-out if they do not wish their child to participate. The survey is completed online within the school environment and with limited assistance - this ensures responses are a true reflection of young peoples' experiences. Crucially, the universal approach ensures there is no stigma attached to engagement with the model and also identifies young people who otherwise show no indication of risk.

The survey allows data collection directly from each pupil, and is complementary to the [Youth Engagement and Progression Framework](#) (YEPF) which includes data about the young person from a range of existing sources.



Schools and early-intervention workers, including Llamau staff, review the survey results to decide how to most effectively respond to any issues raised in the screening process. This includes school-wide education and action, but also **leads to individualised support for a cohort of young people at risk of homelessness.**

The model works by developing a community of schools and services, facilitating provision of appropriate, multi-disciplinary support to those who demonstrate a vulnerability in the screening process. Where appropriate, specialist support is provided by Llamau's well-established and highly effective Family Mediation and EMPHASIS early intervention services. The support is flexible, responsive and person-centred, depending on the complexity of the issues identified in the screening process.

Outcomes and impact

Traditional homelessness prevention services rely on support being offered to a young person after they have presented to the local authority as homeless. **The key objective of Upstream Cymru is to identify children and families who may benefit from additional support before they reach crisis.**

Upstream Cymru works towards the following targets:

1. **40%** reduction in number of young people (screened by Upstream Cymru) who become homeless and seek assistance from their local authority
2. **70%** reduction in risk of youth homelessness as a result of the interventions by those identified as 'at risk' and **40%** of those identified as 'at high risk'
3. **20%** reduction in educational disengagement amongst young people involved in interventions
4. **At least a 50%** improvement in mental health in cases receiving an intervention

To date, the school-based project has facilitated surveys amongst **2,935 pupils** in Wales, with **over 300** being found to be at risk of youth homelessness. In addition, **over 300** were found to be at risk of educational disengagement, and **40** self-reported for the first time that they did not feel safe in their home.


Robust outcomes measurement, monitoring and evaluation, embodied in the model and provided by Cardiff University, informs ongoing decision-making as well as demonstrating the impacts of the model.

Working in partnership

In addition to their work in Wales, Llamau is facilitating the development and delivery of similar services through Aberdeen Foyer in Scotland and Centrepoint in England. In both these cases, partner organisations are using Llamau's bespoke Do-IT Profiler survey to collect and analyse their own dataset. This will provide an interesting multi-country comparison and contribute to the wider evidence base for the model which we hope to see replicated across Wales, the UK, and beyond.

Conclusion

The Upstream Cymru approach has successfully demonstrated early identification of children and young people at risk of homelessness, harm or educational disengagement prior to them hitting crisis point. The method bridges the gap between traditional support services and pastoral care within schools, ensuring children and young people achieve positive outcomes



linked inextricably to youth homelessness, including improved mental/emotional wellbeing and improved family relationships. This specialist support reduces the likelihood of future presentation to already stretched statutory services including Homelessness and Children's Services. The aim is now to continue the roll out of Upstream Cymru across Wales.

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