

CENTREPOINT: UPSTREAM ENGLAND PILOT EVALUATION INTERIM REPORT

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**ENDING YOUTH
HOMELESSNESS**





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The opinions expressed and any remaining errors are the responsibility of the authors alone, and should not be interpreted as reflecting the views of Centrepoint or any other organisation.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



There is increasing interest in the UK and across the Global North in preventing homelessness amongst young people in particular, given that the earlier someone first becomes homeless the more protracted and damaging their experience is likely to be.


The Australian Geelong Project, which has successfully used a school-based survey to identify young people at heightened risk of homelessness and offer them tailored support, has therefore attracted a great deal of international attention. Centrepoint has taken up the mantle of leading the implementation of Upstream in the English context, launching a pilot initiative in six schools located across Manchester and London, surveying children aged 11 to 16. This report captures the first year of learning in a three-year evaluation of the initiative, drawing on interviews with 19 stakeholders and analysis of the first year of Upstream surveys.

The key points to emerge were as follows:

- Upstream was viewed as an innovative and promising model by stakeholders given its notable positive impacts in Australia.
- The early stages of school buy-in and set up of Upstream are labour intensive. Having a key contact in participating schools and early attention to data privacy issues are essential.
- Survey implementation was largely successful in the Upstream pilot, with Centrepoint staff deftly overcoming challenges associated with the rigidity of school timetabling and technical difficulties with the digital platform.
- The sensitivity of homelessness risk as a topic means that the framing of the Upstream initiative both to children and to their parents/carers had to be very carefully handled.
- Overall, the Upstream survey content was viewed positively by key stakeholders as helpful and clear, albeit that there were some concerns about the comprehension of certain items by younger students.
- Survey analysis revealed more than 1 in 10 young people were at risk or experiencing youth homelessness in the pilot schools. Interestingly, there is limited evidence to suggest youth homelessness risk is higher for particular secondary school age/year

groups. Interestingly, nearly three-quarters of those identified as at risk of youth homelessness were not disengaged from school, but they did indicate lowered levels of resilience and wellbeing.

- Homelessness risks were identified using these survey results but also, crucially, drew on follow-up conversations with the young people flagged and input from school staff.
- Centrepoint has been on a journey over the past year as regards the Upstream support offer, moving away from a generic youth support offer and externally-provided mental health support, towards a stronger emphasis on family-centred support.
- Key informants reported positive feedback from those children and families who have actively engaged with Upstream thus far. There are also some promising early indications of improvements in the circumstances of student supported by Upstream.
- Key learning from this first year of the pilot initiative includes the importance of: bedding in this emerging 'whole family' approach in the Upstream pilot; further refinement of data privacy, ethics and consent processes; contributing to the improvement of the survey software and survey tool; and the establishment of a UK-specific 'fidelity' statement on Upstream.



Centrepoint has taken up the mantle of leading the implementation of Upstream in the English context, launching a pilot initiative in six schools located across Manchester and London, surveying children aged 11 to 16



UPSTREAM SET UP

In setting up the English Upstream pilot, Centrepoint were able to draw upon existing knowledge and learning from Upstream Cymru in Wales.

Based on this learning, and internal thinking within Centrepoint, an early decision was taken that Centrepoint would work with external partners to provide specialist support on family mediation and mental health, rather than deliver all support in-house. Establishing relevant partnerships, as well as onboarding new members of Centrepoint staff, were therefore important early tasks.

Selection of participant schools was initially guided by need-based criteria, such as Pupil Premium Rate, but school willingness and capacity came increasingly to the fore during the recruitment process. Several key lessons emerged as regards encouraging

school interest in Upstream and preparing them for implementation.

First, it was crucial to emphasise the added value of Upstream to the schools and the relatively minimal effort required from them, albeit it was also important to acknowledge that some input from their side was required.

Second, critical to roll-out success was the identification of a key Upstream ‘champion’ within each school to liaise with directly and to serve as an advocate for the model during senior level school discussion.

Third, establishing appropriate data protection arrangements, data sharing agreements, and agreed approaches to consent (for both children and parents/carers), had to be an early priority.

SURVEY IMPLEMENTATION

Centrepoint has successfully rolled out the Upstream survey in five schools (from a target of six), achieving very significant levels of engagement and substantial numbers of returns in four of these

schools. The flexibility, positive approach, and genuine commitment to partnership displayed by Centrepoint management and staff was pivotal to this success.

CONTINUED ►

Nonetheless, two key challenges presented themselves.

First, the fast-paced nature of the school environment and the rigid timetabling of the school day presented considerable obstacles to survey implementation. This demanded a highly pragmatic approach to be taken on the part of Centrepoint staff.

Second, questions remain around the efficacy of the current digital platform used for Upstream, with substantial technical difficulties experienced during survey implementation which threatened to undermine the pilot. Centrepoint staff deftly navigated around these technical challenges.

A key theme from this first year of the pilot was that very careful consideration has to be given to the framing of the Upstream initiative to children and, especially, to their parents/carers. This challenge arises from the sensitivity of homelessness risk as a topic, with all the potential for stigma and harm that this implies. A balance has to be struck between appropriately informing children and their parents/carers about the nature of Upstream, while minimising any unnecessary anxiety and resistance to engagement with the programme.

SURVEY RESULTS

Analysis of the first year pilot Upstream surveys provides new and important insights into the scale and characteristics of young people identified as at risk of experiencing homelessness.



Only 1 in 5 young people at elevated risk of youth homelessness were also at elevated risk of family homelessness.

Crucially, youth homelessness emerges as relatively distinct from family homelessness.



It revealed that 1 in 10 young people were at risk or experiencing youth homelessness in the pilot schools, closely matching the rate in Wales.

Relevant to further roll out of the Upstream intervention, there is limited evidence to suggest youth homelessness risk is higher for particular secondary school age/year groups.

The survey results also offer a new understanding of the associations between youth homelessness risk and educational engagement, resilience and wellbeing.

First, of the pupils identified as high risk of youth homelessness, nearly three quarters were either considered engaged in school, or demonstrated low levels of school disengagement. This indicates that Upstream is delivering on its intent to help identify young people who may not be picked up by schools due to a lack of externalising problems.

Second, pupils experiencing any degree of youth homelessness risk indicated lower levels of resilience and wellbeing.



SURVEY CONTENT AND IDENTIFICATION OF RISK

Overall, the Upstream survey content was viewed positively by key stakeholders as both helpful and clear. However, there were some concerns about its applicability across different age groups, with younger students said to struggle with certain survey items, particularly questions on optimism and feelings of safety at home. While senior Centrepont staff were keen that the survey be tightly focussed on homelessness risks, school staff tending to favour extending this focus to include broader psychosocial indicators, such as wellbeing, reflecting their broad pastoral remit.

Key informants reported a lack of transparency on the embedded algorithm that generated the RAG ratings on homelessness risks generated by the Upstream survey tool, despite this being publicly available.

Importantly, **Centrepont's process around identifying risk extended beyond the RAG rating generated by the survey results, and involved both speaking directly with young people to better understand their survey responses, as well as drawing on input from school staff.** However, it was noted that a balance had to be struck between tapping into the wealth of knowledge that schools have on their students, while also acknowledging the limits of that knowledge and avoiding gatekeeping.

It was encouraging to see schools engaging dynamically with the Upstream survey insights, using them to better understand level of need, triangulating findings with other school surveys, and amending/developing policies in light of findings.

OFFERING SUPPORT

Centrepont has been on a journey over the past year as regards the support offer to children flagged as at risk via Upstream. For example, amendments have been made to parental consent processes, so that a lack of response from parents/carers did not introduce significant delays to starting case work.

More substantively, there has been a growing recognition on the part of senior Centrepont staff that the initial 'child-centred', general mentoring and mental health focus was insufficient to meet the homelessness reduction aims of Upstream. **Forward plans now include a move away from externally-**

provided mental health support towards a stronger emphasis on family-centred support. This pivot embraces the specific mediation and conflict-focussed services provided from the beginning of the initiative by partners Depaul, but also potentially bespoke support for parents with both trauma and issues of material deprivation. This emerging 'whole family' approach is very much in line with existing evidence on the importance of family conflict as the main trigger to youth homelessness, but implies a steep learning curve for Centrepont who have not traditionally worked much with whole families.



EARLY IMPACTS

Later stages of the research will involve speaking directly with young people and their families on their experiences of receiving support from Upstream. However, initial indications from Centrepoint workers, support partners and school staff report overwhelmingly positive feedback from those who have actively engaged. **Also welcomed was the early intervention opportunities afforded by Upstream, enabling family mediation to be applied productively before conflict has reached crisis point and inflicted deep harm on relationships.**

This may be crucial in reducing youth homelessness risks further down the line. With this shift towards prevention comes the opportunity to explore what family mediation looks like when implemented upstream and establish best practice. There are also promising early indications regarding Upstream's ability to identify potential cases of homelessness



risk among students that would otherwise not be on schools' radar, and signs suggestive of improvements in the circumstances of students supported by Upstream.

KEY LEARNING POINTS

Key learning points from this first year of the evaluation of the pilot pertain to:

- **The importance of bedding in the emerging 'whole family' orientation of Upstream**, and the imperative associated with upskilling Centrepoint staff unused to working on family-orientated interventions;
- **The need for further reflection and expert advice on handling data protection** and ethics challenges associated with parental consent for the support work, which are likely to come even further to the fore as the focus on family-based work strengthens;
- **Emerging priorities for improving the Upstream survey software** and survey tool to meet the needs of delivery partners across the UK; and
- **The requirement to develop and finesse a UK-specific 'fidelity' statement on Upstream**, and to ensure that any departures from the approach are fully justified.

NEXT STEPS

The remaining two years of this evaluation will involve the collection and analysis of a more substantial array of both quantitative and qualitative data on the Upstream pilot, including survey outcome data, perspectives from young people and families

assisted through the initiative, as well as comparisons of level of risk across waves of survey data. This will all be supplemented with linked data from local authorities to establish any changes in levels of homelessness from targeted schools.

1. INTRODUCTION



BACKGROUND

Over the past two decades there has been an increasing focus on the prevention of homelessness across the UK (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2021). Not only is homelessness hugely traumatic and immensely harmful to those directly affected, it is also costly to the public purse (Wilkins, 2024).

Young people have long been at disproportionate risk of homelessness (Watts *et al*, 2015) and there has been particular interest in improving homelessness prevention amongst this age group (Schwan *et al*, 2018), especially given the evidence that the earlier someone first becomes homeless, the more protracted and damaging their experience of homelessness is likely to be (Mackie with Thomas, 2014; England *et al*, 2022).

While legislative change in England and Wales has focussed more attention on homelessness prevention in recent years (Fitzpatrick & Davies, 2021), action is still largely taken at the 'crisis' stage, when homelessness risks are relatively imminent and fewer avoidant options may be available (Mackie *et al*, 2024). There have therefore been growing calls to push homelessness prevention efforts further 'upstream', so that effective measures can be taken to bolster the protective factors available to high-risk groups well before they face a homelessness emergency (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2021).

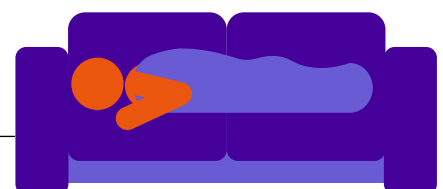
In this context, the Australian Geelong project, by holding out the prospect of an upstream means of preventing homelessness amongst high-risk young people, has attracted a great deal of attention and excitement (Mackenzie, 2018). This initiative, first established in the Melbourne suburb of Geelong, takes a place-based approach, using a school-based survey to identify young people at heightened risk of homelessness and offering them tailored support.



Evaluation findings indicate that the Geelong Project resulted in a **40%** reduction in youth homelessness and **20%** reduction in the number of young people leaving school early (Mackenzie, 2018).

The Australian evaluation study also found that **school engagement was good for 50% of those young people found to be at high risk of homelessness**, meaning that traditional methods of young people coming to the attention of school staff (such as attendance records) do not necessarily capture all those who need targeted support, demonstrating the added value of the intervention.

The Australian project has since been adapted and is being piloted in the US, Canada¹, Belgium, and the three GB nations. In all international contexts outside of Australia, roll out is in its infancy, with research focused primarily on experiences of early implementation. Within the UK, Llamau in Wales was the first to implement the Geelong 'Upstream' model, adapting it in various ways to the Welsh context, including refining both the survey instrument (drawing on questions from both the Australian and US surveys and moving the instrument online) and the algorithm used to identify the children in need of support (Mackie *et al*, 2021). The Upstream Cymru



1. <https://homelesshub.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/COH-UPSTREAM-KELOWNA-Brief.pdf>

initiative involved a collaboration between academia, schools, youth services, homelessness services and Llamau as the support organisation.



Analysis of initial survey findings in Wales found that **one in ten** pupils were at high or immediate risk of youth homelessness; interestingly, over half (**65%**) of this group were at no or low risk of school disengagement.

Moreover, over one in ten pupils and their families were at a high or immediate risk of family homelessness (Mackie et al, 2021). Learning on Upstream is being shared through the Upstream International Living Lab, which brings together partners from the US, Canada, Belgium, and the three GB nations. Within the UK, a collaborative group has been established to share knowledge and learning on Upstream implementation across the three participating GB nations. The governance group includes

workstreams on **'fidelity'**, **'monitoring and evaluation'**, and a **'community of practice'**.

Centrepoint decided to take up the mantle of leading the implementation of Upstream in the English context because this evidence-based model was viewed by Centrepoint staff and its Board as an excellent fit with a core strand of Centrepoint's strategy to end youth homelessness in England by 2037. With funding secured from the Coventry Building Society, as well as internally designated funds, Centrepoint set about establishing Upstream pilot projects in six schools in 2023, three in Manchester and three in London (in Hackney and Islington). The plan was that in these six pilot schools all (consenting) secondary school children (in selected year groups) were to be asked to complete the Upstream student needs survey in order to identify risk of homelessness, education engagement, bullying, wellbeing and resilience. In each of these schools, **Centrepoint would then conduct an assessment with those identified as at risk by the survey, and then provide mentoring support to help the young person address the needs identified, while also referring them onto more specialist support services as required, including family mediation.** In the event, one of the Islington schools decided not to proceed with engagement with Upstream, while another discontinued engagement for capacity reasons, so this evaluation study mainly relates to four schools – three in Greater Manchester and one in Hackney.²

2. Note, however, that one of the Islington schools did participate in a first round of pupil surveys and this data is captured in Chapter 4 alongside that from the other schools.



This evaluation study is intended to scrutinise the impact of these Centrepilot projects against their two core aims to:

1 Effectively identify young people aged 11-16 who are likely to be at risk of homelessness post-16, particularly those who are not already on the radar of support services.

2 Provide support to these young people at an early stage to stop their problems escalating and prevent them from becoming homeless post-16.

The rest of this chapter will detail the research questions that will be addressed in the evaluation study, the methods that will be deployed, and the structure of the remainder of this Interim Report.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This three-year evaluation study, which started in November 2023 and will be completed by end October 2026, will answer the following research questions:

1 How far does the Upstream survey effectively identify young people aged (11-16) who will be at risk of homelessness in the future?

2 Does the support provided by Centrepilot and their delivery partners effectively mitigate young people's risk of homelessness?

- a.** Do young people involved in the programme achieve positive outcomes?
- b.** Are young people and their families satisfied with the support they receive?
- c.** Are young people left better prepared to face challenges that may put them at risk of homelessness in the future?

3 Are there any patterns in which subgroups of young people a) present at highest risk of youth homelessness and b) achieve positive outcomes following Centrepilot's intervention?

4 What type(s) and frequency of support and length of intervention appear to have the biggest impact on young people's outcomes?

5 Do the project design and operational processes work well for the key stakeholders involved (including young people, parents, school staff, and delivery partners)?

6 What does the emerging evidence suggest about the impact of the project on levels of youth homelessness?

This Interim Report focuses on answering RQ5 in particular (exploring the implementation process, barriers and enablers to Upstream), and also aspects of RQ1 (assessing stakeholder views on how effectively the survey identifies those at risk), and RQ3 (quantifying levels of risk and exploring patterns in which subgroups are most at risk).

A second and Final Report (in November 2026) will reflect the findings across all six research questions. There will be a particular focus in this final report on the outcomes associated with Upstream at both individual level and in terms of emerging trends in levels of youth homelessness across the pilot schools, and on overall satisfaction with the Upstream intervention amongst all stakeholders.

METHODS

The findings presented in this Interim Report draw on the following methods.

First, we undertook 19 in-depth interviews with key Upstream stakeholders, focused on project design, operational and implementation processes, the barriers and the enablers to Upstream, and also views on the appropriateness of the Upstream questionnaire. The stakeholders interviewed included management and support staff at Centrepoint, and at Llamau; key local authority officers engaged with Upstream; main contacts within each of the pilot schools; and contracted support providers. All of these interviews were conducted online and recorded, with consent, and professionally transcribed. The transcripts were thematically coded and analysed using NVivo software.

Second, we analysed the first tranche of Upstream anonymised survey data from all five pilot schools where data had been collected. The original data set received by Centrepoint included a total of 3,485 surveys, completed between March 2023 and September 2024. However, pupils could complete multiple surveys, with some having completed up to three surveys. The first survey completed by a pupil, their 'baseline' survey, was retained, leading to a total of 2,525 unique pupil baseline surveys available for analysis in this report. Our analysis explored levels of risk of homelessness, school engagement, resilience and wellbeing. As part of this quantitative analysis, we explored whether there were any patterns in the risk of homelessness in relation to the demographic characteristics of young people (age, gender, sexuality, and school). Further details on the methods of analysis, including measures taken to preserve pupil anonymity and tests for associations in the data, are included in Appendix 1.

The Final Report of the study will draw on additional quantitative data analysis, including analysis of three year's of anonymised Upstream survey data in order to describe trends in homelessness risk factors and risks in other domains over the time that young people remain at school. We will also analyse the outcome data generated by Centrepoint and delivery partners' interactions with young people supported to ascertain patterns in the type(s), frequency and duration of support that appears to have the biggest impact. In addition, we aim to use linked local authority data to explore any changes in the number and proportion of young people presenting as homeless or at risk from target schools, and compare this to the pre-pilot position and trends for similar schools not participating in the pilot.

Two more rounds of qualitative interviews will also be conducted. Next summer, a second 'checking in' round of interviews will be undertaken with key Centrepoint and school staff, so that the research team can keep abreast of progress with the initiative. **A third and final round of interviews, undertaken in summer 2026, will include a full range of stakeholders engaged with the implementation of Upstream**, who will be invited to reflect on the overall experience of the initiative, and to assess its benefits and drawbacks. In this round we will also interview young people and their families who have been supported by Upstream, to garner qualitative feedback on the impact Centrepoint's intervention has had on their lives.

This evaluation study was granted ethical approval by the School of Energy, Geoscience, Infrastructure and Society at Heriot-Watt University. Children were informed that participation in the survey was entirely voluntary. Participants were made aware that anonymised survey data will be shared for research purposes. All interviewees were provided with an information sheet on the project and it was made clear that participation was voluntary, with participants able to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. All participant quotations and other contributions are anonymised in this report.





REPORT STRUCTURE

Chapter 2:

Explores the process of setting up Upstream in the pilot schools.

Chapter 3:

Moves on to consider practical matters of survey implementation.

Chapter 4:

Presents our analysis of this first round of Upstream survey data.

Chapter 5:

Proceeds to look in more depth at stakeholder views on survey content and appropriateness.

Chapter 6:

Examines the process of offering support to the children and families identified by the survey as at risk.

Chapter 7:

Reviews any early (qualitative) indications of impacts of the initiative.

Chapter 8:

Draws together conclusions and learning points thus far.

2. SETTING UP UPSTREAM



INTRODUCTION

This chapter will review the setting up process for Upstream. It includes exploration of the origins of the idea, the partners involved, set up procedures, readiness for implementation, and school engagement and onboarding.



ORIGINS

The purpose of this section is to better understand the origins of Centrepoin’s decision to take forward Upstream as a pilot programme, particularly in terms of implementation considerations.

In January 2022 a consultancy firm conducted pro-bono work for Centrepoin, predominantly consisting of a prevention-focused sprint across six weeks. Working collaboratively with Centrepoin, they identified and explored different models of homelessness prevention.

“So they took us on a bit of a journey, which was really helpful. So they got us to look at what we currently did, what we did well, what other people thought about what we did and reviewed a whole range of prevention projects.”
(Centrepoin staff)

As part of this sprint, **consideration was given to Centrepoin’s existing footprint and remit, specifically being a youth homelessness charity working with 16–25-year-olds.** Focus was also placed on finding an area of intervention where most impact was perceived to be possible.

To further the scoping process and develop a blueprint for potential areas of work, 40 interviews were conducted with other organisations around England. Discussions covered different domains and prevention models. For example, focusing the pilot on young people leaving the care system was discussed, in recognition that this is a vulnerable transitional period and that those with an experience of care are heavily overrepresented in the population of people who experience homelessness

compared to those who have not experienced care. There were also talks on whether Centrepoin should work directly with families who have small children, therefore requiring a shift in age focus.

It is important to highlight that this pro-bono work occurred within the broader context of Centrepoin’s corporate strategy, the objective of which is to end youth homelessness by 2037. Put differently, it means that any young person born in 2021 should not experience homelessness. In an attempt to work towards the fulfilment of this strategic goal, Centrepoin were keen to gear their efforts more towards opportunities for prevention:

“So essentially, we wanted to look at how we stemmed the flow of young people coming into our services because we’d spent many years on just developing new services for homeless young people and we could spend forever continuing to develop new accommodation-based programmes for young people, but actually, what we weren’t doing was looking at the root cause and looking at how we slow the numbers of young people that come through the homelessness system down to a negligible amount”
(Centrepoin staff)

Upstream was eventually selected as the prevention intervention which Centrepoin would pilot. There appeared to be broad organisational interest in the model, an understanding of its objectives, and appreciation and appetite for its ambitions. It met Centrepoin’s desire for something preventative and was reasonably close to Centrepoin’s existing cohort in terms of age.

“Basically, the idea of Upstream is, if you were going to imagine homelessness as a flowing river of people, and the wider area of the river, there’s lots of people presenting as homeless. If you were to go upstream that river and see where all these people were coming from, you can put in prevention tactics, which would mean they never actually fall down the river to that point of presenting as homeless. So the idea behind Upstream is to identify those at risk a lot earlier before you’re having to do crisis management later on down the river, yes.”

[Centrepoint staff]

“I think what’s interesting and unique about Upstream as a model is that we are attempting to get there much earlier, before those signs have really presented themselves, before that damage, as it were, is done. I think from speaking to people in other services that work for Centrepoint, they are in agreement that a lot of the time they’re providing relief, but there is long-lasting damage that is already in place once someone has experienced homelessness for a long period...I think Upstream is, basically, an attempt to do that. It’s an attempt to identify those needs early on, and put in that support early days...”

[Centrepoint staff]

Centrepoint was aware that Upstream had already been adopted in the UK, with Llamau, a Welsh homelessness charity who focus on young people and women, leading on the work. As such, early conversations were had between Centrepoint and Llamau to better understand what had been done so far, and to understand any adaptations and key learning at that point.





PARTNERS

Key to all this work was linking with the broader partnership community:

“Working in partnership with organisations within this model has been integral”

[Centrepoint staff]

As discussed in Chapter 1, Upstream was developed and first implemented in Geelong, Australia. It has now been extended internationally, including adoption across Canada, the US, Wales and more recently Scotland and Belgium. Centrepoint was mindful of this from the beginning, seeking to maximise learning from the existing knowledge base through partnership work. In recognition of the various forms of knowledge and experience in the space of Upstream, Centrepoint set up a steering group of internal stakeholders from across the organisation, including staff from communications, business development, strategy and partnerships, to guide their plans for piloting the model in England. At the same time, Centrepoint submitted a proposal to the Coventry Building Society for funding, which was successful.

It became evident through conversations with Llamau, that **family mediation was a key component of Upstream as a model**. As such, Centrepoint entered into discussions with Depaul, another UK youth homelessness charity, who specialise in family mediation to prevent homelessness among young people. Depaul were already running a family mediation project, Reconnect, in some Manchester schools at the time of these early discussion.

Centrepoint conducted extensive desktop research for delivery of the family mediation component of Upstream within which Depaul, with their unique and significant expertise in the specific area of family mediation and homelessness, were successful.

Relatedly, discussions were had with other organisations to deliver mental health support as part of the Upstream offer. Initially these conversations were had with another potential provider, and then latterly with Beacon Counselling, who ended up delivering the service in the initial stages of Upstream. Again, this followed a procurement process. Key to these partnerships was said to be a genuine openness to collaboration and demarcation of roles and organisational responsibilities.

“Equally, though, the partnership, the way that that developed and worked was, I think, exceptional and to both Beacon and Depaul and Centrepoint working in that way has been really positive to the point where talking with directors within Depaul, they want to look at emulating this model in other areas of England with us, and potential joint bids going in.”

[Centrepoint staff]

Embedded within what was felt to be this successful approach to partnership was an openness to collaboration, as well as demarcation of roles and organisational responsibilities. Crucially, there was a strong sense of coalescing over a common goal, that being ending homelessness for young people, which brought partners together:

“I’ve known [Centrepoint colleague] for some time now. I know that he’s genuinely a collaborator, wants the best for young people. He’s not political! It’s about the end result and being successful, and young people and families not becoming homeless in the first place.”

[Support partner]



SET UP

In terms of setting up the pilot projects there were several key stages.

First, Centrepoint's board had to approve the investment, therefore agreeing on the prevention focus and Upstream as the chosen intervention. This process included a presentation to the senior team and trustees from a member of the senior executive board which focused on the parameters of Upstream and its existing evidence.

Second, Centrepoint needed to establish their internal Upstream team, hiring new members of staff, onboarding them and allocating relevant project coordinators to a local area. Original plans aimed to hire one member of staff to oversee the entire delivery of Upstream. It was intended that they would sit alongside four project coordinators who work closely with schools across Manchester and London and offer in person mentoring

support if a young person is flagged as at risk. However, this team structure evolved in response to changes in the number of schools involved and levels of pupils identified as at risk. The current Upstream team comprises one manager, one senior manager based in Manchester and three frontline staff, two in Manchester and one in London. There is also a vacancy for an additional frontline staff based in London.

Third, it was necessary to establish the exact parameters of what was to be implemented. Centrepoint adopted the Welsh survey tool. It was important to also solidify the subcontracting arrangements to have clarity on the support offer to those who are flagged as at risk of homelessness. The initial offer comprised Centrepoint providing mentoring and "sticky support", Depaul delivering family mediation, and Beacon Counselling focusing on mental health and counselling support³.

3. This support offer was subject to change which is discussed in Chapter 6.

Fourth, and of more operational concern, was to identify areas and schools to run Upstream in. This involved pitching the model to potential participating schools and securing their buy-in. Initially, Centrepoin had guiding criteria for approaching and selecting pilot schools. Areas with an existing footprint were prioritised, both in terms of Centrepoin services but also professional and personal relationships. Area selection was also guided partly by levels of need. Schools in economically disadvantaged areas were prioritised, which was assessed by Pupil Premium Rate (a budget schools receive to support vulnerable children) and rates of children accessing free school meals. Level of need was also judged by the number of young people who approach their local authority as either at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness. There was also a desire to have diversity in terms of the local governance of the area in which schools were based:

“We looked at different boroughs within London, and we were trying to get a difference between a Labour-led council to a Conservative-led council. That proved really difficult...getting interest from different boroughs.”
(Centrepoin staff)

This diversity in political complexion was felt important in enabling Centrepoin to gauge the applicability and deliverability of Upstream as a model across different settings.

This process of selection led to both Manchester and London (specifically Hackney and Islington) being chosen as the regions within which Upstream would be piloted in England. Meetings were then held with the relevant local authorities, with representation from homelessness services, and London Boroughs to develop implementation plans. All but one of the initial pilot schools were academies, meaning that the Government fund the school through an academy trust or sponsor. Some of the participating schools were in fact part of a broader academy chain, wherein an academy trust governs more than one academy school. This is in contrast for example, to Scotland and Wales where schools are funded and managed through local authorities. While the relevant local authorities here are not involved in the funding or operational management of the school, they nonetheless have important insights to contribute and Centrepoin was keen to involve them in discussions:

“Yes, essentially. It’s kind of pre-implementation...It’s the initial scoping of the work in Manchester, based on what they updated us of what happened in Wales and Australia probably. It was one, or two, sorry, I should say, very early doors scoping discussions. One initially directly with ourselves and then they [Centrepoin] had a wider round-table discussion with ourselves and some of the people in the city, then in the education area and some of the colleagues from the local authorities in Wales who’d also delivered this type of work.”

(Local authority staff)

Working closely with Llamau, and using their work as a basis for discussion, Centrepoin were able to secure buy-in from key partners in Manchester:

“So we met with the head from the [school] and got his buy-in...we kind of set up a like a local area interest group. So got the local authority in Manchester on board, then organisations that we thought might be able to support us. So there was Manchester Mind, there was Depaul...So we got a group together and basically asked Llamau to do a bit of a presentation on their experience of it and then got buy-in at that point.”

(Centrepoin staff)



Fifth, the next stage was to ensure selected schools' buy-in, through pitching the value of Upstream and the benefit it can add to schools. Interestingly, as conversations with potential pilot schools progressed in the chosen regions, decisions were more guided by school capacity and enthusiasm rather than any specific criteria, such as free school meal numbers. There were some schools that expressed interest in Upstream but weren't in a position due to lack of capacity to commit to the pilot.

"Ultimately, we started off being quite selective, but I think, really, it's just the schools that said yes, that had capacity and would let us. It wasn't really something we could afford to be too picky with."

(Centrepoint staff)

Highlighting the ways in which the survey may help schools to address local issues of homelessness, and to assist in identifying students who typically might not be on their radar, seemed a successful approach. Moreover, framing the additionality and benefit of Upstream to schools was key. Emphasising the project setup in terms of Centrepoint taking the lead, and striving to minimise the effort required on the part of schools in recognition of their limited capacity, was helpful in securing buy-in:

"The response that we had, when we finally managed to secure meetings with schools, was overwhelmingly positive. I think when you've explained what the idea behind it is, obviously, these teachers have [an] understanding of homelessness, like they've seen children that they work with that are at risk of these kinds of things, and it's something that's been met with a lot of positivity. So, I think those schools that have allowed us to come in and launch the programme, they've been very supportive for the most part."

(Centrepoint staff)

"So it made sense to me to try and do something that had an intervention base that we could tap into, in regards to mentoring, family intervention, and the one-to-one stuff. Schools are short with money, so it's a case of trying to tap into whatever we can get for minimal amount of money, really!"

(School staff)

That said, the innovative nature and nascent stage of Upstream as an evidence-based intervention meant that, at times, the pitching of the model to schools could be challenging, both in terms of its effectiveness and also its operational feasibility:

"I think initially getting schools on board was...difficult... because you don't have anyone you're already working with to show, 'This is going really well. Do you want this in your school?' It was very much like, 'We've never done this before. We hope it'll work and be good.'"

(Centrepoint staff)

For the schools that were recruited later in the process, Centrepoint were able to leverage the academy chain network to their benefit to more quickly enable buy-in:

"They've worked in one of our other trust schools. We've only last year joined with the other schools in the trust, but they've worked at [school]. I'd heard from their deputy head how well it had worked, and then they approached us, so we were really keen to work with them on it, so yes."

(School staff)



READINESS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Once formal buy-in had been secured, the Centrepoint Upstream team delivered presentations both to school staff and students to further explain Upstream and the upcoming surveys, detailing the different stages of the project. In certain schools, project workers conducted separate meetings with key school staff, such as trust lead for data protection, to hone into specific issues that need addressing before the survey could be implemented.

A substantial part of preparedness was the technicalities of organising the data protection arrangements, data sharing agreements, and data management flows (see further in Chapter 3). Centrepoint worked closely with their Data Protection Officer to establish what was needed to deliver the survey to students and provide support where appropriate. **A key priority for successful implementation from Centrepoint's perspective was upskilling their own internal team** to be extremely well versed in this domain, so that they could confidently and comprehensively navigate conversations with schools, and be clear in terms of what is required in order to deliver Upstream. It was emphasised that the level of knowledge required to navigate this stage of setup should not be underestimated, with a firm grasp of GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 crucial. In fact, Centrepoint staff reported that the depth of knowledge required to navigate this phase of the work was initially a surprise and required substantial investment of time and energy:



Interviewer:

“...has there been anything that has surprised you about Upstream either in terms of the actual project itself or its implementation?”

CP1, Centrepoint staff:

“...maybe around the level of – what's the phrase – level of learning around GDPR and Data Protection; the amount of Data Protection focus that we've had to have within this process.”

More broadly, much of this initial preparation for implementation was done through the key contact in each school, such as the Safeguarding Lead, who served as an advocate for Upstream and were able to liaise with other school staff members, particularly those in the senior leadership team.

“Yes. I've got quite a good relationship with SLT, and they do take on what I think is something beneficial. I sold it very well; I'm not going to lie! They saw the benefit of it.”
[School staff]

However, even with the buy-in and assistance of a very proactive key school contact, challenges remained. This speaks partly to the reality of implementing a new intervention within a school setting, which requires involvement of school staff at numerous levels and patience and time to navigate the different layers of sign off.

“We had so much conversation, but it's been hard to get them [schools] to just get something going, like get surveys going, because we'd have plans, we'd have meetings, and I'd liaise with the safeguarding officer who really understands the project, gets it, and really wants to implement it.”
[Centrepoint staff]

Whilst all these preparatory activities were occurring, it was key for Centrepoint to keep schools 'warm' and sustain their interest, which could wane somewhat when negotiating the exact granularity of data protection. It was helpful to ensure regular touch points and clear channels of communication throughout this period. This allowed schools to keep abreast of any progress, continue to build positive working relationships with the Upstream project team and have regular opportunities to raise any concerns or provide updates which may impact the delivery timelines.



SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT AND ONBOARDING

Understanding the pressures within school environments was fundamental to a productive working relationship between Centrepont and school staff, with account having to be taken of the fast-paced environment and rigid timetabling within school settings. It was also crucial to ensure that Upstream was framed and delivered as offering additionality for schools, as opposed to extra work for school staff. Part of this also involved reiterating the focus of Upstream, a preventative model, and its universal approach.

“...[teachers] they’re very good at picking out very critical wellbeing issues within the pupil community, but their job is to teach, and their job is to help get those lessons hit home when the pupils are in class. So I think, for us, it’s about ensuring that we understand where a school is coming from in terms of what they need from this, and our surveys almost piggyback on top of that, then.”
(Llammau staff)

“I think the more time that we work with a school, the more they are willing to pay you attention and give you what you need, really. It’s almost like there’s a little buffer phase of you need to prove that what you’re offering is of value to them, and not to go and inconvenience them, and then I feel like as soon as that is realised, the relationship becomes easier to maintain, because it’s a mutually beneficial thing, yes.”
(Centrepont staff)

Teaching staff saw an evident local need and were open to the idea of being able to pick up students at risk who typically would not be on their radar:

“I think it was the early identification of vulnerability really...Where we see the vulnerabilities, if we go out to agencies, very often, they [student] don’t meet the criteria because they’re not at crisis point... In terms of proactive and preventative, it’s excellent. It really is. It’s brilliant.”
(School staff)

However, it was important for Centrepont to adopt a realistic approach to engagement with schools, acknowledging where power is held, and working alongside existing formal processes such as senior sign off:

“I think the huge barrier in schools is that SLT approval, because being in the current school I’m at [school name] and being inside the school I’ve now seen how literally anything that you could possibly ask for needs SLT approval. I mean, me getting a key for a toilet and for a room was just even challenging in itself.”
(Centrepont staff)

A crucial aspect of recruiting and onboarding schools was identifying a key member(s) of staff, who was able to serve as a channel into the school and function as a reliable and consistent touch point. Given the extremely busy nature of schools, and the already substantial duties of staff, Upstream was generally not viewed as a priority. As such, having this key contact, who was bought-in to the vision and able to act as an ally, particularly in this early set up phase, was invaluable:

“One of the schools in London, they have a family support worker. So actually then she was able to champion it internally, and that makes a big, big difference. They obviously valued the importance of family support there.”
(Centrepont staff)

However, it should be cautioned that relying entirely on a single key stakeholder was a risky strategy as at times of absence or reduced capacity the project could become immobilised:



“With [school name] the barrier was that this person, this family support worker that was interested...was then off sick...I'd contact multiple people in the school...but I guess they were just waiting because they thought the family support worker was the most appropriate person to be able to handle the project...I could actually see that, once she fully returned to school, how much the project just sped up from there.”
(Centrepont staff)

Whilst efforts were made to minimise the labour required for schools to participate in the Upstream pilot, some **time and energy were still inescapably required, particularly in these early phases as the operational design was being established.** In recognition of this, and the potential scalability of the programme, one key informant felt that moving forward it would be best for local authorities and educational bodies to take ownership. Consideration would need to be given to whether local authorities or broader educational bodies, such as the Department for Education, would be best placed to take forward such a recommendation. This is in light of the fact that the constellation of school types in England, with academies making up the majority (over 80%⁴) of secondary schools, means that local authorities will likely have limited influence and involvement.

“...schools are really pressed with everything else...Some of them say, look we just don't have the bandwidth...I...remember one of the...assistant heads saying to me, 'I get 200 emails a day'. He's Safeguarding Lead...we [Centrepont] have gone through safeguarding leads [as part of Upstream]... It's really difficult. That's why...I strongly believe if we're going to...amplify this, it has to be through proper education and local authorities. They have to take some ownership.”
(Centrepont staff)

4. Department for Education (2024). Schools, pupils and their characteristics 2023/24. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>

CONCLUSION

There were evident and strong grounds for Centrepoint taking forward Upstream as a model and for piloting it across schools in England. Given the organisation's increasing interest towards prevention, in recognition of the need to redress homelessness early, Upstream was an ideal candidate. It also aligned with Centrepoint's focus on young people.

Upstream was viewed as an innovative and promising model given its successful implementation in Australia and notable positive impacts there. As a result of the model attracting international attention, Centrepoint were able to draw upon existing knowledge and learning from Llamau and Peter Mackie, who were leading on the Welsh implementation.

In order to deliver a comprehensive and diverse support offer as part of Upstream – mentoring, family mediation and counselling – Centrepoint decided to bring on board additional partners, as opposed to delivering all support in-house. This required substantial partnership working, grounded in collaboration, close working and explicit delineation of roles.

Part of the early set up of Upstream involved internal preparation, such as ensuring senior team and trustee buy-in and sign off, as well as establishing the Centrepoint Upstream team, which involved recruiting, onboarding and training the relevant staff. There were also conceptual questions around establishing what Upstream would look like within this context for example, how many items would be included in the survey.

Careful consideration was given to selecting candidate schools. This process was initially guided by criteria that aimed to capture level of need, for example using the school's Pupil Premium Rate (a budget schools receive to support vulnerable children) as indication. However, as time went on, this became more guided by school willingness and capacity.

There were several key ingredients to encouraging school interest and preparing for implementation.

First, emphasising the benefit of delivering Upstream within a school setting and framing this as an additive which requires minimal input from schools, as opposed



to yet another responsibility for already stretched staff. Crucially however, there was a balance to strike here in that, despite attempts to minimise labour for schools, the introduction of a new programme such as Upstream inevitably required some input, particularly during the early mobilisation period.

Second, ensuring that those involved in the project are sufficiently informed regarding its purpose and what it entails. Importantly, this was successfully facilitated by identifying a key contact within the school to liaise directly with and work through.

Third, establishing the relevant data protection and sharing agreements required across all stages of the initiative from survey completion to providing support.

Fourth, approaching implementation with a realistic and grounded understanding of the setting. Notably, schools are fast-paced, rigid environments, wherein introducing new initiatives can be challenging and time consuming. These early stages of set up are labour intensive, involving substantial back and forth and some trial and error. Building this into the mobilisation period is key.

3. SURVEY IMPLEMENTATION



INTRODUCTION

This chapter will review the data protection and consent underpinning survey implementation, the process for introducing and ‘framing’ the survey to schools, targeting it on specific age groups, and delivering the survey. It also considers challenges to implementation.

DATA PROTECTION AND APPROACH TO CONSENT

The survey was initially undertaken anonymously, meaning that Centrepoint could only view survey results as pertaining to ID numbers (as opposed to student details). Centrepoint were advised at the time by a school Data Protection Officer, which was later confirmed by Centrepoint’s Data Protection Officer, that having an anonymised approach meant that parental consent was not required, nor did it fall under GDPR. However, parental consent was still required before Centrepoint could provide support to the young person. A process of matching then happened, wherein Centrepoint met with schools to discuss survey responses, and match ID numbers to student names (information the school held). If a young person was deemed appropriate for support, the school sought consent from parents/carers. Notably, the schools themselves were required to gain support from parents, this could not be done by Centrepoint. However, before this could be done, the young person had to consent to having their parent/carer contacted.

These numerous steps introduced delay, particularly as regards to chasing students for consent to contact parents/carers and then consequently parents/carers. There was added complexity in that this work could only be done by schools and not Centrepoint due to data protection considerations. Additionally, there were cases where confirmation of parental consent was misplaced and/or lost which added further delay.

In an attempt to minimise delays, Centrepoint changed their approach, switching to ‘legitimate interest’ as the legal basis for the survey. Although, parental consent was still required for providing support to the young person. This change in approach meant Centrepoint were able to view survey results as pertaining to student names. This removed a layer of the previous process, thus enabling schools to liaise directly with students. At

this point, **Centrepoint also established another change to the process, introducing workshops, where students were jointly assessed following their survey completion,** to understand whether support through Upstream would be appropriate. Centrepoint introduced these workshops to move more quickly from receiving survey results to providing support. This was also with the view to speed up referrals to partners, Depaul and Beacon, who were already being paid.

Despite these changes to the consent process, delays persisted in that parents/carers were not replying to requests for consent to work with their young person. In one school, only six out of 61 responses were received. As a result, there was a further change, where Centrepoint sought to use a ‘legitimate interest’ legal basis for both the survey and support. Notably, legitimate interest only applies to those 13 or above meaning schools still needed to seek parental consent to support students under 13.

The pilot provided an opportunity for trial and error, allowing Centrepoint to iteratively develop their approach to data protection and consent. Some of the challenges faced reflect the limitations of approaching survey implementation predominantly through a data protection lens, which can sometimes be in tension with questions pertaining to informed consent and participant enrolment. These are issues we return to later in the report.





INTRODUCING THE SURVEY TO SCHOOLS, PARENTS, CARERS, AND PUPILS

Implementing the survey was viewed by several school staff as the most labour-intensive part of Upstream. The exact operational design varied according to local context. This included which year groups were targeted, the framing of the survey to students, communication to parents and guardians, at which point in the school timetable the survey was conducted and during which lesson.

Nonetheless, it is helpful to provide an overview of how the survey was commonly handled. Typically, Centrepont worked collaboratively with schools to tailor communications to parents and guardians, informing them of plans to distribute the survey to students at the school. This communication was often in the form of a physical letter and circulated through school channels, although at times uploaded digitally to the school system where parents and guardians could view online. The privacy notice remained online allowing parents to refer back to it when needed. There was variation in terms of whether the communication was framed as coming from Centrepont themselves or the school; which interestingly appeared to influence engagement with the offer of

support (which will be discussed in chapter 6). On the day of survey implementation, students chose whether they wish to complete the survey and if so, signed a consent form, which was embedded within the digital survey.

A key consideration of implementing the survey was safeguarding, in that a process was needed to flag any young person whose survey results may be indicative of an immediate risk to their health and safety. Specifically, this related to an item on the survey which probes feelings of safety at home; it was agreed that if a young person scored highly on this, irrespective of their responses to other questions, the school needed to be informed. In some schools, Centrepont gained access to the internal safeguarding system, Child Protection Online Monitoring and Safeguarding system (CPOMS). This allowed the Centrepont staff to immediately flag on the system any student who scored highly on that item, if for whatever reason a member of staff was not available to speak with directly. The flagged student would then be contacted by a member of school staff, normally from the Safeguarding team.

Interestingly, there were changes during the implementation period and variation between schools, in the way the survey was framed to schools in terms of whether it was explicitly described as assessing homelessness risk or whether it was packaged more broadly as a wellbeing initiative. This was partly motivated by evolving discussions within the Centrepoint team regarding language and how best to balance informing schools, students and parents/carers whilst ensuring consistency. There were concerns around the sensitivity of homelessness as a topic, and specifically fears that being explicit may lead to greater resistance from parents/guardians and therefore more disengagement.

“I think the one thing I will say is, schools do not talk about homelessness. It’s not something that schools often talk about. It’s not something that is on the narrative. You talk about vulnerable children in schools, if you talk about children and free school meals, you talk about children who are looked after, or previously looked after, they get physical support in schools. Homelessness is not spoken about, it’s not acknowledged.”

(Centrepoint staff)

“...it was just thinking about how to present it to the parents. What I didn’t want to do was then phone them up and go, ‘We think your child’s at risk of homelessness; can I work with these people,’ because it would’ve created a lot of animosity. They wouldn’t have been very supportive of it. So, it was just making sure that we worded things in the right way.”

(School staff)

In some schools, where the survey was more generally framed in terms of wellbeing, this occasionally led to confusion and suspicion. For example, after receiving their letter, some parents googled Centrepoint and upon realising they are a homelessness charity, became concerned. This unintentionally introduced a level of distrust towards the survey:

“That was some of the trickiest things were as soon as you send it out, you say, ‘We’ve got this really good service coming in. It’ll be really beneficial.’ Then we had a few parents that googled Centrepoint and then straightaway it comes up, homelessness. So we had quite a few parents ringing up. ‘Why have you flagged my child up as being at risk of homelessness? We’re not.’”

(School staff)

The framing of the survey was also influenced by some schools viewing Upstream as beneficial primarily due to its capacity to capture insights beyond those of just homelessness, such as bullying and wellbeing. As a result, framing the survey more holistically facilitated greater buy-in from schools and more accurately reflected survey use.

“I liked the fact that they surveyed all our children and that we were able to get some global data,...test the temperature of how our children feel about certain things..we were able to use that to triangulate with other student surveys that we did as well, so that was quite helpful.”

(School staff)

On the other hand, in some schools it was made explicit that the Upstream survey specifically targets homelessness risk. This was found to be operationally successful in these schools, with the Centrepoint and school staff feeling able to clearly communicate the relevance and importance of homelessness to students and their families and guardians, whilst also creating space for any questions or needed follow up discussions.

“I’ve just been quite transparent about what we’re trying to do. Just also [to] alleviate their fears of hearing the word ‘homelessness’, and I guess just destigmatise it a bit and destigmatise the support, just so that they’re kind of okay with it.”

(Centrepoint staff)

In these schools, concerns around the framing of the survey and parental consent were sometimes less salient due to familiarity with surveys. Several schools already implemented surveys separate to that of Upstream, and this meant that students and their carers were habituated to the relevance and practice of completing surveys within a school setting. In these cases, the concern around framing pertained more to the offer of support (which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6)

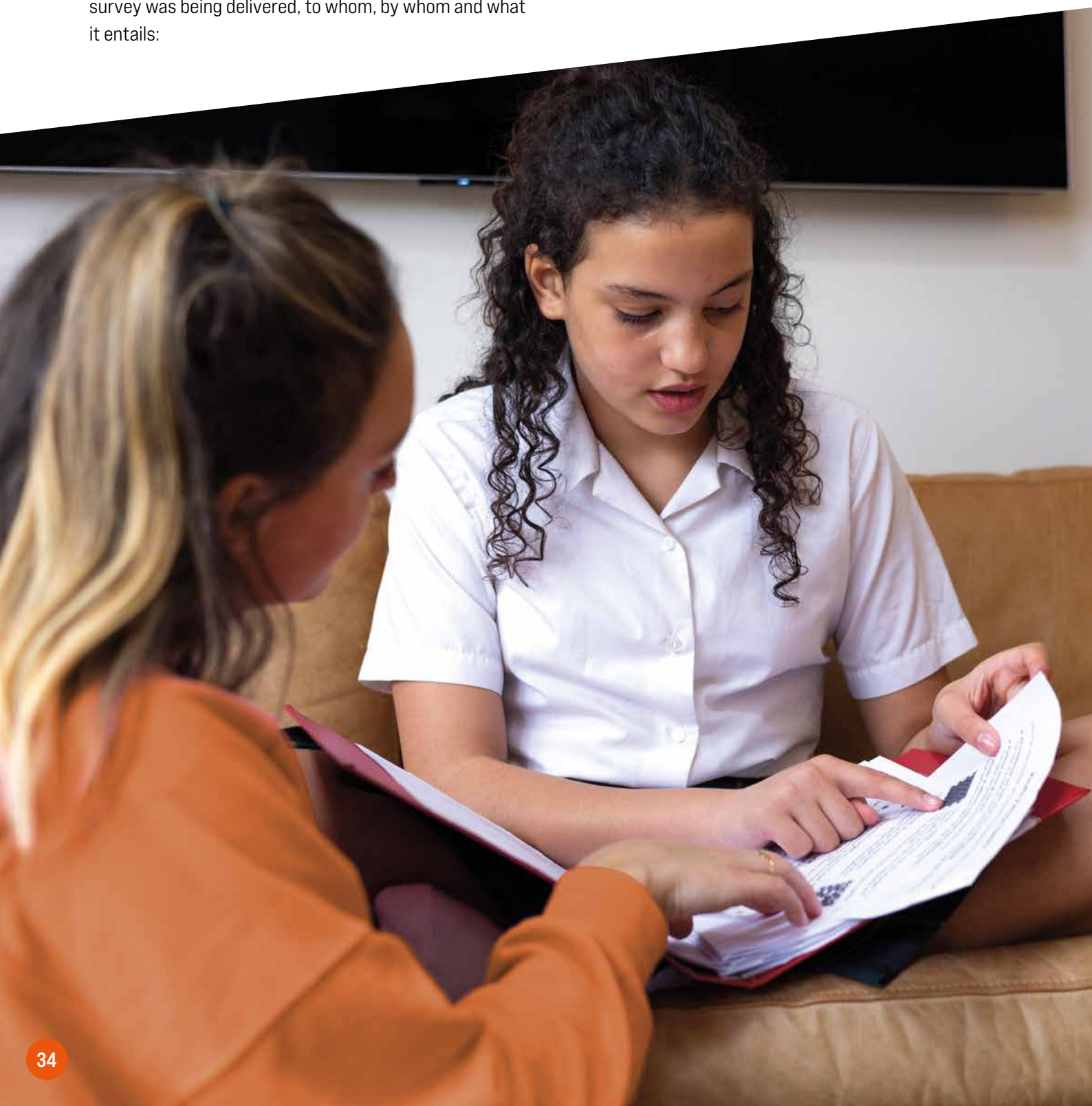
“...we do a lot of surveys anyway. There was nothing, no challenges in terms of thinking that parents wouldn’t be on board with it. It was more after the surveys had been done and then we wanted to get the parents’ permission to work individually with the children.”

[School staff]

Nonetheless, despite this variance, it was evident that careful consideration was needed around how best to communicate Upstream’s implementation to parents and guardians. It appeared important to de-mystify the process and ensure that families understood why the survey was being delivered, to whom, by whom and what it entails:

“I think what we’ve planned for this year is, that maybe on things like parents’ evenings...Upstream need to be here, and maybe advertise themselves a little bit more, speak to parents about what they’re doing, and how they do it, so it becomes more just open and honest, and for people to understand what they’re doing. It’s okay doing an electronic communication...or a text message, or referring someone to a website, but then I think, for me, it’s better to always have that face-to-face interaction with people as well.”

[School staff]



TARGETING THE SURVEY

Schools are given flexibility to determine which year groups they wish to survey, and there were discussions around which year groups to best target. The implementation of Upstream Cymru found value in undertaking the survey with younger age groups in order to act earlier to prevent homelessness, whilst also recognising that those most at risk of homelessness are likely to be older year groups (Mackie et al, 2021). Schools have to weigh this up alongside practicalities such as forthcoming examinations, space within the school curriculum etc. Table 1 summarises the year groups surveyed in each of the five schools between academic school years 2022/23 and 2024/25.

Table 1. Year groups surveyed in each participating school

School	Year groups surveyed		
	2002/23	2023/24	2024/25
A	-	8,9	-
B	-	9,10	8,9,10,11
C	7,8,9,10,11	7,8,9	7,8,9
D	9,10	9,10	9,10
E	-	8,9	8,9

After implementing the first round of the survey, some schools decided that moving forward, they would focus Upstream solely on Key Stage 3 students (Years 7-9). Yet, as evident from the Table this was not the case for all schools. The decision was made partly to enable the school to track students and their progress across a longer period. It was expressed that any intervention would be better suited in these early years. Additionally, in terms of practicalities, survey completion is contingent upon access to IT facilities and students in Key Stage 4 (Years 10-11) do not all have IT lessons as part of their curriculum.

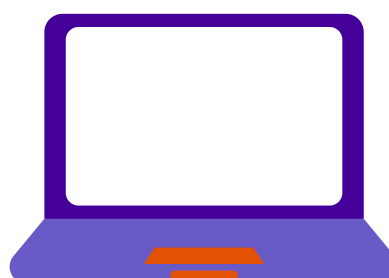
“In the first year, what we’ve tried to do is survey as many children as possible...we’ve now decided that actually, we’re just going to do Key Stage 3, because...we’ll have at least three years of data on them moving forward. So, we’ve got data on our Year 10s and Year 11s. The reason that we don’t want to survey them is because actually, they don’t have a subject called digital media in their timetable...because Key Stage 4 don’t have that time, therefore we can’t survey them easily, it would mean it would have to be in form time and for very little gain because actually, the intervention needs to come in early on and not later.”

(School staff)

It was considered as potentially inappropriate to pull students out of other lessons to complete the Upstream survey, especially when they have competing priorities such as upcoming exams. Additionally, as schools hope to track the young person’s survey score over time, there was a sense that focusing on younger pupils would be better placed.

“If they’re doing their GCSEs, one of the best forms of pastoral care is to make sure that they are in lessons, they’re learning, they’re getting the most out of the lessons and the best grades possible. So, taking them out of lessons – even for mentoring or counselling – is something we try and avoid in Years 10 and 11.”

(School staff)



DELIVERING THE SURVEY TO STUDENTS

The survey was mainly completed by students during an IT lesson as they had immediate access to computers. However, some schools did deliver the survey during form time or personal, social, health and economic (PHSE) classes. Each student was given a username and password which they entered onto the survey platform to complete the survey. The relevant Centrepont staff would lead the class, explaining the purpose of the survey and emphasising that participation was entirely voluntary. The session would typically take 30-40 minutes, with Centrepont staff on hand to answer any questions and supervise survey completion. A teacher was also present during the relevant session, and able to assist where needed, whilst also ensuring students had at least one

familiar face. For students who were absent, there was a “mop up” session to allow them time to complete the survey at a later stage.

“Then we would essentially run that class. So the teacher would be present...Ideally two staff members would go in...just explain who we are, what we’re there for. Explain the survey. We’d go in with saying that it’s quite sensitive and that it’s completely their choice to take it. It’s good to explain to them to try to answer by themselves. Obviously, when they’re all sat together in class and it’s quite sensitive questions...Then a lot of time is usually spent trying to get everyone logged in.”
[Centrepont staff]

KEY CHALLENGES TO SURVEY IMPLEMENTATION

There were two key challenges to survey implementation. **First, rigid school timetabling**, with schools having a vast array of existing duties, responsibilities and deliverables. This meant that there was little flexibility in the timetable for additional activities, such as the Upstream survey and moreover, little space for learning by doing or error.

“Our biggest challenge is the survey because, obviously, we have a curriculum, we have a timetable, and every minute of the day is timetabled into something. So it’s a case of trying to work out when we can do the surveys. After the surveys are done, then doing interventions is a lot easier. It’s the surveys itself. We’re doing whole year groups at a time, which are 185 kids, plus. That’s how we do it, so it has been a bit of a challenge on that sense.”

[School staff]

“Yes, I did have concerns because, in schools, we don’t have a minute and we don’t have lots of space. We’ve got 2000

children in this school, and just organising for 300 of them at any one time to do a survey, it’s not an easy task to do.”
[School staff]

These restrictions placed pressure on the school’s capacity to deliver Upstream, communicate consistently and in a timely manner, as well as prioritise the survey. These challenges were not due to a lack of interest or support for the ambitions of the initiative, but rather a lack of available time, resource and flexibility. Crucially, acknowledging these pressures and maintaining a supportive, collaborative and pragmatic relationship with schools, and exploring where workarounds are possible (for example changing key contacts), seemed key to getting the survey up and running. This was recognised both by school and Centrepont staff:

“Just, obviously, sometimes with the best will in the world, some staff on the project will email, and you can’t always respond to that email that same day. So they’ll send you a reminder, and it’s like, we will get back to you, and usually the turnaround with ourselves is pretty quick, but you just need to have a little bit of patience, as well, because that’s not our only job...I know for them it is, but for us it’s not, and it’s about getting probably that understanding of that as well.”

[School staff]



"Last year it was very much a learning curve, for us in particular. It'd be nice if all we had to do was just think about Centrepoint and what they were doing, but we don't. We've got jobs as well."

[School staff]

"...schools are really motivated by different agendas, and one of the big things that schools are motivated by is Ofsted, the regulatory body, by the Department for Education guidance and STEER. I think having a school, being able to randomly turn around and say, 'As well as everything else we're doing, we're going to focus on homelessness.' It's not that realistic. They've already got limited amount of money to put in there."

[Centrepoint staff]

Second, there were substantial technological issues when attempting to deliver the survey. Although school IT staff assisted with setting up the technology and ensured it was set to run on the day, the survey platform itself was reported as crashing several times and generating error messages in response to ID logins.

Experiencing issues with the platform not only presented practical challenges but could also undermine the working relationship between schools and Centrepoint. Importantly for schools, they had scheduled time within rigid timetables for students to complete the survey, so it felt frustrating when this time was not able to be used as intended, with little wiggle room to reschedule. Centrepoint were in a difficult position as it reflected poorly on them as an organisation. But the issue was down to the platform itself over which they had no control.

This was made even more challenging by the platform crashing during first attempts to deliver the survey, adding strain to partnerships with schools, exposing them to potential fraying, as the foundational working relationship had not yet been fully established. Schools were understandably trying to assess whether participation in Upstream was a worthwhile investment of time and so when issues occurred, such as the technology going awry, these may have felt particularly disruptive and undermined confidence.



“When we first ran it, the survey didn’t work properly... The teachers there wanted us to run the survey with every year group, which was an absolute – it was a lot. We had issues with technology, which meant that we were handing out paper applications, which were then manually uploaded.”

[Centrepoint staff]

“[Survey platform] have had its issues. It’s been inconsistent in how well it’s working. When they tried to use it in [location], it failed, I think, twice whilst in front of a class and in front of people, a teacher, which doesn’t come across well to the school.”

[Centrepoint staff]

“Every time we did it, it didn’t work. So we had 185 kids, and this survey organisation said that you could do 10,000 at the same time. It was a lie. It didn’t work. So we then went over to the other survey, which is a bit longer winded for Centrepoint because they’ve got to go through it manually. It’s quicker for us. We did that, and it worked...”

[School staff]

Working in an agile manner, however, Centrepoint created an alternative manual input approach, to redress these issues, which minimised the burden on schools

but increased required input from Centrepoint’s side. It is worth emphasising that failures and iterations in approach are not only to be expected as part of a pilot but are one of the fundamental reasons why pilots are conducted before fully implementing a programme.

“Well, we’ve done it a few times now. So I think what works well is we’re quite good at running it, really. That sounds big-headed, doesn’t it? No, we know what to expect. We can foresee issues that might come up. Obviously, when that started, it was chaos and panic...Also, the same with teachers. This is the second year that teachers have been doing this. They know what it is, they know what to expect...So I think the idea is that the more familiar they are with it, the more familiar teachers and schools are with it, the more it will just become embedded in their – just like a thing that they do.”

[Centrepoint staff]

CONCLUSION

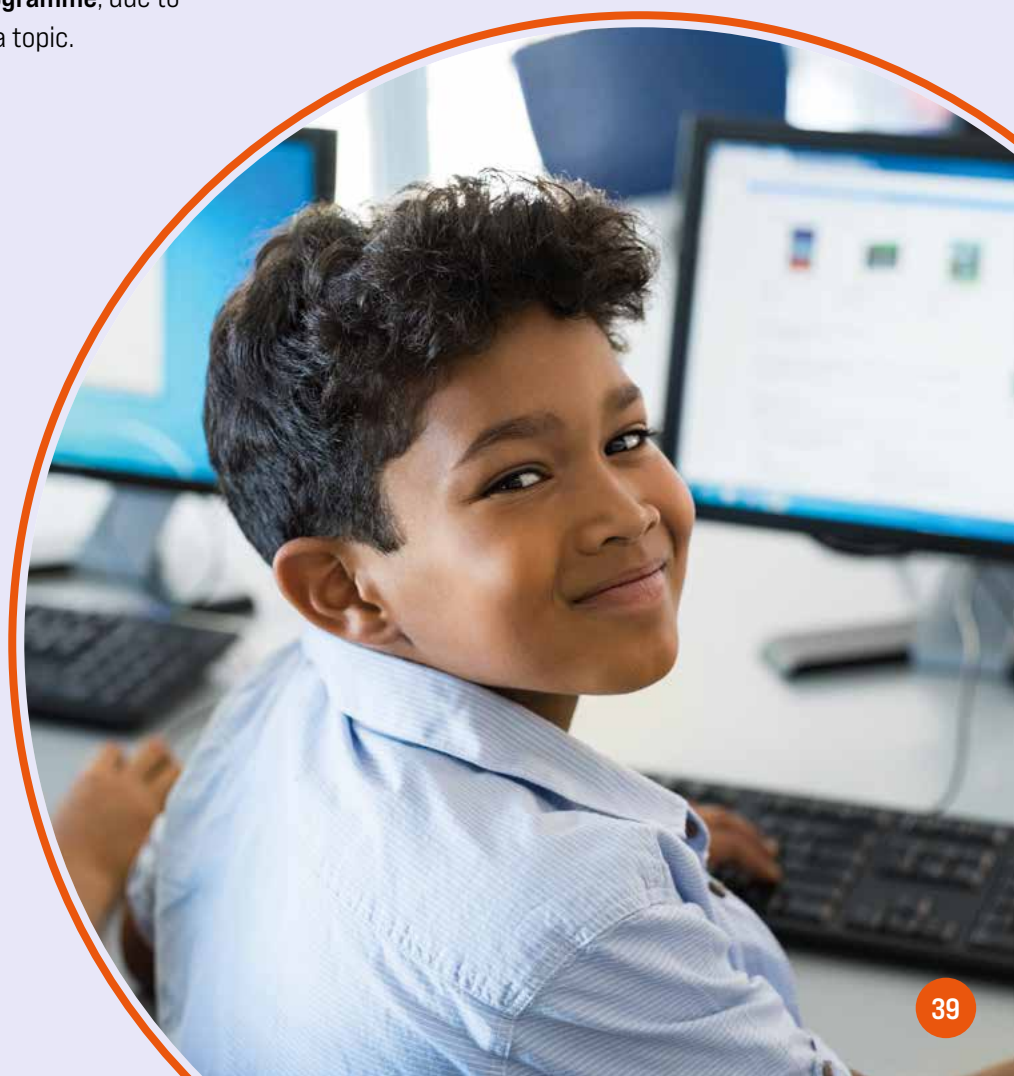
Implementing Upstream is evidently both feasible within a school setting and also broadly well received.

The exact operational design and delivery seems to require flexibility in adapting to specific school settings and local contexts. Implementing the survey during IT lessons ran smoothly. Schools may wish to further refine elements of the operational design, such as selecting targeted year groups, taking into consideration practicalities such as compulsory computer time, ability to track children over a given period of time and timings for the intervention itself.

Careful consideration is needed regarding the framing of the programme. There are relative benefits and disadvantages to framing the survey as either explicitly focused on homelessness or on wellbeing more broadly. The decision around this is likely to be guided by the implementation setting and particularly perceived stigma towards homelessness within the school community. Crucially, **the framing needs to sufficiently balance informing those involved (students and their parents or guardians) with minimising anxiety, and potential resistance to engagement with the programme**, due to the sensitivity of homelessness risk as a topic.

Establishing the appropriate data protection agreement and approach to consent have been a particularly challenging component of implementing Upstream. Further refinements may still be needed to ensure this process is as streamline and robust as possible.

Despite Upstream being successfully implemented across schools in both Manchester and London, two key challenges presented themselves: school capacity and the platform. It is essential to recognise how rigid the school environment is, the vast existing remit of staff and the impact this may have on capacity to deliver Upstream. Therefore, implementation must be approached pragmatically with scope to adjust where needed. Questions remain around the efficacy of the current platform given the substantial technical difficulties experienced during survey implementation which threatened to undermine the pilot. Even though Centrepoint adapted with great agility, it is reasonable to ask whether moving forward, implementation of Upstream as a model is reliant upon this specific platform.



4. INITIAL FINDINGS OF THE STUDENT NEEDS SURVEY



INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an analysis of the first Upstream surveys completed by pupils between March 2023 and September 2024⁶.

The chapter begins by describing the characteristics of the pupils who responded and moves on to explore findings relating to the different sections of the Upstream survey: youth homelessness, family homelessness, school life, resilience and wellbeing. The youth homelessness section places a particular focus

on exploring patterns in the characteristics of young people facing different levels of homelessness risk. In each of the other sections (family homelessness, school life, resilience and wellbeing), the analysis considers the relationship with levels of homelessness risk.

6. see Appendix 1 on how we created the data set used in this section.

PUPIL CHARACTERISTICS

The baseline characteristics of pupils who responded to the Upstream survey are provided in Table 2. It is noteworthy that nearly half of all pupil responses originate from one school. There were high levels of missingness for basic demographic characteristics, with upwards of 30% of baseline surveys missing information on age, gender, and sexuality. Furthermore, in addition

to high levels of missingness, due to issues with the procedure used to collect ethnicity data, breakdowns by ethnicity cannot be provided. Future instances of the Upstream survey tool may benefit from making basic demographic characteristics mandatory rather than optional, to ensure monitoring of equality characteristics among young people accessing Upstream.

Table 2. Pupil characteristics at baseline survey, non-missing data

	n	%
Age:		
11 years	185	13
12 years	170	12
13 years	440	31
14 years	345	24
15 years	230	16
16 years	65	5
Gender:		
Female	705	45
Male	825	53
Other	35	2
Sexuality:		
Heterosexual	1255	88
Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual	110	8
Other	55	4
Anonymised school identifier:		
School A	95	4
School B	320	13
School C	1195	47
School D	335	13
School E	580	23

(n = 2525)

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Young people were asked a series of questions related to their current and recent experiences of homelessness, and opinions about their current living situation (Table 3). Responses to these questions were used by Upstream to assign young people to one of four categories for risk of youth homelessness, as low⁷, medium⁸, high⁹

risk and immediate priority¹⁰. The breakdown of youth homelessness risk categories for the available sample is presented in Figure 1. Most young people (88%) were categorised as either low or medium risk, 7% of the sample were categorised as high risk of youth homelessness, and 6% were immediate priority.

Table 3. Responses to questions indicating risk of youth homelessness, non-missing data

	n	%
Situation in which pupil usually slept in the past month:		
Housed	2320	96
Sofa-surfing	90	4
Homeless	20	1
Ever been homeless for more than one night in the past year:		
No	2420	98
Yes	55	2
Feel safe where I live now:		
Strongly agree	1355	55
Agree	855	34
Don't agree or disagree	190	8
Disagree	40	2
Strongly disagree	40	2
Get into lots on conflict with parent(s)/guardian(s):		
Strongly agree	75	3
Agree	240	10
Don't agree or disagree	585	24
Disagree	875	35
Strongly disagree	700	28
Ever slept away from home because of being forced to stay away:		
No	2375	96
Yes	100	4
Worried about having to run away or being asked to leave home:		
No	2140	87
Don't know	230	9
Yes	100	4

7. Pupils are low risk if they do not meet the criteria to be classified as medium, high or immediate risk.

8. Pupils don't agree or disagree that they feel safe at home; OR they agree that they get into lots of conflict.

9. Pupils strongly agree that they get into lots of conflict; OR they are worried they might run away or be asked to leave; OR they have been forced to sleep away from home.

10. Pupils disagree or strongly disagree that they feel safe; OR they have found themselves homeless on one occasion or more; OR they usually slept in a hostel, hotel, B&B, car, campground, public space, somewhere else (e.g. friend's house), or they didn't have a usual place to sleep.

Figure 1. Breakdown of youth homelessness risk categories



Characteristics of young people in youth homelessness risk categories

One of the evaluation research questions is to identify if there are any patterns in which subgroups of young people appear to be at higher risk of youth homelessness. Breakdowns of mean age, gender, sexuality, and school, for each youth homelessness risk category are provided in Table 4. The significance of any association between risk of youth homelessness and age, sexuality, gender,

and school, was assessed¹¹. Pupils with missing data on any of the variables of interest were excluded from Table 4 and subsequent statistical analysis. Due to the high degree of missingness, caution should be exercised in making inferences about the type of young people in each category in the general population.

Table 4. Composition of youth homelessness risk categories

	Low	Medium	High	Immediate priority	Total
Female*	420 (43%)	70 (51%)	40 (53%)	25 (42%)	555 (45%)
Male*	535 (55%)	65 (46%)	30 (43%)	35 (52%)	665 (53%)
Other*	10 (1%)	5 (4%)	5 (4%)	5 (6%)	25 (2%)
Sexuality					
Heterosexual*	880 (91%)	115 (85%)	65 (85%)	50 (80%)	1110 (89%)
Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual*	60 (6%)	10 (8%)	5 (7%)	10 (12%)	85 (7%)
Other*	25 (3%)	10 (7%)	5 (8%)	5 (8%)	45 (4%)
School					
School A	65 (7%)	5 (4%)	0 (3%)	5 (9%)	80 (6%)
School B	215 (22%)	30 (22%)	10 (16%)	15 (22%)	270 (22%)
School C	430 (45%)	65 (47%)	40 (51%)	30 (46%)	560 (45%)
School D	130 (13%)	20 (16%)	10 (16%)	5 (11%)	170 (14%)
School E	125 (13%)	15 (12%)	10 (15%)	10 (12%)	160 (13%)
Mean age					
Mean age	13.4	13.5	13.2	13.3	13.4
Total (Row %)					
Total (Row %)	965 (78%)	140 (11%)	75 (6%)	65 (5%)	1240 (100%)

* Significant association between characteristic and youth homelessness risk category ($p < 0.05$)

11. The significance of the association between risk of youth homelessness and age was evaluated ('Analysis of Variance'), followed by a test which compared each category to all other categories ('post-hoc test'). The significance of any association between risk of youth homelessness and sexuality, gender, and school, was assessed using a separate kind of statistical approach ('Fisher's Exact Test') suited to the type of data.

Both gender and sexuality were found to be statistically significantly associated with youth homelessness risk category. Within the immediate risk category, 80% of pupils reported that they were heterosexual, compared to 91% in the lowest risk category. By implication, there were a higher proportion of pupils reporting that they were gay/lesbian/bisexual/other in the immediate priority category compared to the low risk category. In terms of gender, 6% of pupils in the immediate priority category reported that their gender was 'Other', whilst 1% reported 'Other' gender in the low-risk category. Caution should be exercised in generalising that pupils of either trans- or non-binary

gender experience greater risk, due to the small sample and lack of controls for wider pupil characteristics.

Analysis comparing the ages of pupils across the youth homelessness risk categories¹² found no statistically significant association¹³. This finding is an important insight into the operation of Upstream, given the practical discussions taking place in schools about whether to focus surveys and interventions with specific age/year groups.

School was not significantly associated with youth homelessness risk category.

FAMILY HOMELESSNESS

Pupils were asked a series of questions related to risk factors for experiencing family homelessness (Table 5). Responses to these questions were binarized to indicate whether a risk of family homelessness was present, and then summed to give an indication of the intensity of risk. For presentational purposes, the intensity of risk of family homelessness is categorised as no risk indicators,

one indicator, or more than one indicator. The breakdown of intensity of family homelessness risk indicators for the available sample is presented in Figure 2. As can be seen, most pupils surveyed had no indicators of risk of family homelessness (85%), whilst 11% displayed one indicator, and 4% had more than one indicator.

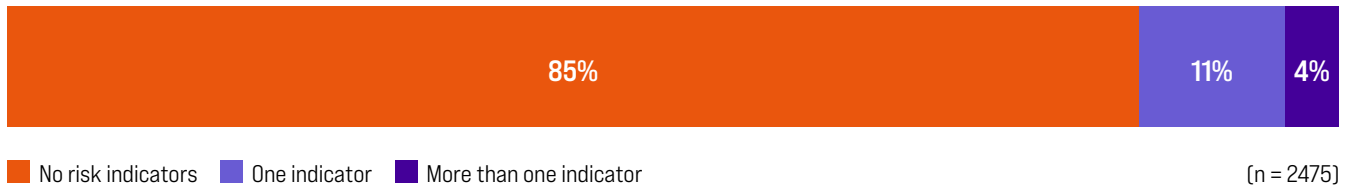
Table 5. Responses to questions indicating risk of family homelessness, non-missing data

	n	%
Family had trouble paying for accommodation last year:		
No	1640	92
Yes	140	8
Family stayed with friends/relative due to a lack of housing:		
No	2310	93
Yes	165	7
Worried family may not have a place to live in coming year:		
No	2060	83
Don't know	320	13
Yes	95	4
Number of times pupil/family has had to move in past year:		
Not moved	1920	78
1 to 2 moves	425	17
3 or more moves	130	5

12. Analysis of Variance

13. F-statistic = 1.18, p = 0.3149

Figure 2. Number of risk indicators for family homelessness



Overlaps between family and youth homelessness risk

To explore the overlap of family and youth homelessness, summary measures were firstly binarised, set to one where pupils were categorised as high or immediate priority for youth homelessness and where pupils experienced more than one indicator for risk of family homelessness. For ease, these flags are referred to as 'elevated' risk of youth and family homelessness, respectively. The overlap of the binary flags for youth and family homelessness was then visualised in Figure 3.

Each circle in Figure 3 is proportional to the number of pupils flagged as being at elevated risk of youth and family homelessness. 12% of pupils were categorised as being at elevated risk of youth homelessness¹⁴ and 4% were at elevated risk of family homelessness.

The region of overlapping circles represents pupils who were at elevated risk of both forms of homelessness.

2% of pupils were only at elevated risk for family homelessness,

10% only elevated risk for youth homelessness,

and **3%** at elevated risk for both youth and family homelessness.

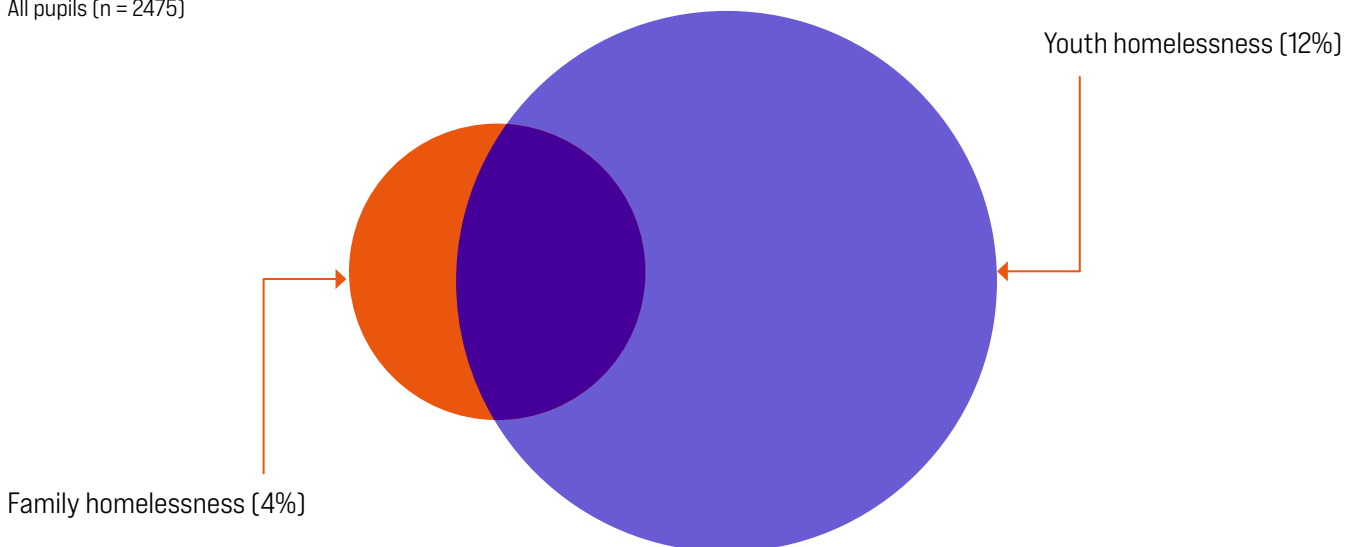
Interestingly, **20%** of pupils who were flagged as elevated risk of youth homelessness, were also elevated risk for family homelessness.

However, just over half of pupils (**56%**) with elevated risk of family homelessness were flagged as being at elevated risk of youth homelessness.

The key finding here is that an elevated risk of family homelessness tends to also imply elevated risk of youth homelessness but not necessarily vice versa.

Figure 3. Overlap of pupils flagged as high risk of youth and family homelessness

All pupils (n = 2475)



14. Due to rounding of percentages, this figure differs slightly to the combined percentages of young people categorised as high/immediate priority in Figure 1.

SCHOOL LIFE

Pupils were asked about their time at school to identify possible signs that they were disengaged. School (dis) engagement is conceptualised in its broadest sense, to include cognitive, emotional, and behavioural elements—what pupils feel and think about school, and how they act in school¹⁵. In addition to six questions about (dis) engagement, the survey includes a question about the extent of bullying experienced by pupils, though this is not included as an indicator of disengagement. Responses to indicators of school disengagement and the question related to experiences of bullying are presented in Table 6.

Responses to questions related to school (dis)engagement were binarised to indicate engaged/disengaged. The higher

the number of indicators of disengagement, the greater the level of disengagement. A disengagement categorisation system was developed, splitting young people into engaged, low disengagement, medium and high school disengagement¹⁶. Figure 4 provides a breakdown of school disengagement categories for pupils who responded. Most pupils were either engaged or demonstrated low levels of disengagement (86%). 12% of pupils were categorised as displaying a moderate degree of disengagement, whilst a further 2% were highly disengaged.

It is notable that the additional question on bullying (not included in the disengagement measure) finds that more than one third of pupils reported experiencing some degree of bullying.

15. Fredericks, J., Blumenfeld, P. & Paris, A. (2004) School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of evidence. *Review of Educational Research*. 74(1):59-105

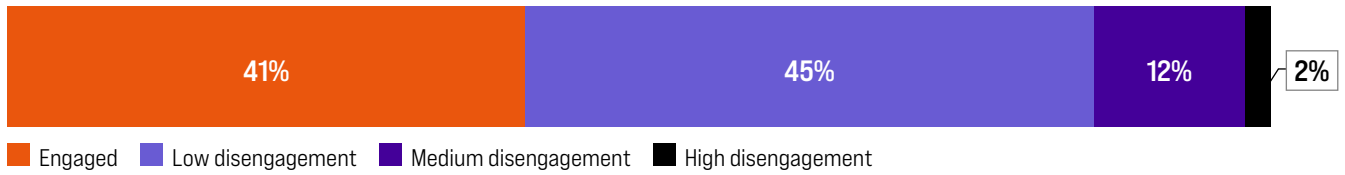
16. The risk of school disengagement measure was developed by the Upstream Cymru team by combining the 5 AIAD questions and the single exclusion from school question. Zero negative responses equate to engaged, 1-2 low disengagement, 3-4 medium disengagement, and 5-6 high disengagement



Table 6. Responses to questions indicating (dis)engagement from school and bullying

	n	%
Enjoys going to school every day:		
Strongly agree	115	5
Agree	720	29
Don't agree or disagree	870	35
Disagree	450	18
Strongly disagree	355	14
Gets along well with most of their teachers:		
Strongly agree	170	7
Agree	1110	44
Don't agree or disagree	770	31
Disagree	330	13
Strongly disagree	140	6
Would leave school if they were able to get a job:		
Strongly agree	380	15
Agree	465	18
Don't agree or disagree	575	23
Disagree	800	32
Strongly disagree	300	12
Regularly skip school:		
Strongly agree	35	2
Agree	85	3
Don't agree or disagree	230	9
Disagree	735	29
Strongly disagree	1425	57
Get into a lot of trouble in school:		
Strongly agree	70	3
Agree	200	8
Don't agree or disagree	555	22
Disagree	890	35
Strongly disagree	800	32
Been excluded or suspended from school:		
No	2230	89
Yes	285	11
Frequency of being bullied or picked on by other students:		
Never	1295	63
1-2 times in the past year	300	15
1-2 times per month	130	6
1-2 times per week	125	6
Almost every day	215	10

Figure 4. Breakdown of categorisation of school disengagement measure



(n = 2515)

The relationship between school (dis)engagement and youth homelessness

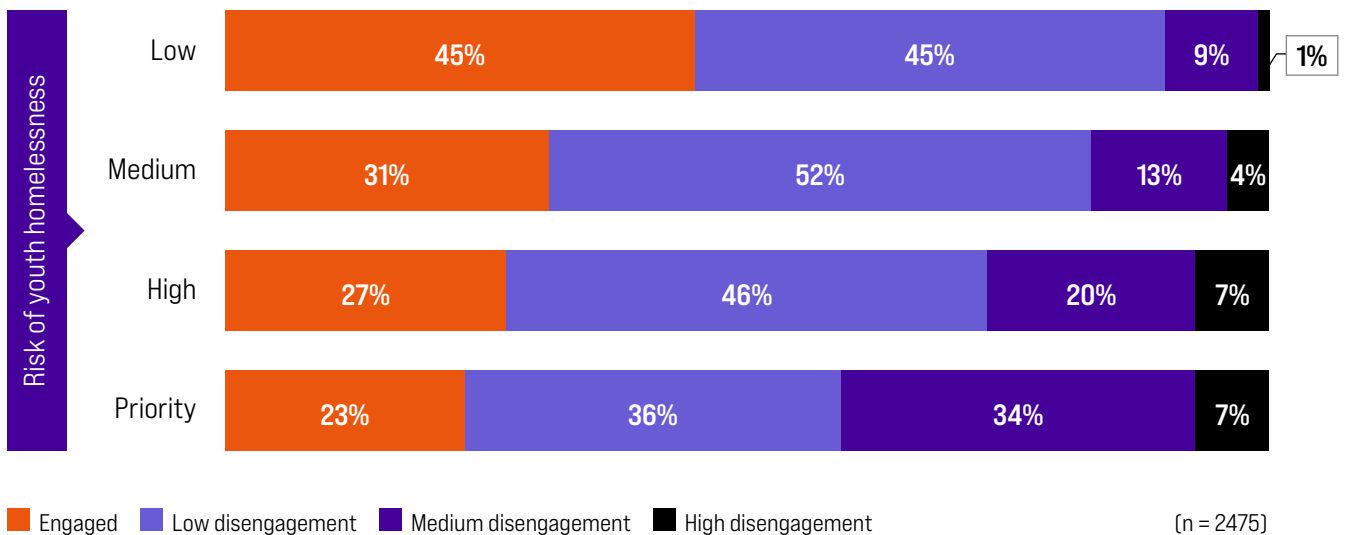
Figure 5 provides a breakdown of the categories of school disengagement for the youth homelessness risk categories. In general, as the risk of youth homelessness increased, i.e., moving up the risk categories, so did the proportion of pupils who demonstrated medium and high levels of school disengagement—as measured in this study. The visual interpretation of an association in Figure 5 is supported by statistical analysis which found that there was a statistically significant association between risk of youth homelessness and school disengagement categories.

59% were either considered engaged in school, or demonstrated low levels of school disengagement. Similarly, of pupils identified as high risk of youth homelessness,

73% were either considered engaged in school, or demonstrated low levels of school disengagement. These findings echo Upstream survey findings in Australia and Wales, and they reiterate points made by key informants (documented elsewhere in the report) that Upstream helps to identify young people who may not be picked up by the school due to a lack of externalising problems.

An important finding is that of pupils categorised as immediate priority for youth homelessness intervention,

Figure 5. Disengagement from school by risk of homelessness categories



(n = 2475)

17. Data were treated as unordered as the difference between categories was not deemed consistent enough to warrant an ordinal approach. As expected cell counts were less than 5 in a number of cells. Fisher's Exact Test was chosen over the more standard Chi-square Test.

RESILIENCE

Resilience is understood as the ability to meet challenges and cope with adverse situations¹⁸. Pupils were asked to rate a series of twelve statements related to resilience, drawn from the validated Children and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM)¹⁹. The purpose of the CYRM is to explore

resources available to children and young people that may support their resilience, such as individual and community ties. Table 7 provides the breakdown of ratings for the twelve CYRM statements, and an additional question related to having a trusted adult.

Table 7. Ratings for individual resilience statements

	n	%
I have people I look up to:		
Yes	1525	63
Sometimes	650	27
No	235	10
Getting an education is important to me:		
Yes	1690	70
Sometimes	600	25
No	120	5
My parents/caregiver(s) know a lot about me:		
Yes	1685	70
Sometimes	555	23
No	170	7
I try to finish activities that I start:		
Yes	1140	47
Sometimes	1030	43
No	240	10
When things don't go my way, I can fix it without hurting myself/others:		
Yes	1115	46
Sometimes	895	37
No	405	17
I know where to go to get help:		
Yes	1490	62
Sometimes	610	25
No	310	13
I feel that I belong at my school:		
Yes	1045	43
Sometimes	935	39
No	430	18

18. <https://phw.nhs.wales/files/research/resilience/resilience-understanding-the-interdependence-between-individuals-and-communities/>
 19. L., Ungar, M., and LeBlanc, J. C. (2013). The CYRM-12: A brief measure of resilience. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 104(2), 131-135.

	n	%
My family/caregiver(s) stand by me when times are hard:		
Yes	1870	78
Sometimes	435	18
No	105	4
My friends stand by me when times are hard:		
Yes	1500	62
Sometimes	760	32
No	155	6
I am treated fairly:		
Yes	1380	57
Sometimes	865	36
No	165	7
I have chances to learn things that will be useful when I am older:		
Yes	1840	76
Sometimes	500	21
No	70	3
I like the way my community celebrates things:		
Yes	1485	62
Sometimes	740	31
No	185	8
There is an adult in my life who I can trust/talk to about problems:		
Yes	1810	75
Sometimes	395	16
No	200	8

Overall resilience

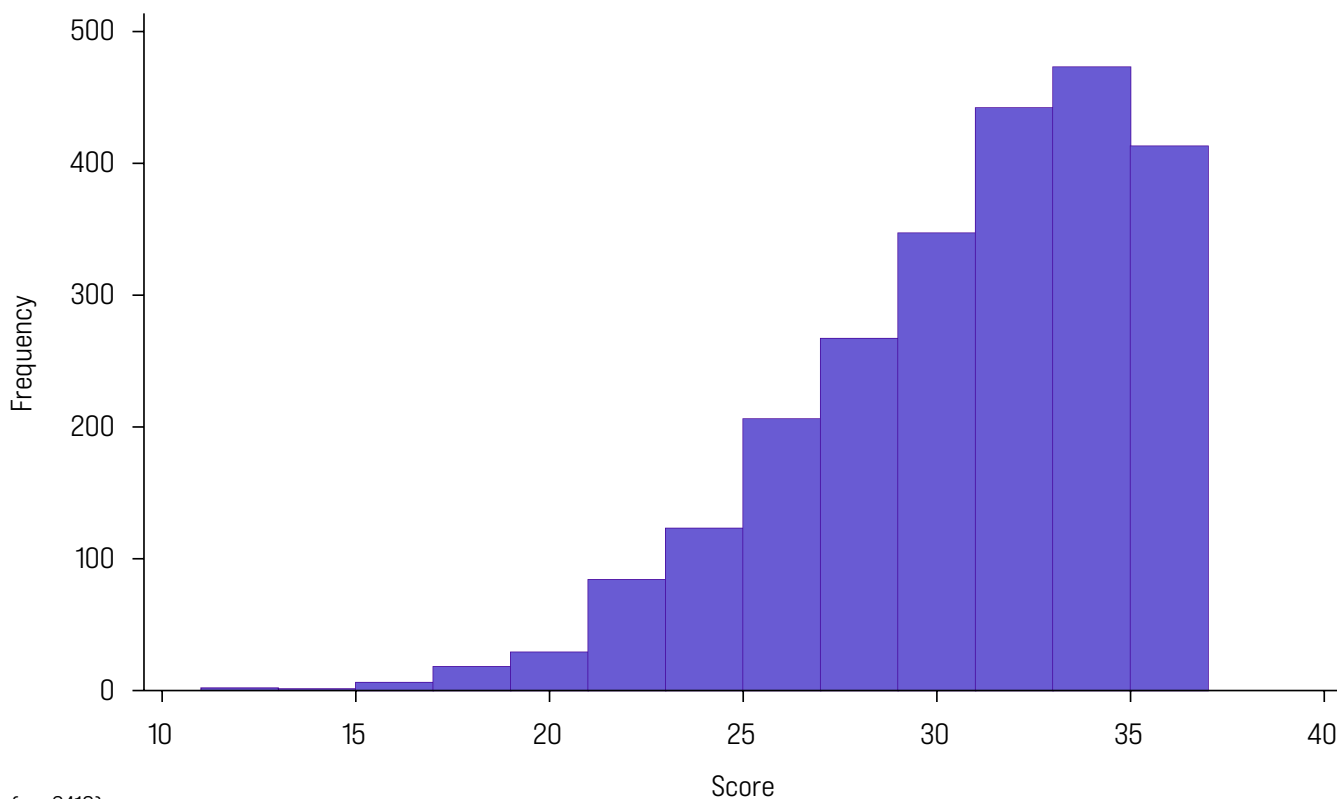
Responses to the resilience statements were given a numerical value or score²⁰. Overall resilience was calculated by summing scores across statements. Higher scores indicate greater resilience. Only the twelve original CYRM statements were used to calculate the overall resilience score; the survey's additional question related to having a trusted adult was not included. By using the approved CYRM methodology, findings in this report can

be compared to other studies using the CYRM. Only pupils who responded to all twelve CYRM statements were included in the following analysis.

Figure 6 represents the distribution of overall resilience scores for pupils. The mean resilience score for pupils was 30.3 points. The minimum possible resilience score was 12-points and the maximum possible score was 36.

20. Yes = 3, Sometimes = 2; No = 1

Figure 6. Distribution of overall CYRM scores



The relationship between resilience & youth homelessness

To explore whether resilience varied by risk of youth homelessness, we compared mean resilience scores for the youth homelessness risk categories. The mean resilience score for those at high, medium, and low risk of youth homelessness were 26.3, 27.5, and 31.3 points, respectively. The immediate risk category had a mean resilience score of 27.0 points. Analysis to compare differences in means across groups²¹ found that there

was a statistically significant difference in resilience scores between the categories of youth homelessness risk²². More detailed testing found that resilience scores varied significantly between the low-risk category and all other categories, and that there were no other significant differences between the remaining pairs of categories. This is an important finding: pupils experiencing any degree of youth homelessness risk have lower levels of resilience.

21. Welch's Analysis of Variance

22. F-statistic = 133.2, p < 0.01

WELLBEING

Pupils were asked to rate seven statements about their mental wellbeing. By mental wellbeing we mean feeling good and functioning well. The statements were drawn

from the Shortened Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS). Table 8 shows the breakdowns of pupil ratings for the individual SWEMWBS statements.

Table 8. Ratings for individual wellbeing statements

	n	%
I've been feeling optimistic about the future:		
All of the time	360	15
Often	585	24
Some of the time	850	35
Rarely	430	18
None of the time	210	9
I've been feeling useful:		
All of the time	295	12
Often	675	28
Some of the time	850	35
Rarely	390	16
None of the time	230	9
I've been feeling relaxed:		
All of the time	395	16
Often	760	31
Some of the time	735	30
Rarely	410	17
None of the time	140	6
I've been dealing with problems well:		
All of the time	350	14
Often	690	28
Some of the time	740	30
Rarely	415	17
None of the time	240	10
Get into a lot of trouble in school:		
Strongly agree	70	3
Agree	200	8
Don't agree or disagree	555	22
Disagree	890	35
Strongly disagree	800	32

23. <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/research/framework>

	n	%
I've been thinking clearly:		
All of the time	445	18
Often	690	28
Some of the time	770	32
Rarely	375	15
None of the time	160	7
Frequency of being bullied or picked on by other students:		
All of the time	445	18
Often	690	28
Some of the time	770	32
Rarely	375	15
None of the time	160	7
I've been feeling close to other people:		
All of the time	510	21
Often	845	35
Some of the time	680	28
Rarely	280	12
None of the time	120	5
I've been able to make up my own mind about things:		
All of the time	610	25
Often	865	35
Some of the time	620	25
Rarely	255	11
None of the time	85	4

Overall wellbeing

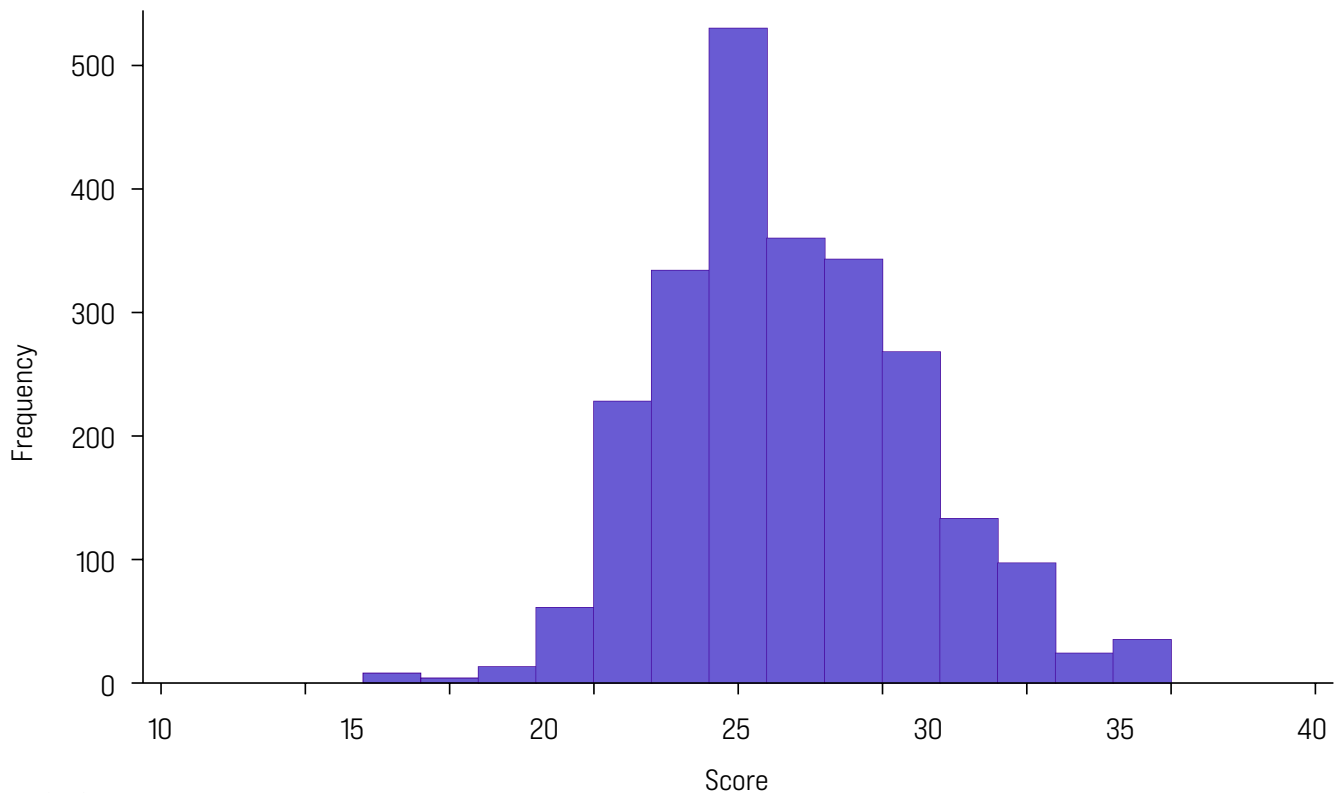
As with the resilience measure, a pupil's overall wellbeing was calculated by assigning point scores to responses to each statement²⁵ and summing scores across all seven statements. Higher overall scores indicate greater wellbeing. Total wellbeing scores were then transformed to make them metric, as indicated by SWEMWBS guidance²⁶. Only pupils who responded to all seven SWEMWBS wellbeing statements were included in the following analysis. Figure 7 represents

the distribution of overall metric wellbeing scores for pupils. The mean wellbeing score for pupils was 21.7 points, with a minimum possible score of 7 points and a maximum possible score of 35. The SWEMWBS survey has been conducted in schools in several research studies and they tend to find a mean score of approximately 23, suggesting wellbeing is a little lower amongst pupils in the participating Upstream schools (Page et al, 2023).

25. All of the time = 5; Often = 4; Some of the time = 3; Rarely = 2; Never = 1

26. <https://www.corc.uk.net/outcome-experience-measures/short-warwick-edinburgh-mental-wellbeing-scale-swemwbs/>

Figure 7. Distribution of wellbeing scores



(n = 2440)

The relationship between wellbeing & youth homelessness

The mean wellbeing score for those at immediate risk of youth homelessness was 19.5 points. The mean wellbeing scores for those at high, medium, and low risk of youth homelessness were 18.7, 19.6, and 22.4 points, respectively. Analysis to compare differences in means across groups²⁷ found that there was a statistically significant difference in wellbeing scores between youth homelessness risk categories²⁸. As with the resilience

measure, further tests found that wellbeing scores differed significantly between the low-risk category and all other categories, but that there were no other significant differences between the remaining pairs of categories. This is another important finding: pupils experiencing any degree of youth homelessness risk have lower levels of wellbeing.

27. Welch's Analysis of Variance

28. F-statistic = 90.7, $p < 0.01$



CONCLUSION

Analysis of the first Upstream surveys provides new and important insights into the scale and characteristics of young people identified as at risk of experiencing homelessness. **It has allowed levels of youth homelessness risk (at least according to definitions employed in the Upstream survey) to be explored within England for the first time.**

Additionally, the results show that **youth homelessness risk is associated with gender and sexuality** – a finding that reinforces existing knowledge, albeit the small sample size for certain populations means caution must be taken in over generalising from these findings. Importantly for the Upstream intervention, there is limited evidence to suggest youth homelessness risk is higher for particular secondary school age/year groups.

The results also offer a new understanding of the associations between youth homelessness risk and educational engagement, resilience and wellbeing. Two key insights emerge.

First, and most importantly, of the pupils identified as high risk of youth homelessness, nearly three quarters were either considered engaged in school, or demonstrated low levels of school disengagement. Therefore, Upstream is delivering on its intent to help identify young people who may not be picked up by schools due to a lack of externalising problems. **Second, pupils experiencing any degree of youth homelessness risk have lower levels of resilience and wellbeing.**

The survey clearly provides excellent insights, however it is important to note that high levels of missing demographic data, and problematic ethnicity collections, limited the type and quality of the analysis that could be undertaken, and potentially missed important further insights.

Interestingly, the rate of **1 in 10** young people being at risk or experiencing youth homelessness that has emerged from the Centrepilot pilot closely matches that found by Upstream Cymru in Wales.



Importantly, youth homelessness emerges as relatively distinct from family homelessness – only 1 in 5 young people at elevated risk of youth homelessness were also at elevated risk of family homelessness.

5. SURVEY CONTENT, ANALYSIS AND THE IDENTIFICATION OF RISK



INTRODUCTION

This chapter turns to consider the survey content, as well as views on the meaningfulness of the data generated, the process of survey analysis and identification of risk, the role that schools play within this, and perspectives on the effectiveness of the survey in accurately identifying risk.

VIEWS ON THE UPSTREAM SURVEY CONTENT AND FOCUS

Broadly speaking, **the survey appeared well regarded** among key informants. The questions were viewed as relevant, helpful and generally clear. There was also a sense that the survey filled a knowledge gap in terms of capturing information on the young people which is typically not asked in a school setting.

“I think it’s [survey] helping us to identify people at risk, definitely...”

[Support partner]

“I haven’t done a survey of them [students] doing the survey if you like, but certainly, it seemed to be received positively.”

[School staff]

There were some helpful reflections on the appropriateness of the survey for different cohorts. For example, several interviewees felt that the survey could be improved in terms of age appropriateness, keeping in mind that it has, and will continue to be, implemented across different age groups, whom are at different developmental stages.

“I think it needs to be tailored to different age groups, so it’s more...It’s not just so much around understanding the questions; it’s also feeling comfortable enough to answer them without fear of getting parents into trouble or anything like that.”

[Support staff]

“I think, obviously, it’s a standardised survey, and it works better with maybe some age groups than another. So a Year 7 reading it, even concepts like safe and feeling safe can be confusing for an 11-year-old when you’re talking

with them, so there might be some discrepancies in ability to understand what the questions are really trying to get at.”

[Centrepoint staff]

“There could be some level of not understanding all the questions fully, based on your age range. I think some of the younger groups might struggle with some of the questions.”

[Centrepoint staff]

There was some difference of opinion regarding how intrusive the questions were perceived to be. Some school staff felt the survey was appropriately pitched, whereas others reported that they and/or their students found some questions overly personal. It was suggested that if students had a better understanding of why the survey was being conducted, this may help to alleviate feelings of intrusiveness and resistance to completing the survey.

“They think, these questions are kind of personal. Why are we asking these questions? What I normally say to them is, ‘Homelessness around young people is very high. We would like to get interventions in place to stop that from happening before you leave Year 11. So the better you answer the questions, the better we can help in interventions.’ That normally works!...”

[School staff]

There were also differences of opinion in terms of how closely targeted on homelessness the interviewees felt the survey to currently be and/or felt that it ought to be. There was a spectrum of perspectives, in that some felt that the strength of the survey lay in its ability to capture an array of important issues and outcomes, including homelessness, wellbeing and bullying.

“I think one of the strengths of [the survey] is that it gives a large amount of information, which then you can drill down into. That’s really good. It asks things that normally wouldn’t be asked. It gives you a good profile of the kids.”

[School staff]

At the other end of the spectrum was a sentiment that the survey is attempting to cover too much ground and lacked focus. Those taking the latter view recognised the relationship between mental health and homelessness, for example, but viewed poor mental health as neither necessary nor sufficient in causing homelessness and therefore not a reasonable primary focus for an initiative like Upstream, set up as a youth homelessness prevention model.

“I think maybe the survey is trying to do too much. I just wonder whether we should really home in on homelessness...poor mental health doesn’t necessarily lead to homelessness.”

[Centrepoint staff]

Somewhere in the middle were those that **recognised the importance of other domains such as mental health but felt that the survey should be more focused given limited resources**. An argument was made by some that, while a broader set of issues may be risk factors for youth homelessness, the key mediator is family breakdown and therefore should be the focus of Upstream and guide any support work.

“There’s absolutely a need for mental health...but then equally thinking around what the offer could be and the limited resources we’ve got, the survey frames

everything through relationship breakdown and relationships. So, if you imagine a river, everything flows through there, no matter what the inlet, whether that’s mental health, whether it’s not performing well at school... within this model, everything comes through that pinch point of relationship breakdown.”

[Centrepoint staff]

Continuing with this theme, the view was expressed that the survey needed more and nuanced questions on family relationships. In part, this was to be able to better distinguish routine conflict within the home from that which may be indicative of a more substantial issue. This distinction would aid appropriate referrals to family mediation. Having more questions on family relationships could also help capture different manifestations of conflict across age groups.

“There weren’t really very many questions around the family relationship, or the right questions maybe. There’s a loose question about conflict, but it’s probably not enough...”

[Support staff]

“...some of the questions I have struggled with a bit...So, the question around conflict. What does conflict mean to a 12-year-old? It could be completely different to what it means to a 16-year-old.”

[Support staff]

Importantly, however, given that Upstream is preventative, it aims to identify family conflict in its nascent stages. This means that the issues picked up may be more similar to that of routine conflict, rather than the more acute forms of conflict typically experienced by those engaged in family mediation services, which tend to be more downstream in their approach to provisioning.

“I think having something that’s a bit more focused – I know it’s not meant to be focused in some ways. It’s meant to be broad, isn’t it, an early indicator, but some more questions around the nature of what conflict is would probably have been helpful...People in general don’t necessarily know how to communicate often, or what conflict really is.”

[Support staff]



REFLECTIONS ON HOW TO ENSURE SURVEY COMPLETION IS MEANINGFUL

Some school staff mentioned key considerations which they felt were needed for students to complete the survey meaningfully. **As with all surveys, participants need to feel motivated and confident about engaging sincerely and truthfully in order to generate meaningful insights.** There was a sense that this may be an even more salient consideration when administering a survey to young people in a group setting during school.

“Some students might just not take it seriously, and just answer things untruthfully...I try to stop it where I can – but you have students that are laughing at it and talking to each other while they’re doing it. Even if they are someone who might be at risk, or might be experiencing these things, because of that they might be less willing to actually open up about it. So I don’t think it’s 100 per cent airtight in that sense.”

(Centrepoint staff)

"It all depends on how the person has filled out the form. They might fill it out as a bit of a joke. Or they might not understand it."

[Support staff]

"...what's tending to happen is we're getting a caseload through, and it's quite high initially, but then when you meet with them, they've misunderstood the questions or they've just been messing around on the questions. Yes, so it ends up being a lot smaller caseload."

[Support staff]

On top of this, given the sensitive topic area, **it was suggested that some students may not fully engage in the survey**, potentially as a defence mechanism or avoidance strategy.

"On the survey, there's a lot of 'Don't know' on there. So it's 'Yes,' 'No,' 'Maybe,' 'Don't know.' I find, with young people, they tend to put don't know because they're trying to go through it. So we're not really getting the best results, or the most correct results."

[School staff]

Much of the conversation on survey content surrounded students' understanding of concepts such as safety and home circumstances, which ties closely with the above discussion on age appropriateness. There was a sense that, for some students, both their understanding of such concepts, and also their ability to articulate themselves, may influence their capacity to properly complete the survey.

"She [school student who provided feedback] did make comments about like, this doesn't work with her year group because she feels like they don't have an awareness of their own circumstances. She feels like if there are things going on, they don't necessarily have I guess maybe the language or the awareness to be able to bring these out from that survey they did..."

[Centrepoint staff]

"...some of our kids, especially in the bullying section, quite a lot of them will flag up as, 'I'm bullied every single day,' and then when you actually talk to them, it's not every day and it's not bullying. It's something different, but it's their interpretation...it [survey] could be skewed depending on their understanding..."

[School staff]



Building upon this question of understanding, one particular survey item, relating to optimism, was continually raised as an issue for students. Many had never previously come across the term and did not understand it. More fundamentally however, there was uncertainty over what optimism looks like for a young person, and how consistent this may be across different age cohorts. There was also uncertainty about which domains of life they should be considering with respect to how optimistic they felt. Put differently, **optimism was viewed by some as a mature concept that is potentially inapplicable to young people.**

“Yes, and the concept of being optimistic about the future. What does that actually mean? Does it mean I think I’ll get a job or I won’t? Is it for health? Is it that I’ll still know my mum?”

(School staff)

“Some of the language...you can see there’s common words people don’t know, like optimistic. You definitely will get that all the time. I think because people have different learning needs, the survey itself, I think with some of the questions, isn’t basic enough to meet.”

(Centrepoint staff)

“Yes, I think, so there’s a question, for example, I feel optimistic about the future. Many, many children will ask you what optimistic means.”

(Centrepoint staff)

It is possible to see the challenges associated with potentially limited data in regard to meaningfulness and a lack of understanding, when looking at the survey item on safety at home. Importantly, as discussed above, if a young person scores highly on this item, they would instantly get flagged by Centrepoint to the school as a potential safeguarding risk. Concerns were raised by several different key informants that students may not be understanding this question as the survey designers intended it to be understood.

“So, when they do the survey, on the day, one of the questions is... Do you feel safe at home?...Anybody that ticks ‘no’, they would immediately flag up for us so we can have a conversation as to why...most of the students [flagged] said, ‘No, we feel perfectly safe at home. It’s in our community at times. We live in a city that. You hear a lot of bad things are going on.’ Not necessarily worried for their own personal safety. More just a general [sense of danger]...”

(School staff)

SURVEY ANALYSIS AND ESTABLISHING RISK

Survey analysis focused on identifying and categorising survey results which may indicate risk of homelessness.

This was achieved through an embedded algorithm within the platform that weights certain item responses and generates a traffic light rating, referred to as a RAG rating (red, amber and green). From this output, Centrepoint specifically focused on two domains: youth homelessness risk and family homelessness risk.

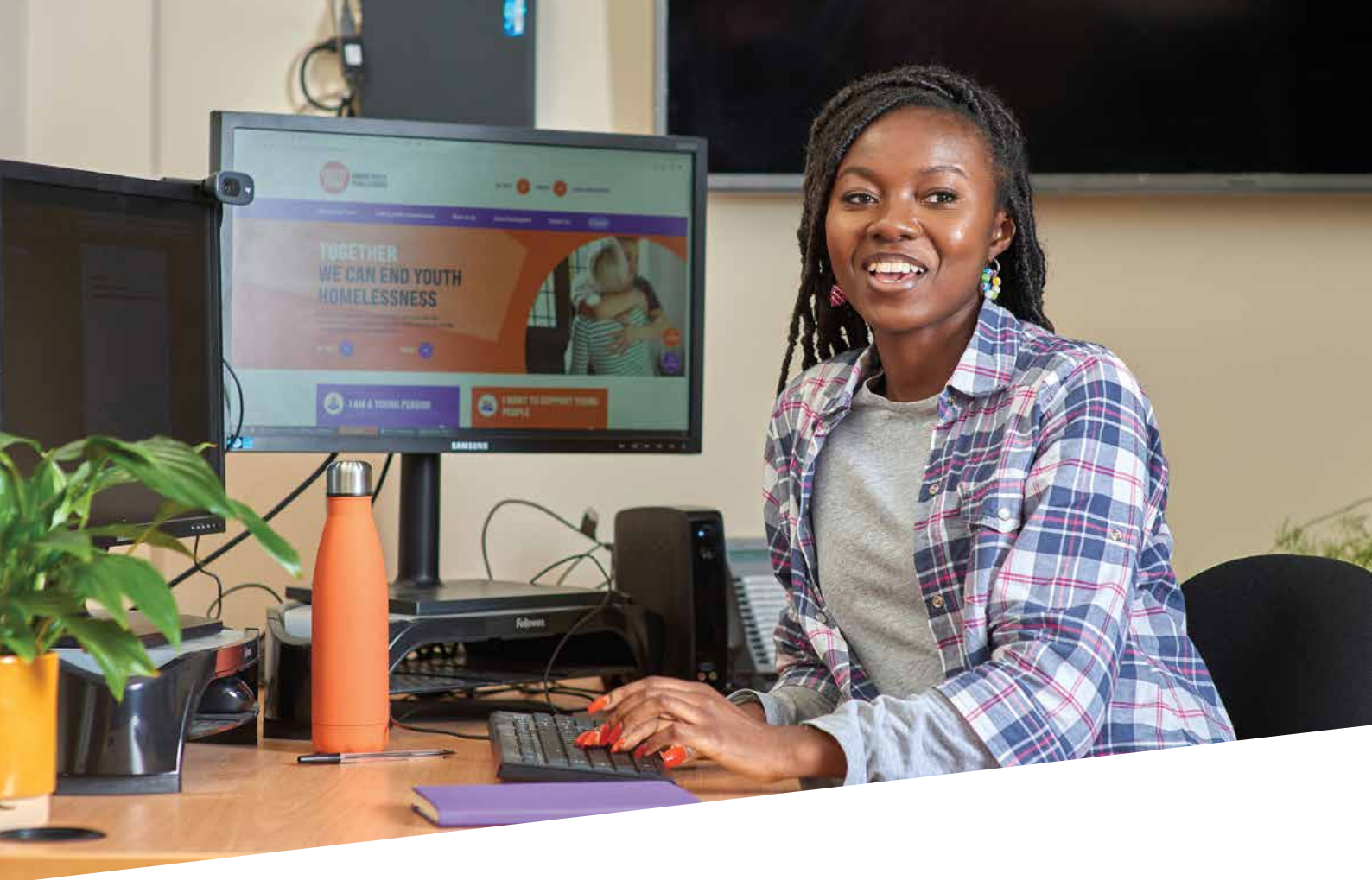
“...the main ones that we really consider when we’re identifying who should get support, are risk of family homelessness and risk of youth homelessness. Family homelessness, obviously, means the family’s in a situation where they could be forced into a position where they could be homeless, and that could be financial, or social, or something like that. Youth homelessness is more in a situation where family relationship has broken

down, the young person has made that decision, or has been forced against their will.”

(Centrepoint staff)

There were concerns that the algorithm embedded within the survey platform is opaque, meaning that the team working on the project did not fully understand how the RAG ratings were generated, and therefore were not able to fully trust in its ability to identify young people at risk of homelessness. There were also some questions around whether it would be helpful to adapt the algorithm to fit the local context, or whether the algorithm should be consistent across all Upstream settings.

“It’s really hard because, I suppose because I don’t know the algorithm as such. Sometimes I do find it, you’re looking at someone’s rating say as two, and you look at the



questions they've answered, it's quite hard to tell exactly what that algorithm is. Yes, I can't say I fully understand it. I feel like we're just putting quite a lot of trust in the survey, essentially, to get that right."

[Centrepoint staff]

"There is an algorithm which we don't know. As an organisation, we haven't got sight of that algorithm...if we got hold of that algorithm, we could look to see whether there is any kind of fine-tuning that could be done."

[Centrepoint staff]

"Well, most of that's done for us through the algorithm, as I say, which is something that we can't really replicate. It's a bit of a secret. It's like whatever they put in Worcestershire Sauce."

[Centrepoint staff]

Whilst the survey platform generated a RAG rating, this was not the only step guiding decisions on which students received support through Upstream. Importantly, Centrepoint conducted workshops with groups of students who were flagged as potentially at risk, to further understand their survey responses and to have the opportunity to sense check, clarify any errors and probe areas for further clarity.

"I feel like the workshops was a good way of doing a mass recording of who needs to go where, rather than having to go and speak to those each individual child. It was still a lengthy process in the sense that you had to run these workshop days..."

[Centrepoint staff]

Having some type of follow up conversation with the young person was viewed as necessary partly due to the concerns raised in the previous section relating to age appropriateness, sincerity when answering the survey, and students' understanding of the questions, all which could impact the validity of results. It was also considered necessary because the survey was viewed as a heuristic which flags potential need but which requires a more thorough follow up through discussion.

"Well, that could have been a mistake on the survey, so some of that is identifying, well, what's going on here? What have you meant by this, and then being able to look at that as well. I think, yes, so, that assessment point at the start both filters out the people who have either been messing around or made a mistake, but also then allows you to identify and go a bit deeper into those areas."

[Centrepoint staff]

“Once they’ve done the survey, I suppose they [Centrepoint] need to just talk to the children more about what it is that the mentoring is going to involve and a bit about the programme, so they do it through an interactive workshop with groups of young people. From the workshop, they then identify those that they think do need the mentoring, so it’s a little bit of a triage. They don’t all get mentoring, but they’ll get this workshop session.”

[School staff]

The proposed changes, wherein a young person gets directly referred to support simply from their RAG score, are therefore particularly notable. This proposal would remove any follow up conversation which allows survey responses to be validated and further explored.

“Whereas now...I think we’re looking at referring straightaway from the survey data, so just looking at the bands and immediately, just from there, referring, which I feel makes sense, and it’s a much quicker way of doing it...”

[Centrepoint staff]

This seems at odds with Centrepoint’s own understanding of the importance of a follow-up discussion and their acknowledging the limitations of guiding support solely based on survey results.



“It’s hard to judge someone’s need based off a band and how they answered a survey. You’re not having the opportunity to actually meet the child and understanding why they answered things in certain ways.”

[Support staff]

“Being able to have a conversation and being able to have that conversational assessment of someone where you identify more, is a lot more personable...than doing it as a digital survey.”

[Centrepoint staff]

THE ROLE PLAYED BY SCHOOLS IN DECISIONS TO OFFER SUPPORT

Schools also fed into the decision on which young person received support through Upstream. This happened in two main ways.

First, school staff added to discussions on the appropriateness of providing support to young people flagged as at risk through the survey. As school staff knew students well, they were often aware whether a young person was already receiving support. This was relevant as school and Centrepoint staff were generally of

the view that receiving support on top of existing support may at times, be overwhelming and counterproductive.

“...it depends on what the child’s other needs are...they might already be seeing somebody. Generally what my rule is, is if they’re seeing one counsellor, they shouldn’t see another, and if they’re seeing one mentor they shouldn’t see another.”

[School staff]

“Yes, and for them [Centrepoint] to understand that actually we do have a lot of knowledge. We have the relationships with the children, we have the relationships with the families as well, and to understand that we’re trying to support them, and not necessarily being, ‘No, you’re not doing that,’ or, ‘We don’t think that’s right,’ but I’ve most certainly had those deeper conversations with them to explain why it wouldn’t necessarily be the right thing at the right time.”

[School staff]

“Just a lot of the time when they [school] are a bit confused about the people who have flagged up, or they could say, ‘Don’t work with this person because they already have three interventions in place,’ sometimes that conversation is really helpful because you’re getting a better idea of who actually has no support, and who’s really hidden here, and who’s never come up.”

[Centrepoint staff]

It was evident that a careful balance needs to be struck, acknowledging the crucial role schools play in building a comprehensive picture of the young person’s needs and mapping their current support, whilst also establishing clear principles for decision making. For example, reflecting on whether certain principles, such as avoiding having more than one mentor, is appropriate and applicable to all students.



It is also important to reflect that teachers may not always be abreast of or have an accurate picture of students’ home situations. Therefore, reliance on school judgement should be balanced with insights from both the survey and discussions with the young person themselves.

“There was someone that they [school] said, well, she’s so intelligent, why has she flagged? Intelligence has nothing to do with homelessness. They also thought her relationship with her dad is very solid, and they were very shocked when I disclosed some things that came up from our assessment. They were like, well, the dad used to come in smiling with her, they joke. They were just shocked, and other people that they see.”

[Centrepoint staff]

Second, schools further fed into the process of deciding who received support by making additional suggestions of students to work with, whom the algorithm did not flag as at risk. Importantly, some of the reasons why these students were suggested by school staff did not relate to homelessness risk. This circles back to the above discussion on how targeted, or not, Upstream is, and raises questions as to whether having this additional layer to referrals dilutes the focus of the model.

“Actually, we’ve had kids towards the end of the year saying we think they would really benefit from support... we’ve managed to get support for kids quite late on in the year actually, that have really benefited from it, that might not have been flagged in the questionnaire for whatever reason. That’s been really good.”

[School staff]

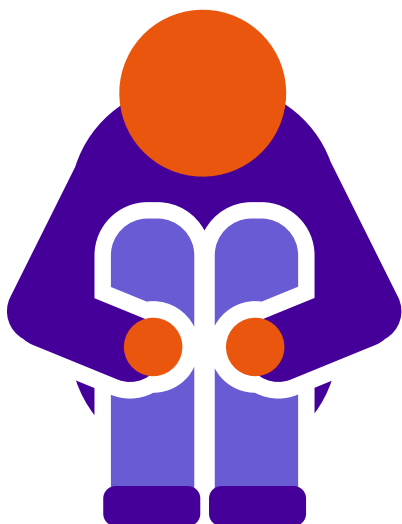
“The survey’s done in such a way that it just – it picks out vulnerabilities, doesn’t it, in – however it’s pulled together, but we have vulnerabilities over the whole sphere of vulnerability, so yes, it could be anything. It could be family in prison...Mental health...We used Upstream quite well with somebody that was PA, persistently absent, and so we managed to use the Upstream mentor as a reason for why they would then come into school, so we’ve got that.”

[School staff]



PERSPECTIVES ON THE ACCURACY OF RISK IDENTIFIED BY THE SURVEY

There was a general sense that the survey successfully identified young people at risk of homelessness who typically would not be picked up by the school due to a lack of externalising problems, such as disruptive classroom behaviour or poor attendance. Several school staff expressed surprise at the young people flagged from the survey, which reinforces the idea that the survey can effectively pick up on hidden risk.



“Well, to be honest, the last one that we did, flagged up students that we would never look at, because they’re very quiet, they just get on with what they’re supposed to do, they don’t cause any issues, so they don’t get our attention. So for us, it brought our attention to students that were falling underneath that line. So yes, it is good to know that. For us, it’s worked, with how we can get something in place because we didn’t realise what was going on at home until they did the survey.”

[School staff]



“...there was a lot of children on that list that I would have expected to be on the list, but there was also some surprises. When you started to just maybe look a little bit more into their background, you could see they were on the cusp...so I think it was picking up the right cohort, yes.”
(School staff)

“Yes, I think it is really good at identifying those individuals who are at a hidden risk of homelessness. I think it identifies students, and sometimes they’re already known to the school, and they already have interventions in place, which is great, but then I do feel like it also brings up people that the school never would have thought would have needed any support...Sometimes I think it can be a bit of a surprise to schools when they learn that, oh, these people are flagged up, and maybe they’re performing really, really well in school but, actually, when you look at the survey, they don’t feel safe at home, and they’ve moved four times in the year.”
(Centrepoint staff)

However, there were suggestions that the survey could be tighter, more refined and more discriminating.

“I think the survey is useful. I am not 100 per cent sure as to if the survey accurately identifies people who are at risk of homelessness. For me, part of this process is how do we identify people who – how is it identifying people who are potential – how does that work? Is it doing it accurately? At the moment, we’re finding it’s somewhere between ten and fifteen per cent of the populations in the school are at risk of homelessness, either family or youth homelessness, which is quite high, seeing as I think it’s about one-point-five per cent at the moment in England of people who may present to their local authority. If we’re talking around 15 per cent, one thing I want to understand is how do we make that tighter? How do we make it so that we are identifying fewer people, but who are more at risk, at the same time as maintaining that we’re identifying those who are hidden?”
(Centrepoint staff)

Some interviewees reflected that the survey did not successfully identify all relevant cases. This was a view more commonly expressed by school staff and

may partly reflect a difference in how “risk” was being understood. Specifically, **school staff seemed to approach risk from a more holistic standpoint, considering multiple vulnerabilities beyond that of homelessness.**

“I don’t know, because some of our kids that we’ve referred in ourselves had done it [survey] but hadn’t been flagged up, and that could be because they’re filling these things out and they’re asked, ‘Do you feel safe at home?’ They might think, well, I don’t want to...What if this comes back as...Some of our kids know how to answer things to get picked up, and also how not get picked up”.
(School staff)

“I’ll look at the list and I might think I’m really surprised that they didn’t flag on there...They [Centrepoint] are happy to add to as well if I want to, and then I – but obviously I have to explain why I think they are vulnerable or I’d like them looked at.”
(School staff)

It is worth noting that, outwith the analysis of survey results for the purpose of Upstream, schools were using the data to inform their own practice. The data was partly used to better inform school staff about issues of homelessness, and specifically to gauge levels of need within their own school. The data also guided the development of new lessons for students, demonstrating a shift towards integrating homelessness as a core element of young people’s learning and education.

“Information passed to us by teachers within the school has said they’ve found it a really positive experience. The information they’re getting, they’ve been able to use as a school basis from the survey. One of the schools has looked into developing PHSE lessons. One of the schools developed a what’s a house, what’s a home lesson.”
(Centrepoint staff)



“So I had a teacher approach me...who had looked at the data, because that data...is freely available to the school – that’s a big selling point, in terms of us getting involved with schools...he’d looked at the data, and he was really interested in student wellbeing, student engagement, and it’s informed his work in relation to that.”

[Centrepoint staff]

Interestingly, some schools triangulated data from the Upstream survey with other surveys run in the school. For example, the Them and Us survey was triangulated with Upstream to identify emerging themes on feelings of safety among students. This demonstrates a growing interest in synthesising all available information on students to understand experiences at school and increasing data literacy to identify patterns across different sources of insight. This likely contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of student vulnerability and need.

“I’m running another survey, separate from this [Upstream]...and we’ve also got our behaviour survey. **One of the key emerging themes is....about feeling safe...**the staff overestimate how safe young people feel. For me, as well, just having that triangulation with all this data saying that they’re feeling a little bit unsure out in the community and one thing or another has formed part of my school improvement target for this year around working around – with groups of student leaders about how we can make young people feel safer...So, that whole strand of school improvement has in some respects come from this project.”

[School staff]

In terms of concrete impact, some schools have used the survey insights as a basis for changing policy. The bullying domain of the survey came up as a particular point of interest for schools and internal policy change. This reinforces the point that schools commonly viewed one of the key benefits of Upstream to be its ability to offer insight across an array of outcomes, including psychosocial factors such as wellbeing and bullying, rather than simply as a homelessness prevention tool.

“Yes, guided curriculum as well. One of the schools has altered its bullying policy around some of the evidence that we’ve been able to provide as well – which has been really, really positive there.”

[CP1, Centrepoint staff]

CONCLUSION

Overall, the survey content was viewed positively by key stakeholders as both helpful and clear. There were concerns about its applicability across different age groups, as literacy and comprehension can vary substantially, with younger students potentially struggling to comprehend the survey content at times. Specifically, there were recurring issues as regards to particular items and concepts in the survey, notably optimism and feelings of safety at home.

Some concerns were raised around the content being viewed as intrusive and overly personal. However, these reservations may be alleviated through comprehensive explanation of the survey rationale and its importance. **Suggestions for including more and nuanced items on family relationships may facilitate greater insight and better guide the family mediation element** of the Upstream support offer.

As with all surveys, participants need to truthfully engage with questions to generate meaningful insights. However, this may be a more salient consideration for Upstream as the survey questions are sensitive and completed by young people, in a group school setting, which some interviewees speculated may lead to greater disengagement as a defence strategy.

There was substantial variance in key informants' views on how targeted the survey was on homelessness and the benefit of doing so. Some felt that the survey was trying to cover too much ground, others felt that capturing broader psychosocial outcomes, such as wellbeing, was one of the key benefits of Upstream. Views in the middle recognised the importance of other outcomes but considered family conflict and breakdown to be central and as mediating other risks. This variety in perspective partly reflects the different agendas of key stakeholders – for example, schools may be more interested in broader outcomes as it speaks to their wide remit.

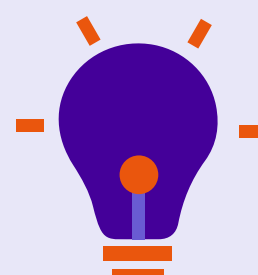
In addition to these conceptual questions there are practicalities that require resolving moving forward. Specifically, developing a better grasp of the embedded algorithm, which informants felt lacked transparency and clouded their agency in delivering the survey and

therefore tailoring support. **As Upstream continues to grow, it is ever important that adopters are aware of public resources on model fidelity**, the algorithm and specifically **guidance on how different subscales feed into the RAG ratings and prompt intervention**.

The process around categorising risk was multilayered, involving a RAG rating produced from the algorithm, which was then validated through workshops with students. **Having the ability to speak directly with young people to better understand their survey responses is fundamental to this process**. It provides the opportunity to validate answers, clarify any inconsistencies or errors and establish whether support, and if so what type, would be most appropriate. The shift towards removing this step of the decision process appears misaligned with recognition of these points by Centrepoint staff.

Further input was provided by school staff, aligning the English adoption to that of the Welsh. It is encouraging that schools are being heavily involved at this stage, tapping into their wealth of knowledge regarding students. However, such an approach relies on professional judgement which may introduce the possibility of gatekeeping. Therefore, attention needs to be given to enabling input from schools whilst acknowledging the boundaries of their knowledge and ensuring clear decision-making principles are in place.

Despite these areas of improvement, the survey is evidently of significant value to schools. It appears to be identifying young people at risk of homelessness who typically would not be known as vulnerable to the school. Additionally, **schools are engaging dynamically with the survey insights, using them to better understand level of need, triangulating findings with other school surveys and amending/developing policies in light of findings**.



OFFERING SUPPORT



INTRODUCTION

This chapter reflects on the reception of both parents/carers and children to offers of support, on the types and nature of support offered, and the evolution in this. It also offers some key informant reflections on the early intervention orientation of Upstream and on the challenges of offering support.



RECEPTION TO OFFERS OF SUPPORT BY PARENTS

As described in detail in Chapter 3, the approach to seeking parental/carer consent at both the survey and the support stage has evolved over the time that Upstream has been running, with a shift to a 'legitimate interest' rather than parental consent as the legal basis for both from February 2024 for children aged 13 and over. This shift was prompted by the difficulties encountered in obtaining parental consent and the impact this was having on getting the work underway. **In most cases, parents did not actively refuse offers of support to their children. More commonly they simply failed to respond:**

"The majority is absence of communication. However, we have had a few parents who have said no, they don't want...their children to be involved. More commonly, though...it's parents not responding."

[Centrepoint staff]

Even where parents did agree, there could be a considerable time lag in their consent being forthcoming. This prompted the change in approach to working under the legitimate interest legal basis:

"The reason we did that is because it was really, really difficult and was a huge barrier in terms of us working. When we were doing it case-by-case, everyone that we'd identified, we were then having to get consent from a parent before we could work with them, and that wasn't coming back quicker than we were doing surveys, which meant we had a huge build-up of people to work with."

[Centrepoint staff]

This change in procedure was very helpful, but did not resolve all data protection-related issues as the legitimate interest legal basis related only to the child's data not the family data. This caused some issues with interventions like family mediation that required parental involvement:

"...schools entering into a partnership with Upstream but not sharing parental details..We can't work with the family unless we have the details of the family. We're not doing anything else with that data other than just being able to contact the family. So it's getting through those barriers."

[Support provider]

While parental consent was no longer required post February 2024 (for the over 13s), Centrepoint were nonetheless keen to get them on board, not least to maximise the chances of positive engagement with family mediation and other family-orientated work (see further below). This prompted another change in procedure from September 2024, whereby parents were informed prior to the survey, and when children are offered support, almost in the form of opt out consent:

"Although on one hand, we've gone down the legitimate interest route – which means we don't need consent from [parents] – the other side is, we want parents to feel comfortable with the process, especially if we're going to be involving them in a mediation process, and especially if we're going to be involving them in further activities."

[Centrepoint staff]



“Then I think we also want to reach out to parents more, just to tell them more about what the offer is and what we’re doing. So far, that’s been more in the form of around consent, which does explain who we are, but I think we could probably reach out to parents more. I think that’s something we’re looking at developing.”

[Centrepoint staff]

For those parents who refused consent to support, or were otherwise resistant, the hesitation could be because the intervention was seen as associated with the school which was not always viewed as supportive:

“I think part of it is because the support’s coming through the school – from the school. There are a lot of parents who are – who see the school as a threat as opposed to necessarily a supporting environment.”

[Centrepoint staff]

“Some parents were a little bit suspicious and a little bit felt like their young people had been targeted for a particular reason; that they weren’t sure what that was for...Maybe in terms of sometimes getting some of our more vulnerable children working with these agencies or getting parents to say, ‘Yes, okay, go ahead with that,’ a third-party involvement where it doesn’t look like it’s school...A subtle difference, but it made the difference with some people agreeing to the engagement.”

[School staff]

There could be particular challenges in contexts where parents were wary of all forms of what may be perceived as ‘the state’, sometimes as a result of poor experiences of the asylum or immigration systems:

“...[school has] 48 different languages spoken and a huge amount of asylum seekers and refugee families coming through the school. A lot of the families see the school more as a state thing, and interventions like this being led by the state. So, there’s a resistance to what that could look like and the support there.”

[Centrepoint staff]



More generally, there could be understandable sensitivity on the part of parents given that these are self-identified issues by the young people that they may not be aware of. Handling these sensitivities appropriately is vital to the success of Upstream:

“In our usual work, families are aware of the issues, and they’ve sought help. Or someone’s made a referral and they’ve been aware of it. This is why this isn’t a referral. This is a young person self-identifying their issues that the parents might be completely oblivious of, and it’s difficult to engage them based on that. So we are developing a way ...to get the parents to buy into it and explain things in a gentle way. I’m a parent myself, so if someone approached me saying it’s been indicated that so and so feels like this, I’d be like, oh, wow, I didn’t know about that, if I didn’t know. Then that can trigger things, especially in parents who might not feel that they’re good parents anyway. It can make them defensive and fearful that social services are going to knock on their door and that sort of thing.”
(Support provider)

Key informants were also acutely aware that homelessness was a highly loaded and stigmatised issue, which may generate resistance or even animosity on the part of parents if not handled well. This meant that there could be a sense of ‘walking on eggshells’ around the subject:

“the last thing that we want to do is to tell parents that you’re not doing a good job and your child is at risk of homelessness as a result. It’s a delicate thing to approach, because that’s absolutely not what we’re wanting to do here.”
(Centrepoint staff)

“What I didn’t want to do was then phone them up and go, ‘We think your child’s at risk of homelessness; can I work with these people,’ because it would’ve created a lot of animosity. They wouldn’t have been very supportive of it. So, it was just making sure that we worded things in the right way.”
(School staff)

It was therefore argued that there could be advantages in keeping communications light touch and more general, especially where this was building on existing relationships with parents:

“...that personal touch is the bit. We try and keep it generic to start with, but because we have so many agencies and people who work with our children, our parents are very much used to, ‘My child needs some support and you’re going to give it them? That’s brilliant.’”
(School staff)

“Yes, you’ve got to word it in a certain way. Telling a parent, ‘I think your child’s going to be homeless,’ that doesn’t really go down too well! If you explain that their mood seems to be quite low, and I see that they’re struggling at home with mum or dad. To elaborate on it. I work with parents anyway. I’ve already got that relationship with most of them, so it does make conversations a little bit easier. If I didn’t know them at all, it might be a bit harder.”
(School staff)

One observation made was that parents could be more on board with the support if their child was engaged in ‘externalising’ behaviours:

“It tends to be if the young person is displaying difficult behaviour. If they’re truuanting from school or things like that, maybe at home they’re quite loud or they’re going out, they’re breaking the rules, parents tend to be a bit more on board with the support and a lot more appreciative of the support. Whereas I’ve had some cases where the young person feels that they’re being ignored by their parent and they want to spend more time together.”
(Support partner)

There was also a suggestion that there is scope for enhanced communication to parents around the Upstream offer, as the association with homelessness can be offputting, yet at the same time parents can find out for themselves that Centrepoint is a homelessness charity:

“If you do google Centrepoint...you do just get the homelessness website. You don’t get what you guys offer. So I think that’s something that we wanted to put

in our evaluation, that perhaps more detailed or bespoke information or a leaflet, something that we could share with parents along with the letter to say that this is more about preventing homelessness, preventing having no money, preventing not having a job. Maybe it could have approached it that way, we may have got more of a take-up.”

[School staff]

All of this said, it was reported that feedback from parents who had actively engaged with Upstream was said to be strongly positive:

“With families that I’ve been working with, I’ve found like with parents, when they’ve not been aware initially of the issues, they’ve been very grateful...eventually. Initially, not at all, but eventually grateful that it’s been brought to their attention and they’ve seen then the improvements.”

[Support provider]

“I’ve had feedback from some parents that have been overwhelmingly positive. I’ve yet to have any negative feedback, actually.”

[Centrepont staff]



RECEPTION TO OFFERS OF SUPPORT BY CHILDREN

There could also be suspicion of Upstream on the part of children and young people.

“I would say...probably 75 per cent, the child is a little bit suspicious, quite hesitant, a little bit confused, and it takes time to change those feelings, and I can understand why, because we’re telling them, ‘We’re not a part of the school,’ but we’re meeting you in school, and we’re an adult and we’re in the staff room, and it all must blur into one for them.”

[Centrepoint staff]

However, this seemed possible to overcome once Centrepoint were working closely with the child or young person. This is an area that we will explore more fully with young people and their parents/carers later in the study, but in the meantime there were some useful insights from school and Centrepoint staff:

“I think when we first met, she thought this was the school wanting to know about her life, and I think a lot of resistance from her was, why do the school want to know? I had to distinguish from us being a separate project to the school, and it’s not necessarily the school wanting to know these things.”

[Centrepoint staff]

“What I’m finding is if I build a rapport with the young person over several sessions...I think once they realise I’m not directly involved with the school, and I’m not telling them what they need to be doing or anything like that, I’m just providing emotional support and getting to know the situation, that’s when I find that they tend to open up a bit more.”

[Centrepoint staff]”

“I think the young people have responded positively, and those who we’ve engaged have fully bought-in to the process. So it must be doing some things right...Well, if the student wasn’t engaging, then they wouldn’t be turning up to the sessions every week. They’re voluntary. Nobody is making them go there, so the fact that they’re still going and engaging on a weekly basis, tells you it’s something that they’re getting benefit from.”

[School staff]

Nonetheless, **there was an ambition on the part of some key informants to move beyond the school setting, and become more of a community or place-based initiative**, as it was thought that that will also help to build trust with young people:

“ [looking at] other ways we can embed ourselves in the community a little bit, because I think we’re very much seen as an extension of school at the minute, which isn’t something that we really want to be. I think Upstream is bigger than schools”.

[Centrepoint staff]

“What I think, it’d be useful to be able to meet with children outside of that school environment just so they see you as less a part of the whole school system, and more as a trusted adult in their life.”

[Centrepoint staff]

As noted in Chapter 3, there was some divergence of opinion on how appropriate it was to be explicit with the young people regarding Upstream's core purpose as a homelessness prevention intervention, given the stigma and fear around homelessness:

"We do need to be careful that at a young age, it isn't all about homelessness, because actually, their world is so different. They're not ever going to think that they're going to be homeless. So whilst ethically it sounds wrong, I think you need to go under a cloak of other questions to get to the questions that will lead us to the results."

[Centrepoint staff]

"I think we also have this differentiation [some colleagues] they say they don't really use the word 'homeless', or

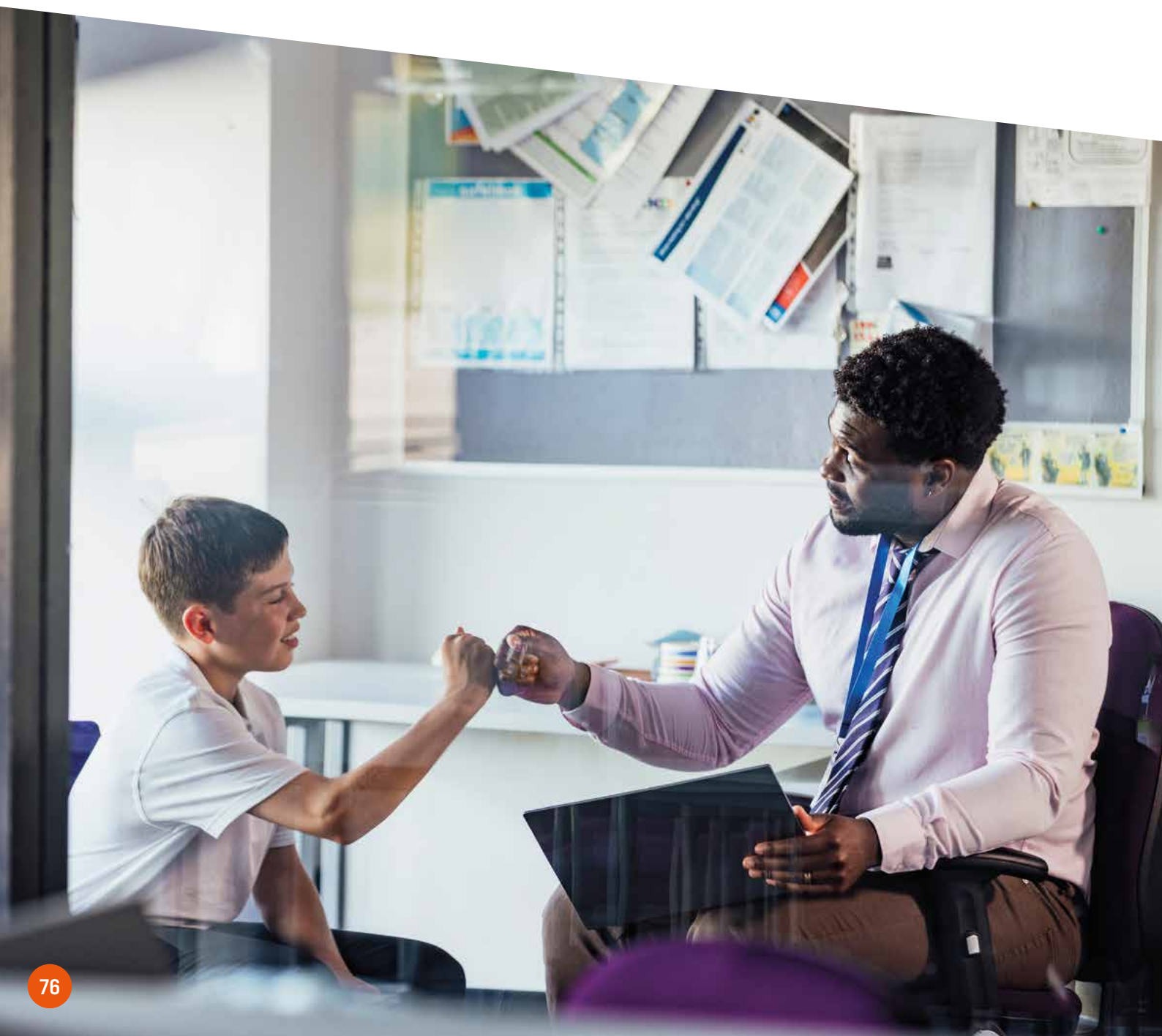
they feel like they're tiptoeing around homelessness. Whereas...I feel like...we speak about it quite frankly and about the aims of the project...I've just been quite transparent about what we're trying to do."

[Centrepoint staff]

There were some young people who initially engaged with support but then decided that it wasn't for them. This was interpreted by school staff as simply not being 'ready' rather than reflecting on the support offered:

"We've had kids that have maybe tried the first session and think, oh, it's not for me, but that's probably because they're not ready. It's not really [about]...the service or the workers. It's just they're not ready for it."

[School staff]



TYPES AND NATURE OF SUPPORT

The thinking behind the support offer when Upstream was established was summarised by one member of Centrepoint staff, as rooted in the consultation exercise undertaken in 2022 (see also Chapter 2):

“...there’ll be three different ways this would work. We’d have the general mentoring and that child-led stuff as one area. You’d have the family mediation and then you’d have the mental health support brought in.”

[Centrepoint staff]

Centrepoint staff focussed on the ‘general mentoring’ – sometimes described as ‘sticky support’ – element of the offer. **The approach taken in practice by Centrepoint was very flexible and holistic, described as ‘child-centred’ by some school staff and as ‘child-led’ by Centrepoint staff.** This meant that the range of support that could be offered was very wide-ranging:

“Also, with our goal setting that we do in casework, because that’s child-led as well, sometimes they can pick goals that are nothing – well, you perceive as not really anything to do with homelessness prevention and really specific and not related to other stuff.”

[Centrepoint staff]

“I also thought about someone who is on my caseload who has a lot of leadership potential, and I think leadership coaching has been something on my radar, and I wondered, I’m not a leadership coach, but I wonder if that’s something I could learn to offer that to him.”

[Centrepoint staff]

“I’ll just basically start by explaining who we are, explain what the support is, asking them if they think that’s something that they can benefit from, and then, basically, just asking them about themselves. Asking them about what do they like about their homelife, how are things, how are their relationships, is there anything that you would

change if you had the option, how are things in school, how are your relationships with your friends...”

[Centrepoint staff]

This could contribute to a certain opaqueness from the school’s perspective about the content of the support Centrepoint offered:

“I know they get the information from the survey about the areas of need for the child, but then what do they do? Do they then put a plan in place? Do they have a written plan and say X needs support in this. This is what we’re going to try. We’re going to try out therapy here, we’re going to try music therapy. Just as a daft example there, but what does their support plan look like for each child?”

[School staff]

This open-endedness meant that the distinction between what Centrepoint staff were offering, and the role of other professionals that may be involved in the children’s lives, was sometimes hard to draw, with a temptation to try to fill all gaps:

“A lot of the time, the caseworkers talk about where’s the line, if their support is a support to reduce the risk of homelessness by empowering, by embedding skills, whatever that looks like. They’re also not counsellors and they’re also not coaches. Again, where’s their role in it versus the other role? That’s the difficulty. You’ve got a school system in place that should be supporting mental health, but if they’ve met with a young person where they’re trying to reduce the risk of homelessness, but mental health is a massive impact, and there’s no mental health support in the school for that young person at that time, then what do you do?”

[Centrepoint staff]

As noted in Chapter 2, the specialist family mediation work has been undertaken by Depaul, and while the specialist mental health input was provided by Beacon, this was discontinued in summer 2024. While it is well-evidenced that relationship breakdown with family is the key trigger for homelessness amongst young people, it is perhaps not quite as obvious why there should be a

strong focus on mental health services as part of the core Upstream 'offer'. However, the rationale for this was explained by one Centrepoint stakeholder as at least in part linked to making participation in Upstream as attractive as possible to schools:

"We were under the impression when we initially spoke with schools that mental health is skyrocketing, and every school is under-resourced, so we were thinking actually, if we go in with a mental health offer, firstly, they are more likely to want to work with us and secondly, that will be supporting young people because mental health is one of those things that then potentially could lead to family disputes, etc. Recently, we've taken the decision that we're going to scale back the mental health offer and bolster what feels like is now more needed, which is family support."
[Centrepoint staff]

In practice, referrals to the mental health service had been slow in getting off the ground, and more recently

a decision was made to focus Upstream more strongly on family support (see further below). This was accompanied by a view on the part of some Centrepoint staff that the organisation could handle some of the mental health support in-house:

"...things like parenting support groups, putting the family at the centre rather than just the young person at the centre."
[Centrepoint staff]

"What we have, and one of our reflections is that there's more of the mental health stuff, personal resilience, that we can do ourselves. Which means we don't have to contract it out, which means that we have actually got our own colleagues who can actually do it as and when. So that's the other reflection, what can we do, so we don't have to contract somebody who then we don't refer to."
[Centrepoint staff]

THE SHIFT TOWARDS MORE FAMILY-ORIENTATED INTERVENTIONS

As just noted, much of the support that has been undertaken to date by Upstream has been very child-focussed. But one of the most important ways that the Upstream pilot has evolved since its introduction is a very recent pivot towards a more a more 'family-centred' model, similar to that pursued in Upstream Cymru, including more focussed support for parents:

"As we're moving more further away from child-led work and more into the family space, so there's still an element of child-led work there. But there's also more of that relational work between them and their family."
[Centrepoint staff]

In part, this reflected a recognition of the limitations of the child-centred approach that could see the locus of the 'problem' as located entirely with them:

"Of course you're putting all the emphasis on the young person, and the problem isn't the young person. For those particular caseworkers I think family mediation is obviously more systemic..."
[Centrepoint staff]

"Ultimately, we can only offer so much support to the child, and the risk of homelessness isn't always exclusively relevant to them".
[Centrepoint staff]

It also was linked with an acknowledgement, particularly on the part of senior Centrepoint staff, that the child-led work did not always seem closely aligned with the core aim of the pilot project to prevent youth homelessness, including as regards the outcome measurement tool that was used:



“Initially, we started with using the My Star Outcomes Star... the downside is...it structures things very much towards well-being and emotional well-being...[But] Improved emotional well-being isn't the focus of the work. The focus of the work is reducing youth homelessness, so we thought this needs to be structured slightly differently.”
[Centrepoint staff]

While Upstream has included specialist family mediation services from the outset, it was planned in future to go beyond this to encompass targeted support on parents, including with their trauma:

“I think it's more specific support for parents. We've talked a bit about parenting courses but...That would be helpful, that's definitely a gap...A lot of the parents that I've worked with have some sort of trauma, or there's some trauma in the family, so it's more specific support for parents around mental health and well-being. What I tend to find is I work with families – the parents have specific issues. I try and signpost and refer to get support for those issues, but it takes a really, really long time, so I end up finishing work with the families before any of that support comes into play.”
[Support provider]

“So we've contracted with [Depaul] for mediation, family mediation. What we really need to do is family support. It's got to be wider than mediation. So it's got to be a wider offer so it can cater for more families.”
[Centrepoint staff]

“Yes, I think there's a need that we can fill for more family support. We're doing a lot of work with the children and that's positive, but I think there's scope to involve parents more and offer them more practical or emotional support.”
[Centrepoint staff]

This also implies more practical support with the material precursors of family as well as youth homelessness, such as poverty and poor housing conditions:

“I think this kind of family support, parental support is key, just support to parents, and actually that could include welfare benefit support...we know that financial difficulties can lead to arguments, can lead to homelessness...So parents we're supporting can go and see the CAB person to make sure they're maximising their benefits.”
[Centrepoint staff]



“Maybe if they’re living in overcrowded accommodation and they need somebody to advocate for them, and that they haven’t got an advocate at the moment. That’s something that either we could do, or we could refer them to the CAB or to the Law Centre or somewhere else where somebody can advocate for them.”

[Centrepoint staff]

“...we’d have to distinguish it from mediation, where we weren’t, because that’s already being offered, and the focus there is around conflict or relationships, essentially. So this would be where the family have another struggle and need that support, but it’s not conflict resolution. It could be financial.”

[Centrepoint staff]

This pivot to a family-orientated model has been a learning curve for Centrepoint, as their work has not traditionally taken a whole-family approach, but it has been recognised that preventative work requires this:

“Centrepoint don’t massively work with families. We’ve started to a little bit, so I’ve had some parental interaction, but I think in terms of homelessness prevention,

family breakdown and relationship breakdown, it’s such a direct cause leading to homelessness, that it only feels right to come up and see a child’s background and understand further what’s going on.”

[Centrepoint staff]

Some of the challenges in engaging in whole family approaches were alluded to by one key informant, with decision making still unfolding about whether it is best to support children and parents separately or via the same worker:

“...we start thinking, well, should we be having one worker to do all of that as a family support worker? Or do parents need their own worker and the child needs their own worker, and how does that look?...also when we’re working with Depaul and working with the family mediation side, we’re taking into account: how do we keep mediation as impartial if we’re also putting in specific support to the child? So, there are a few dilemmas there that we are trying to work our way around at this point.”

[Centrepoint staff]

EARLY INTERVENTION ORIENTATION

A key feature of Upstream is that it is intended as an early intervention, before crisis point has been reached:

“The idea is it’s meant to be lower level than the sort of referrals we would normally get [from social services or schools]. So there should be an indication of some issue, but not anything full on. ‘My mum’s about to kick me out.’...Yes, they would probably be a little bit further back than we would initially take referrals from, but I think that’s a good thing. It could be that lower-level conflict, low-level issues with communication, can lead to higher-level ones if it’s not dealt with.”

[Support provider]

This clearly yields significant preventative opportunities, at least in principle:

“So you could do a very simple session with the family – once you can get to them, once you get past all the consent stuff – and that means they could put in a framework so they wouldn’t need help later on. I mean, that’s the whole point. That’s what prevention really is, isn’t it. You know, prevent family breakdown which is still one of the highest reasons young people become homeless.”

[Support provider]

“Before working with Upstream, the type of referrals that I was getting were quite serious safeguarding issues. It was usually from social services or from school and it was lots of trauma within the family, the young person’s going missing from home, or there might be serious substance misuse or that type of thing. It would end up being that the family support side of it was alongside a lot of other support that needed to be put in place...with Upstream... we want to prevent youth homelessness, so we want to work with families where the conflict is just emerging. I have been happy with those kinds of referrals that have come through where it is just a case of the struggling to communicate with each other properly at home.”

[Support provider]

But as noted in the parental reception section above, this also comes with some challenges too, as it may come as a surprise and a shock to the families that there are any issues:

“So, being able to structure that in a different way, being able to approach those families earlier, I think it’s one of the things mediators often say is: they’d like to have got to that family a bit earlier. So, being able to do that has been really beneficial, but opened up other challenges where the families aren’t aware that there are issues.”

[Centrepont staff]



PRACTICAL CHALLENGES IN OFFERING SUPPORT

A lack of facilities for confidential conversations and therapeutic work posed a challenge in school settings:

“Finding rooms, available room space in the schools is one of the challenges, to actually have the appropriate place to do the one-to-one work.”

[Centrepoint staff]

“Being more flexible with the space that you can work in, this is an interesting one because...Some of that space is not suitable for, say, a psychotherapeutic appointment. It may be appropriate for something else, but even then you need to be very conscious about confidentiality, very conscious around, well, what does this space look like to the child? Does this child just feel they're being put in a cupboard...”

[Centrepoint staff]

“...the logistical side of things, so actually having a room and having an appropriate space to support young people, or at least having consent or things set up where I can work with young people outside of the school setting. Yes, there's been some logistical issues around that, around

consent and partnership working with the schools, and appropriate spaces.”

[Centrepoint staff]

“Occasionally we're having to meet people in almost bathrooms, or little closets and things like that, which is not ideal.”

[Support provider]

From the school perspective, it was important that these constraints on space were recognised and accommodated by Upstream. So one important piece of learning was that only one of the Upstream service providers (Centrepoint staff, Depaul or Beacon) should be in the school at the same time:

“[Centrepoint said] ‘It's better if our service is in one day a week, so it's either Upstream, it's Depaul, or it's Beacon.’

We can accommodate that better. Whereas because last year it was all done in a much shorter space of time... Some days, we might have had all three services in, and we didn't have space for that.”

[School staff]





CONCLUSION

This chapter has reflected on the journey that Centrepoint has taken as regards the support offer to children and young people flagged as at risk via Upstream. Part of this journey relates to the amended way that parental consent is dealt with, shifting to a legitimate interest legal basis for the intervention so that a lack of response from parents did not introduce significant delays to starting case work. Some of the key learning from the pilot has also been around how best to communicate with parents, and children, with differences of view emerging on how explicit to be about the homelessness prevention focus of the work (see also Chapter 3). **More work seems to be required on communicating the homelessness focus in a reassuring, contextualised, consistent way.** It was also suggested that building trust with children and their parents may also be aided by Upstream doing more to move beyond the school setting to embrace a wider community model as captured in the 'COSS' approach in Australia.

At the same time, and more substantively, **there has been a growing recognition on the part of senior Centrepoint staff that the initial 'child-centred', general mentoring and mental health focus was insufficient to meet the homelessness reduction aims of Upstream.** Forward plans now include a move away from externally-provided

mental health support towards a stronger emphasis on family-centred support. This pivot embraces the specific mediation and conflict-focussed services provided from the beginning of the initiative by Depaul, but also potentially bespoke support for parents with both trauma and issues of material deprivation. The emerging 'whole family' approach brings Centrepoint's work closer into alignment with Upstream Cymru, and is more closely targeted on addressing family conflict as the key trigger to youth homelessness. However, it implies a steep learning curve for Centrepoint who have not traditionally worked much with families, with key matters of practice still being worked out.

While later stages of the research will involve speaking directly with young people and their families on their experiences of receiving support from Upstream, **initial indications from Centrepoint, support partners and school staff report highly positive feedback from those who have actively engaged.** Also welcomed was the early intervention opportunities afforded by Upstream, enabling family mediation to be applied productively before conflict has reached crisis point and inflicted deep harm on relationships. This may be crucial in reducing youth homelessness risks further down the line.

EARLY IMPACTS



INTRODUCTION

This short chapter discusses perceived early impacts of Upstream. It focuses on the identification of young people potentially at risk of homelessness who typically are not known to schools, increased awareness among schools as regards to therapeutic spaces, and possible improvements in student circumstances. These discussions should be contextualised within an understanding that the Upstream pilot is still in its early stages and more complete findings based on a wider range of evidence will be provided in the final report.

PERCEIVED EARLY IMPACTS OF UPSTREAM

Broadly speaking, there was little raised regarding early impacts, as it was viewed as premature given that Upstream had not long been running in schools across London and Manchester. This was the view taken across the majority of key informant interviews.

“I think it’s too early because, obviously, the interventions have just started properly. I just think that you need to give them at least a term, to see whether or not there’s any difference. So I just think it’s too early to tell.”

[School staff]

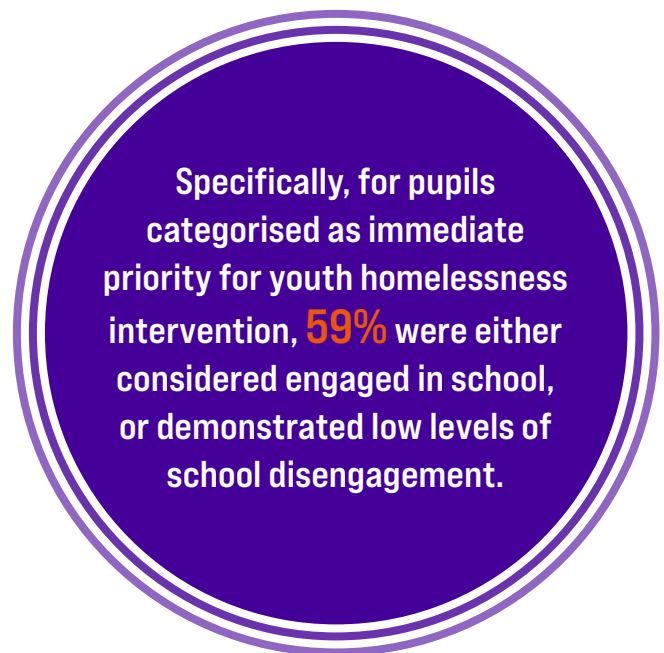
“I think it’s a tricky phase for it [Upstream] isn’t it, because at the minute, we’re not seeing that impact quite through the homelessness Front Door. I think what I’ve understood about the scheme [in Geelong] is that there was that reduction in youth homelessness, a very visible reduction in youth homelessness from areas that had piloted it. I think because we’re still quite early on, we haven’t seen those outcomes yet here, so it isn’t within a strategic priority at this moment.”

[Local Authority representative]

Nonetheless, it is helpful to highlight three main reflections on perceived impacts.

First, it was felt that Upstream had enabled schools to identify young people either currently experiencing or at risk of homelessness, who were not on the school’s radar and typically would not be picked up due the young person seemingly doing fine at school (i.e. presenting minimal disruptive or externalising behaviour during school). This is a crucial point as Upstream, as developed in Australia, grew partly out of an understanding that many young people at

risk of homelessness were not presenting as vulnerable at school. This was also supported by findings in Chapter 4.



This therefore reifies a fundamental pillar of Upstream and demonstrates its additive value in the space of homelessness prevention.

“I would say that the impact is from getting more children identified, because some of them are the quieter ones that wouldn’t normally be identified through their behaviours. So, that’s really good.”

[School staff]

“Key positive aspect would be the fact that they can flag up students that slipped out of our hands.”
(School staff)

Second, participating in Upstream enabled some staff to advocate for better support spaces within school. Upstream has encouraged them to reflect on the importance of having a safe, psychologically mindful, physical space for students to access. Notably, this is likely to create benefits which extend beyond Upstream, as schools typically work with a plethora of external services in order to provide a broad and varied package of support to students where needed.

“As a safeguarding team, we’ve moved offices...we’re trying to create a bit of a hub. So we’re learning from this and moving on and developing. There’s a lot of mental health stuff that goes on across the school anyway with regard to our PSHE curriculum...So we have a huge amount of – our kids have got access to a lot of stuff, but at the expense of we don’t really have the space. We’re working on it...

...it’s given us a goal as well...It’s spurred us on to do something. What can we do? I know, we need a better space. We’ve ordered nice cushions with lovely little slogans on them and we’ve got beanbags and we’re doing the rooms up and it’s given us a focus, yes.”
(School staff)

Third, key informants were keen to emphasise perceived positive changes in student’s circumstances. Preliminary findings from schools that are further ahead with delivery suggest that homelessness risk has reduced for some young people from the first survey round to second. This may well be a result of the support provided through Upstream, however, further analysis is needed to establish this with confidence.

“...from the 26 cases that have had interventions within [school] – 16 of them have not been flagged again in the next survey. Ten of them have been flagged, but with a better score. Now, there are a few different reasons for this and a few different things we can draw out, and a lot more analysis needed of all of this, but that in itself is quite a positive thing.”
(Centrepoint staff)

Relatedly, and most commonly reported, Upstream was considered to have a positive influence on psychosocial

outcomes for the young people who received support. This predominantly pertained to perceived improvements in wellbeing and self-confidence but also at times, communication with family and school attendance.

“There’s definitely been a few cases where children have given feedback at the end of things that it [Upstream] has supported them with. Even if it’s just, ‘I can speak more to my mum at home’, or, ‘I feel more confident with this in class.’ There’s those smaller impacts.”
(Centrepoint staff)

“I think just with some people that you’re working with, where you are working around school engagement, and their issue is lack of attendance, or missing lessons and stuff, I’ve noticed that just our presence being there and coming from a non-threatening angle seems to help.”
(Centrepoint staff)

These improvements were viewed by a key informant as not only the perceptions of staff but evidenced through service outcome monitoring. Specifically, they referenced changes in My Star self-reported scores, a tool developed for children and young people, which tracks changes across eight key domains (physical health, where you live, being safe, relationships, feelings and behaviour, friends, confidence and self-esteem, education and learning). Note that a full analysis of this outcome data will be conducted as part of the final report.

“...we have seen that people are moving along their goals. They’re rating themselves higher on those scales than they did at the beginning of working with you, which is showing that they have improved in whatever their goal was, which is often around emotional well-being or school engagement.”
(Centrepoint staff)

Upstream project workers seemed to have built sound and trusting relationships with the young people they supported, creating space for open discussion and flexible support.

“I’ve had children tell me that they’ve never expressed to an adult, or to anyone, some of the things that they’ve mentioned, and that the support and the environment that we’ve had has been a real help to them.”

[Centrepoint staff]

“She [project worker] actually met one of our students who has not been attending, and she’s been working with her to bring her in on her first day. She actually arranged that, bless her, and came this morning and brought her in...What [project worker] done [sic] with that student, that student’s just a non-attender, so it’s amazing, isn’t it, that because she probably wouldn’t have come in today if [project worker] hadn’t been.”

[School staff]

This meant that some schools occasionally leveraged the mentoring session to encourage school attendance.

“It’s a positive for them to focus on. It’s a carrot in a way for us. ‘Come on, come on. You got your worker in.’ They’ll

be like, ‘Oh yes, yes, yes.’ It is becoming a carrot for them, it is making them think, I need to stay in school because I want to see [project worker] today...”

[School staff]

Whilst improvements in psychosocial outcomes are important in and of themselves, future stages of the evaluation study will examine the extent to which these psychosocial factors map onto homelessness prevention relevant housing and other outcomes.

“...from the My Star they [students] all improved. Overall... they’ve all improved so we’re doing something that’s improving something. But it’s about aligning that and making sure that aligns with more of the housing side there and how we map in that sort of area.”

[Centrepoint staff]

It will also be important to consider the extent to which any changes to wellbeing, for example, can be attributed to the Upstream support. Moreover, we will examine which specific elements of Upstream, such as mentoring or family mediation, account for any positive impacts identified. Delving deeply into these questions on impact will form a key focus of the final report and help to better understand the impact of Upstream as a model.





CONCLUSION

At this stage, it is too early to definitively conclude on the impacts of Upstream. However, there are some promising early indications emerging regarding Upstream's ability to identify potential cases of homelessness risk among students that would otherwise not be on their radar, and to encourage school staff to reflect on and advocate for better physical support spaces. **There are also positive signs in the way of improvements in student circumstance, including a suggestive reduction in homelessness risk for some young people.** The potential impact on psychosocial outcomes, such as improved wellbeing and confidence, whilst positive in and of themselves, are of most interest to this evaluation with regards to the extent to which they map onto

homelessness risks. This will be the focus of later stages of the research, together with assessing the extent to which any improvements may be attributed to Upstream, and to which particular aspects of Upstream.

The final report will have a stronger focus on outcomes. It will draw upon a broader and more substantial array of both quantitative and qualitative data, including survey outcome data, perspectives from young people and families assisted through the initiative, as well as comparisons of level of risk across waves of survey data. This will all be supplemented with linked data from local authorities to establish any changes in levels of homelessness from targeted schools.



8. CONCLUSIONS AND PRELIMINARY LEARNING



Centrepoint has recently taken the exciting step of piloting an innovative youth homelessness prevention intervention in England. Upstream, first developed in Geelong in Australia, and since adapted for implementation in the US, Canada, Wales, Scotland and Belgium, uses a school-based survey to identify young people at heightened risk of homelessness and offer them tailored support. This Interim Report of the evaluation study examined Centrepoint's journey with Upstream, from set up through to the first year of implementation. The report examined implementation process, barriers and enablers, and delved into key areas of interest including the survey content and the evolving offer of support to young people and their families/carers. The report also provided an analysis of the first Upstream surveys, delivering new and important insights into the patterns of youth homelessness risks in the pilot schools.

Overall it is clear that Centrepoint, the schools and other partners have been on a very significant journey over the past year. Learning heavily on learning from Upstream Cymru, **Centrepoint has successfully rolled out the Upstream survey in five schools (from a target of six), achieving very significant levels of engagement** and substantial numbers of returns in four of these schools. While attempts were made to select schools based on purposive criteria, it became apparent that a base level of enthusiasm for the initiative was required for successful school engagement, as was the presence of a key member of staff willing to act as 'champion' for Upstream. A key moment of danger arose when the digital platform malfunctioned early in the survey roll out, but Centrepoint staff were fleet-footed and effective in pivoting to a manual approach which worked well and allowed the initiative to proceed.

Very strong and effective partnerships have been established with support partners, especially Depaul who have been providing expert family mediation input, and with participating schools. The latter have particularly appreciated Centrepoint's willingness to accommodate aspects of the school context, such as rigid timetabling and limited private space, which poses challenges to an initiative like Upstream. **The flexibility, positive approach, and genuine commitment to partnership displayed by Centrepoint management and staff has been pivotal to the success of the pilot initiative thus far**, enabling these other key stakeholders to be brought on board and be kept on board.

A key area where there has been much learning in this first year has been around data protection. An initial focus on 'consent' as the legal basis for offering support to children and young people was amended to 'legitimate interest', on legal advice, prompted by the difficulties in securing parental consent for these supportive interventions. A workshop approach to confirming young people's risk was introduced during implementation but is an approach not taken elsewhere, where a one-to-one approach has been adopted. **While the workshop is intended to enable quick progress in referring on to appropriate support for the young people flagged through the survey, questions have arisen as regards the confidentiality and appropriateness of a group approach to assessment.** In recognition of these issues, Centrepoint are considering direct referral of young people flagged through the survey to support services, without follow-up assessment. However, this seems at odds with insights from the interviews and discussions within the international Upstream community, which recognise the survey as a heuristic which is not sufficient in and of itself to definitively assess need.


Another area of evolving learning has been around effective communication with parents and children/young people about the purpose of Upstream. In particular, there appears to be a difference of view on how upfront to be with both parents and children about the homelessness prevention purpose of Upstream, given the loaded and stigmatised nature of the issue. This is an understandable dilemma given the (hoped for) very early stage nature of the Upstream intervention, meaning that talk of homelessness may feel premature and alarmist, with the potential to alienate rather than engage. On the other hand, as Centrepoint is a high-profile youth homelessness charity, failing to flag the homelessness connection of the work at the outset can lead to suspicion and concern on the part of parents who then go on to discover this for themselves via internet searches or other means. Encouragingly, **some key informants felt that it was possible to be clear on this homelessness focus if handled sensitively** and properly contextualised as regards the emphasis being on bolstering protective factors such as good communication and early conflict resolution. The risk of family homelessness, also picked up by the survey, albeit affecting smaller numbers than the risk of youth homelessness, may well be more imminent and therefore require an explicit conversation as early as possible.

But the most significant part of the journey taken by Centrepont in this first year of Upstream has been as regards the support offer to children and young people flagged as at risk via Upstream. To start with a tripartite approach was taken, including a very flexible (even generic) offer of mentoring 'sticky' support based on a 'child-led' model; specialist mental health support; and specialist conflict-focussed family mediation. This departed quite significantly from the Upstream Cymru approach, with its much tighter focus on the resolution of family conflict as the key trigger to youth homelessness.

Over the course of the year, Centrepont have pivoted from this initial child-led model, and the provision of specialist mental health support, to an intended (though still nascent) **emphasis on a more family-orientated model**. This shift towards a more 'whole family' approach was in recognition of the fact that the locus of the 'problem' generating homelessness risks does not necessarily rest wholly (or even mainly) with the child but often rather in broader family dynamics. It also became apparent to senior Centrepont staff that neither the mental health specialist support nor the general mentoring support were necessarily closely aligned enough with homelessness prevention to meet the core objectives of the initiative. On the other hand, **family conflict is well evidenced as the primary trigger of youth homelessness and so there are strong grounds for placing this front and centre of the pilot project**.

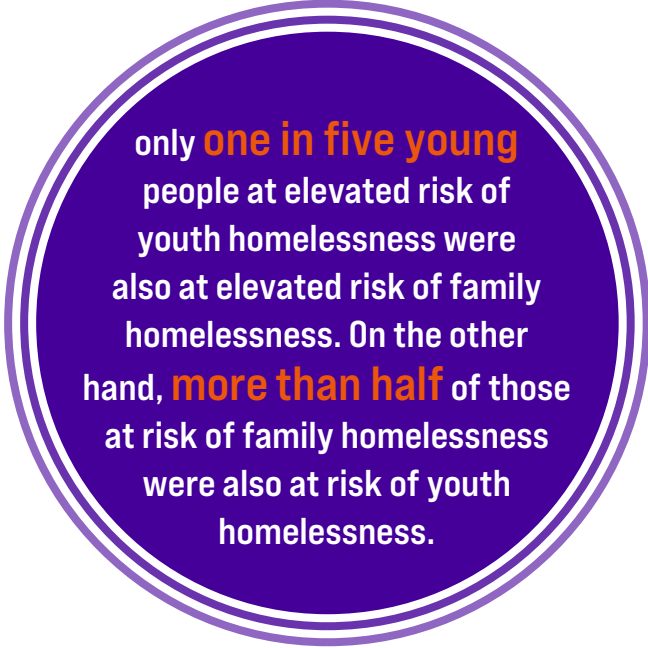
There are therefore plans to extend beyond the conflict resolution-focussed mediation intervention offered by Depaul to other forms of family support, including (potentially) bespoke support for parents with issues like trauma, and material concerns like financial and housing problems. However, Centrepont have not traditionally worked much with families so this implies both an exciting opportunity for development and a **steep learning curve in working out key matters of ethics and practice, including how to balance the interests of parents and children**.

All of that said, Upstream has already demonstrated its added value in a number of ways in this first year of operation. It has allowed levels of youth homelessness risk (at least according to definitions employed in the Upstream survey) to be explored within England for the first time.



Interestingly, the rate of **one in ten young people** being at risk or experiencing youth homelessness that has emerged from the Centrepont pilot closely matches that found by Upstream Cymru in Wales.

Importantly, youth homelessness emerges as relatively distinct from family homelessness –



only **one in five young** people at elevated risk of youth homelessness were also at elevated risk of family homelessness. On the other hand, **more than half** of those at risk of family homelessness were also at risk of youth homelessness.

Additionally, the results show that youth homelessness risk is associated with sexuality, with a higher proportion of pupils reporting that they were gay/lesbian/bisexual/other in the immediate priority category compared to the low risk category. In terms of gender, 9% of pupils in the immediate priority category reported that their gender was 'Other', as compared with only 1% in the low-risk category. Further important learning included the finding that those young people who have low levels of resilience

and/or well-being are at higher risk of homelessness. Crucially, though, **a substantial proportion of young people at risk of homelessness are not disengaged from school, demonstrating the value of Upstream in getting vulnerable children on the radar** that schools may not be aware of.

Necessary improvements flagged on the survey side include, the need for a more stable online platform, more complete demographic data, especially in relation to ethnicity, and greater communication around the survey algorithm. As with all surveys, but perhaps even more so when delivering a survey in a group school setting to young people, responses must be truthful in order to generate meaningful insights. This reinforces the importance of a one-to-one follow-up conversation to clarify any issues around inaccurate responses.

It is early days to consider substantive impacts of Upstream, but already there are promising indicators regarding

identifying hidden cases of homelessness risk among students, and encouraging school staff to reflect on and advocate for better physical support spaces. Potential positive impact on psychosocial outcomes, such as wellbeing and confidence, were also flagged and it will be important to consider how these map onto homelessness risks in the later stages of the project. Moreover, while later stages of the research will involve speaking directly with young people and their families on their experiences of receiving support from Upstream, **initial indications from Centrepoint, support partners and school staff report highly positive feedback from those who have actively engaged, which bodes well.** Another positive key learning from this first year of the initiative is the great value attached to the early intervention opportunities afforded by Upstream, enabling family mediation to be applied productively before conflict has reached crisis point and inflicted deep harm on relationships. This is likely to be very important in preventing youth homelessness further down the line.



Looking ahead, it will be important for Centrepoint to reinforce the evolving tighter focus on homelessness risks within the remainder of the pilot initiative, having experienced a bit of acknowledged 'drift' from these core objectives in the first year, and also to cement or encourage operational changes that have been identified as improving the effectiveness of Upstream.

This will be aided by:

- **Bedding in the new 'family' orientation of Upstream**, which is fully supported by the existing evidence in terms of family conflict being the key trigger to youth homelessness, but involves upskilling of Centrepoint staff unused to working with whole families;
- **Further reflection and expert advice on the challenges around, and sometimes tensions between, data protection and ethics** that are thrown up by a complex and sensitive initiative like Upstream, which involves the rights and interest of both parents and children. In particular, issues around the handling of parental consent are likely to come even further to the fore as the focus on family-based work strengthens;
- **Giving attention to improved communication with both parents and children** on the nature and focus of Upstream, while being sensitive to concerns this might provoke and fully contextualising and testing out all communication materials as regards how they will 'land' with parents in particular;
- **Exploring whether building trust with children and their parents may also be aided by Upstream** moving beyond the school setting to embrace a wider community model, as suggested by some of the frontline workers;
- **Reflecting on whether cooperation and demarcation between the Upstream support 'offer' and other professional support involved in young people's lives may be enhanced** by the introduction of school-based multi-agency meetings/fora, such as that captured in the 'COSS' approach in Australia;
- **Discontinuing the use of workshops as a means of confirming homelessness risks** with young people and instituting a more appropriate one-to-one approach that ensures that the survey is treated as the heuristic device that it is intended to be;
- **Contributing to the improvement of the survey software to meet the evolving needs of delivery partners across the UK**. This should include taking the opportunity to improve the survey tool as regards the demographic questions included, age appropriateness of questions, and communications around the algorithm used to flag risks; and
- **Participating in the development and finessing of a UK-specific 'fidelity' statement on Upstream**, and ensuring that any departures from the approach are fully justified.



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APPENDIX 1. ADDITIONAL DETAILS ON SURVEY DATA ANALYSIS

Creating the study data set

The original data set covering the five schools participating in Upstream Centrepoint included a total of 3485 surveys, completed between March 2023 and September 2024. However, pupils could complete multiple surveys, with some having completed up to three surveys. The first survey completed by a pupil, their 'baseline' survey, was retained, leading to a total of 2525 unique pupil baseline surveys available for analysis in this report.

Protecting pupil anonymity

Responses to some of the questions have been recategorised to reduce the chances that a pupil might be identified ('disclosed') based on a unique set of circumstances or characteristics. To further reduce disclosure risks, rounding and suppression of data are applied in this publication²⁹, specifically:

- Counts are rounded to the nearest multiple of 5
- Percentages are based on unrounded data and are themselves rounded to the nearest percentage point
- Percentages are not reported if they are fractions of a small group of young people (fewer than 22.5)
- Averages (like average wellbeing score) are not published if they are averages of a small group of young people (7 or fewer)

Testing for associations in the data

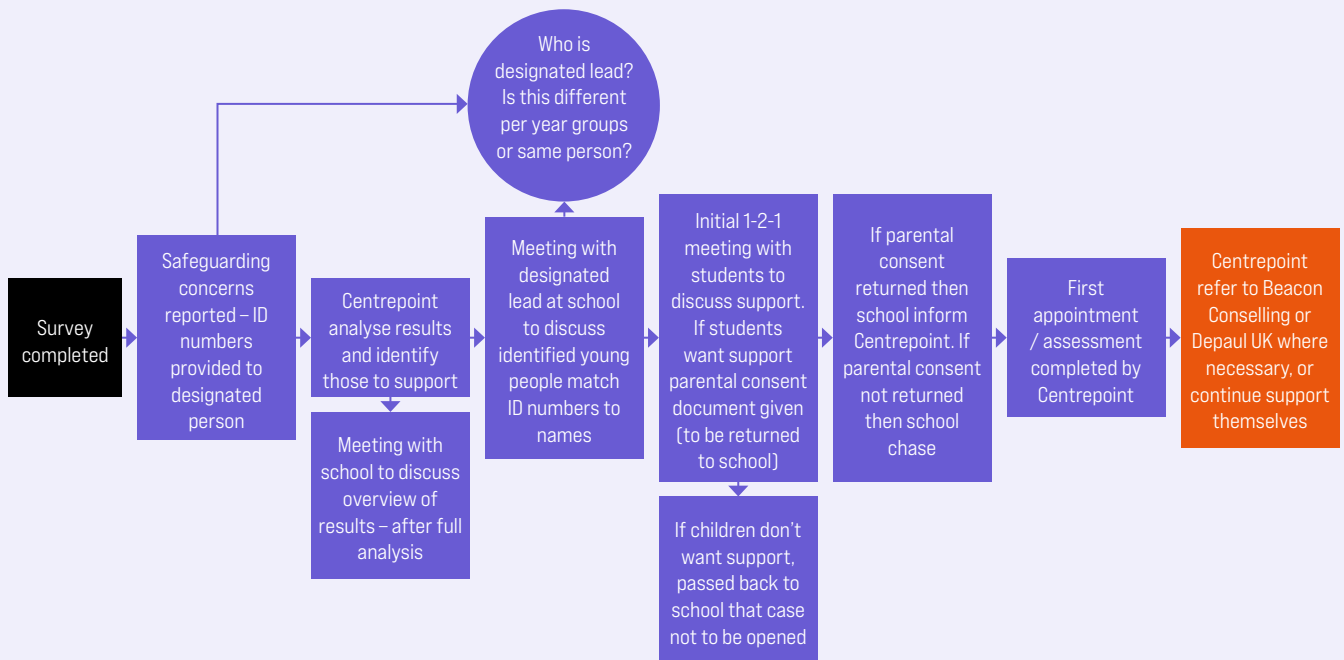
At points within the report, statistical tests are used to explore associations within the data. The name of the test being conducted is provided at the relevant point as a footnote. Probability values ('p-values' or 'p') are used to determine if the results of tests are statistically significant or not. We take p-values less than 0.05 as the cutoff for a significant association.

29. <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/about/regulation/data-protection/rounding-and-suppression-anonymise-statistics>

APPENDIX 2. FLOW DIAGRAM OF CONSENT AND DATA PROTECTION APPROACHES

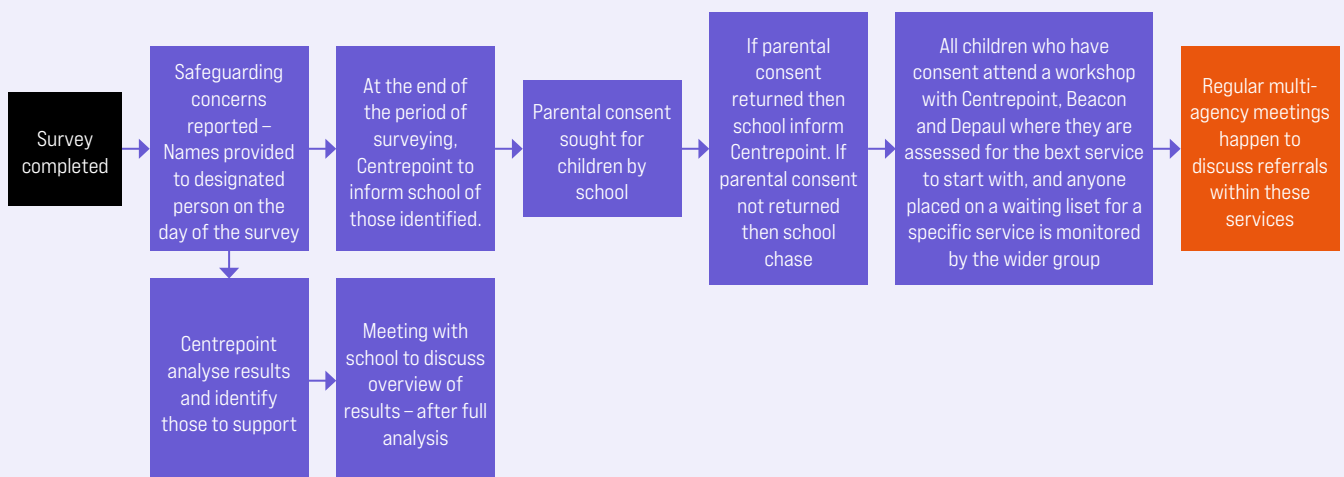
Key Information: DPIA: within this model the survey is anonymous to Centrepoint, so that data does not fit within GDPR. The school keep the list of names against ID numbers, Centrepoint only have ID numbers. The support uses parental consent legal basis.

February 2023 – September 2024



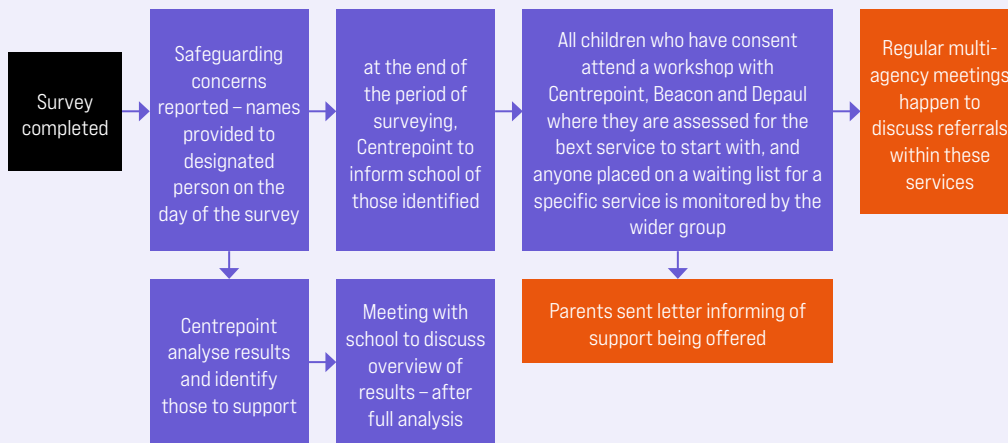
Key Information: DPIA: within this model the survey is undertaken using legitimate interest and the support is undertaken using parental consent. Centrepoint keep the data – the list of names vs ID numbers, but this is kept separate from the survey platform as an extra level of data security. Parental consent is still required for support.

February 2023 – September 2024



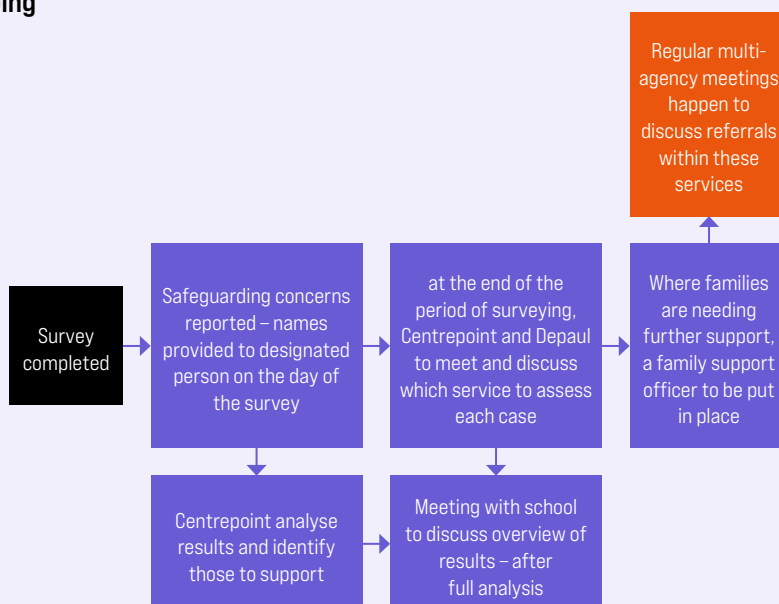
Key Information: DPIA: within this model the survey and the support are legitimate interest, meaning parental consent is not required for any of the work.

February 2024 – ongoing



Key Information: DPIA: within this model the survey and the support are legitimate interest, meaning parental consent is not required for any of the work. However, parents to be informed at each point – prior to the survey, and when people are being offered support, almost in the form of opt out consent.

September 2024 – ongoing





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