Upstream Scotland Pilot Evaluation

Interim Report

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Acknowledgements

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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. Rock Trust is leading the implementation of Upstream in the Scottish context, with Upstream Scotland being piloted in six secondary schools located across three local authority areas (Edinburgh, West Lothian and Perth and Kinross). This report captures the first year of learning in a three-year evaluation of the initiative, drawing on interviews with 11 stakeholders and analysis of the first year of Upstream surveys. The key points to emerge were as follows:

- Upstream Scotland was inspired by international collaboration and informed by learning from the existing Upstream Cymru initiative in Wales.
- Rock Trust successfully recruited a diverse range of schools to participate in the pilot, and has established, and sustained, strong positive relationships with the targeted schools, in part by demonstrating sensitivity to the pressures they face.
- Despite challenges associated with the rigidity of school timetabling, and technical difficulties with the digital platform, the Upstream survey was successfully implemented with two year groups (S3 and S4) in all six pilot schools, with few young people or parents/carers 'opting out'.
- The sensitivity of homelessness risk as a topic means that the framing of the Upstream initiative both to young people and to their parents/carers had to be handled carefully.
- The Upstream survey content was generally viewed by key stakeholders as appropriate and clear, albeit that there were concerns about pupils' comprehension of one particular question about optimism.
- Survey analysis revealed more than 1 in 10 young people were at risk of experiencing youth homelessness in the pilot schools. Nearly three-quarters of those identified as at risk of youth homelessness were engaging with school, but they did indicate lowered levels of resilience and wellbeing. There was limited evidence to suggest youth homelessness risk is higher within specific schools or age groups.
- Homelessness risks were identified using these survey results but also, crucially, drew on follow-up conversations with the young people flagged in one-to-one meetings and input from school staff in 'data analysis' meetings.
- About half of young people offered support accept it. Upstream Scotland project workers provided a broad range of emotional and practical forms of support to pupils, as well as referral or signposting to relevant local services. A fund established to purchase family mediation and other specialist forms of support has not been utilised as yet due to a perceived lack of demand.
- While it is too early to assess the impacts of Upstream Scotland on homelessness risks, key stakeholders reported some promising early indications of positive effects, such as improved student and teacher understanding of homelessness.
- Key learning from this first year of the pilot includes the importance of: considering the feasibility of a pivot to a 'whole family' approach in the Upstream Scotland 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.

Upstream Scotland set up

Rock Trust's interest in Upstream as a model arose from ongoing international collaboration, with two timely donations enabling the launch of the Upstream Scotland pilot initiative in 2023. The Rock Trust team secured buy-in from local authorities with which they had existing relationships, facilitating the successful recruitment and onboarding of six schools in total. As intended, the pilot schools encompass a mixed profile as regards school size and local levels of deprivation, and include both rural and urban locations. Identifying a key contact for the initiative in each of these pilot schools was considered essential to implementation, with responsibility usually falling to the deputy head teacher.

In planning the pilot, Rock Trust drew heavily upon learning from the existing Upstream Cymru initiative in Wales. One notable departure from the Welsh model, however, related to the staffing of the Upstream Scotland team, which did not include a family mediator, unlike Upstream Cymru. Instead, the Upstream Scotland team comprises generalist project workers and a fund which can be tapped into to purchase specialist mediation and other services, as required.

Rock Trust has established a strong, positive relationship with both the local authorities and schools involved in the pilot initiative. This can be attributed to three main factors. First, from the outset, the Rock Trust team signalled clear recognition of the existing pressures schools face and minimised additional demands upon them. Second, Upstream Scotland's core aim to identify young people who are at potential risk of homelessness and other adverse outcomes who may not be otherwise on schools' 'radars' was emphasised as a key attraction of the initiative to all partners. Third, the need to strike a balance between flexibility in responding to the feedback of local authorities and schools, for example on how the survey is framed and delivered to students, with promoting clarity as regards the Upstream model, has been skilfully handled.

Survey implementation

Implementing Upstream within a school setting proved a time-consuming process, complicated by rigid school timetabling and a full curriculum. Challenges were more pronounced in larger schools, due to the sheer number of pupils involved and resources required, including staff cover and technological devices. Issues with the digital platform added complexity to the logging in process and may have undermined some student's patience and willingness to participate.

Despite these challenges, Rock Trust staff successfully delivered the Upstream survey to two-year groups (S3 and S4) in all six pilot schools. Through a process of testing and learning from different approaches, the team found that delivering the survey during personal and social education lessons, with a guidance teacher present where possible, appeared to be optimal in providing a supportive environment for survey completion. The opt-out consent approach used

at the survey stage worked well, with few parents/carers or young people declining to complete/allow completion of the survey.

Nonetheless, it was clear that careful and sensitive handling of the homelessness dimension of the initiative was required, to avoid unnecessarily alarming young people and their parents/carers. Given that Rock Trust is well known as a youth homelessness organisation, key stakeholders noted that it was important to be upfront that Upstream Scotland is a homelessness prevention initiative. Equally, it was crucial to do so in a way which fully contextualises Upstream as a very early stage and preventative intervention.

Survey results

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 revealed that 1 in 10 young people were at risk of experiencing youth homelessness in the pilot schools, closely matching the rates in Wales and England. Youth homelessness emerged as distinct from family homelessness – only 18% of young people at elevated risk of youth homelessness were also at elevated risk of family homelessness. Relevant to further roll out of the Upstream intervention, there is limited evidence to suggest youth homelessness risk is higher within specific schools or age groups in this pilot study, though it should be noted that the surveys were largely undertaken with pupils within a narrow age range (age 14-16).

The results also offer a new understanding of the associations between youth homelessness risk and educational engagement, resilience and wellbeing. First, of the pupils categorised as high or immediate risk of youth homelessness, nearly three quarters were either considered engaged or demonstrated low levels of disengagement from school. 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 categorised as experiencing any degree of youth homelessness risk have lower levels of overall resilience and wellbeing.

Survey content and the identification of risk

Overall, the Upstream survey content was viewed by key stakeholders as appropriately focused and clear, successfully probing sensitive topics without being overly intrusive. The survey was thought to be effective in identifying young people at risk of homelessness, and as complimentary to other survey work undertaken by schools.

That said, it was reported that some young people struggled to comprehend the wellbeing question relating to optimism. Also, given that a large proportion of young people were identified as experiencing low wellbeing, there were concerns about the appropriateness of thresholds used to determine wellbeing levels.

Key informants reported a lack of transparency on the embedded algorithm that generated the RAG ratings on homelessness risks provided by the Upstream survey tool, despite this being publicly available. Nonetheless, the RAG ratings were viewed as helpful by the Upstream Scotland team, enabling them to navigate large volumes of information and prioritise accordingly.

Rock Trust's approach to utilisation of the RAG ratings and triage list was a notable strength. The Upstream Scotland project workers took these outputs as indicative of potential need but, crucially, supplemented insights with further information from the young person in one-to-one meetings, and schools in 'data analysis' meetings. However, it was noted that certain blind spots or biases that teachers can have in regard to particular pupils meant that it was important to balance any input from the schools with insights from the survey.

Offering support

Data collected by Rock Trust suggests that around half of young people offered the support accept it, and half turn it down. Key reasons for turning it down included not feeling that the support is needed, having other support in place, and things having moved on since the survey.

A premium was placed on flexibility in the support offered by Upstream Scotland project workers, with a personalised support plan developed in conversation with each child. A broad range of both practical and emotional forms of support were mentioned, but with the central focus on mentoring, delivered mainly in schools on a one-to-one basis. The open-ended nature of these interventions meant that some of the school staff seemed a bit unclear on the Rock Trust support 'offer' and would have appreciated more clarity.

As noted above, Upstream Scotland does not employ specialist family mediators, but instead has a flexible fund to purchase mediation, counselling and other specialist services if not locally available. This fund has not been called upon as yet as the need for it has not been established. On occasion specialist support such as family mediation has been offered but not taken up by the young person or their family. It is unclear how risks of family homelessness flagged by the survey can best be addressed within the current support configuration of Upstream Scotland.

Recognising some of these issues, the potential for taking a more 'whole family' approach within Upstream Scotland was floated by some Rock Trust staff. Widening out the focus from young people to encompass their families would be a strong fit with the existing evidence on the importance of family conflict as the main trigger to youth homelessness. However, it would require substantial upskilling within Rock Trust, whose expertise has not traditionally extended to conflict resolution or broader family-orientated interventions.

The time-consuming nature of contacting parents/carers to secure their 'opt in' consent for offering young people support has caused substantial delays in getting interventions underway. Active consideration is therefore being given to switching to 'legitimate interest' as the legal basis for engaging with young people – the route that has already been taken by Centrepoint in England. However, such a move would be in tension with potentially taking a more 'whole family' approach within Upstream Scotland as this would clearly have to involve explicit consent by parents/carers.

Early impacts

At this stage, it is too early to draw any substantive conclusions on the impacts of Upstream Scotland. However, both Rock Trust and school staff reported some promising early indications of positive effects of the initiative, including improved understanding and awareness of

homelessness on the part of both students and teachers in the pilot schools, reduced stigma, raised visibility of Rock Trust and other support services, and enhanced wellbeing on the part of young people assisted. The outcomes of most interest to Upstream Scotland and to this evaluation relate to reductions in youth homelessness risk, and this will be the focus of later stages of the research.

Key learning points

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

- the importance of evolving a tighter focus on addressing homelessness risks within the remainder of the pilot initiative, and clarifying the nature of the support offer;
- giving urgent consideration to whether a 'whole family' re-orientation of the Upstream Scotland support offer is feasible. If this step is taken, resources and time must be devoted to the upskilling of Rock Trust staff for whom working with whole families will be a new departure;
- 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 if a whole family approach is taken;
- emerging priorities for improving the Upstream survey platform 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 Scotland pilot, including outcome data, perspectives from young people 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 & Thomas, 2014; England *et al*, 2022).

Consistently, relationship breakdown is the main immediate cause of youth homelessness (Watts *et al*, 2015). Traditionally, homelessness prevention services provide support to individuals after they have made a homeless presentation to a local authority. Unfortunately, in many cases, this is too late and young people and their families have already reached crisis point and relationship breakdown is inevitable. Young people and their families repeatedly state that help at an earlier stage could have prevented them reaching point of crisis.

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 Scotland, this thinking has underpinned "ask and act" proposals in the current Housing (Scotland) Bill which is intended to make homelessness prevention a shared responsibility across relevant public services. This is in recognition of the fact that many of those who are at risk of homelessness come into contact with a wide range of other public services well before they present to local authority housing and homelessness services (Bramley *et al*, 2019; Reid, 2021). Similar proposals for homelessness prevention duties on wider public authorities are captured in the current White Paper on Ending Homelessness in Wales.[1]

With regards to upstream prevention of youth homelessness specifically, the Australian Geelong project 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 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, Canada[2], Belgium, and the three GB nations. In all international contexts outside of Australia, roll out is in its infancy,

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[1] https://www.gov.wales/ending-homelessness-white-paper
[2] https://homelesshub.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/COH-UPSTREAM-KELOWNA-Brief.pdf

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 young people in need of support (Mackie *et al*, 2021). 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 countries. Within the UK, a Steering 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'.

Rock Trust decided to take up the mantle of leading the implementation of Upstream in schools across Scotland after learning of the initiative via international networks, particularly FEANTSA (The International Network of National Organisations Working with the Homeless)[3]. Upstream Scotland involves a collaboration between schools, homelessness services, academia and Rock Trust as the support organisation. Upstream Scotland has been developed and is being piloted in three local authority areas (Edinburgh, West Lothian and Perth & Kinross) over a three-year period (2023-2026) to test the model in the Scottish context. Funding for Upstream Scotland was secured via a combination of three streams: Rock Trust was the beneficiary of the Balnacraig School closure when the school's trustees gifted their remaining funds to be used to prevent youth homelessness; Rock Trust also received funds from the Buchanan Friendship Foundation at the recommendation of The Brunner Family; and contributions were received from some of the selected local authorities to contribute to the running of the service.

Two secondary schools are participating in each area, so six in total are involved in the pilot. In each of these schools, (consenting) pupils in selected year groups complete a survey that identifies risk of homelessness, particularly as a result of family relationship breakdown, as well as issues of educational engagement, wellbeing and resilience, and support is then offered to the young people and their families. In the main, this support is offered by a dedicated Rock Trust Upstream Project Worker who is also responsible for delivering the universal screener in the participating schools. In addition, there is also a dedicated budget available for purchasing specialist support, such as family mediation or counselling, if required.

The overarching aim of this action research is to examine the implementation and impact of Upstream Scotland in three pilot areas. 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.

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[3] Note, however, that Aberdeen Foyer had previously introduced Upstream in a local college setting.

Research questions

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

1. What is the starting profile of risk of homelessness, educational disengagement, wellbeing, and resilience amongst young people involved in the Upstream Scotland pilot intervention?
2. How has Upstream Scotland been adapted and implemented in the three pilot local authority areas and what have been the barriers and enablers to implementation?
3. Does the support provided by Rock Trust and partners effectively mitigate young people's risk of homelessness?
    a. Did young people involved in the programme achieve positive outcomes?
    b. Were young people satisfied with the support they received?
    c. Have the young people been left better prepared to face challenges that may put them at risk of homelessness in the future?
    d. Can any patterns be discerned with regard to which subgroups of young people that, a) present at highest risk of youth homelessness and b) achieve positive outcomes following Rock Trust's intervention? (This could include factors at individual as well as institutional level).
4. What does the emerging evidence suggest about the impact of the project on levels of youth homelessness?
5. Do the project design and operational processes work well for the key stakeholders involved (including young people, parents, schools staff, and delivery partners)? What key lessons can be learned from the pilot for any potential roll-out across Scotland?

This Interim Report focuses on answering RQ1 (the starting profile of young people engaged in the pilot), RQ2 (implementation processes, barriers and enablers), aspects of RQ3 (patterns in the subgroups of young people at greatest risk of youth homelessness), and RQ5 (views on the design and operational processes from the perspective of delivery partners and school staff).

A second and Final Report (in November 2026) will reflect the findings across all five research questions. There will be a particular focus in this final report on the outcomes associated with Upstream at both individual level (RQ3) and in terms of emerging trends in levels of youth homelessness across the pilot schools (RQ4), and on overall satisfaction with the Upstream intervention amongst all stakeholders and lessons for Scotland-wide roll out (RQ5).

Methods

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

First, we undertook 11 in-depth interviews with key Upstream stakeholders, focused on project design, operational and implementation processes, and the barriers and the enablers to Upstream Scotland. The stakeholders interviewed included management and support staff at Rock Trust; a key local authority officer engaged with Upstream Scotland; and main contacts within each of the pilot schools. 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 Scotland anonymised survey data from all six pilot schools where data had been collected. The original data set covering the six schools

participating in the Rock Trust Upstream pilot included a total of 1365 surveys, completed between November 2023 and September 2024. Pupils could complete multiple surveys, with some having completed two surveys during the study period. The first survey completed by a pupil, their 'baseline' survey, was retained, leading to a total of 1330 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 years' worth 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 Rock Trust and delivery partners' interactions with young people supported to ascertain patterns in the type(s), frequency and duration of support that appears to be associated with the most positive impacts. 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 Rock Trust 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 who have been supported by Upstream, to garner qualitative feedback on the impact Rock Trust'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. Parents/guardians were informed of the Upstream project and could opt out if they did not want their child completing the survey. Young people 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 of the report explores the process of setting up Upstream Scotland in the pilot schools, before Chapter 3 moves on to consider practical matters of survey implementation. Chapter 4 presents our analysis of this first round of Upstream Scotland 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 young people and families identified by the survey as at risk, and Chapter 7 reviews 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, set up procedures, readiness for implementation, and school engagement and onboarding.

Origins

Rock Trust first heard about Upstream via their relationships with FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless. They had been informed of Upstream as a model, and the work done in Geelong, Australia, whilst attending a study session in Budapest in 2018 focusing on homelessness support for young people. Conversations were had with colleagues from Llamau, who were involved in implementing Upstream in Wales. Fortunately, Rock Trust were able to monitor developments there to better understand its implementation in a UK setting.

> *"I had first really heard about the concept because of our close relationships with FEANTSA...I'd been over at a study session in Budapest learning about another topic...and one of my Welsh colleagues...was explaining the concept of the Geelong Project and what it had achieved, and obviously your ears prick up when you hear that in terms of the headline statistics and things. From that point it was on my radar."* (Rock Trust staff)

Discussions were also had with David Mackenzie who headed the Australian project, to better understand the initiative. Rock Trust were attracted to Upstream due to its notable positive impact in reducing youth homelessness rates in Geelong, Australia, and due to its prevention focus, which aligned well with their corporate strategy. In focusing on prevention, Upstream was also viewed as potentially filling a gap in current homelessness provisioning for young people in Scotland.

> *"...[Rock Trust staff member] had conversations with [David Mackenzie] from Australia, where Upstream had originated... because as we know at the moment, all support seems to be focused around point of crisis...There's very little in the way of looking to prevent youth homelessness. So, trying to help support people to manage relationships, to be able to stay at home, or families to manage situations to be able to all stay at home and not be at risk."* (Rock Trust staff)

Further value was seen in Upstream's ability to identify young people potentially at risk of homelessness who typically are not known as vulnerable to schools.

> *"...you're getting young people that normally in my opinion would fall through the cracks ... a lot of the young people that are just getting by. So I think that's what's really good about Upstream. It's targeting young people that normally wouldn't be targeted in the school as high risk or needing support..."* (Rock Trust staff)

Rock Trust's plans to pilot Upstream were supported by two timely and generous donations. As noted in Chapter 1, Rock Trust was the beneficiary of two significant donations which were used

to establish Upstream. Further contributions were provided from some of the selected local authorities, where Upstream was piloted, towards the running of the service.

> *"Within a period of six months we got two really big donations which obviously go into unrestricted reserves...they [family] wanted to donate some money to a Scottish youth homelessness charity, or a youth charity. The second one was a school up in Perthshire...It was functioning as a group living environment that was deemed no longer needed but it was run as a charity...the last person who moved out of [school] moved into a Rock Trust* flat in Perth*, one of our supported accommodation models..."* (Rock Trust staff)

Set up

There were several key stages to setting up the pilot projects. First, Rock Trust needed to establish their internal Upstream team, hiring new members of staff, onboarding them and allocating project workers to relevant local areas. Rock Trust lent heavily on Llamau for guidance regarding team structure given theirs was already in operation.

> *"The early stages were thinking about what the staffing structure would look like, learning from what had happened down in Cardiff - so we'd relied quite heavily on our contacts in Llamau..."* (Rock Trust staff)

The Rock Trust team structure included one Service Manager of Upstream, who was responsible for overseeing the entire running of the programme, facilitating the development of Upstream, its implementation and delivery across all pilot schools. The Service Manager worked closely with the three Project Workers, allocated to the three local areas selected (see further below). This was then all overseen by the Head of Service. It is of note that this team structure differed from that of Llamau, wherein a family mediator formed a key member of the Upstream Cymru team.

> *"We identified the staffing structure. We wanted a member of staff to lead it, and as we were also investing in management capacity at that time we were able to bring in [Service Manager] to manage our [location] service, and operationally the Upstream service."* (Rock Trust staff)

While consideration had been given to recruiting family mediation workers, as per the Upstream Cymru model, it was decided that a different approach was suitable in Scotland, with the core team consisting of generalist project workers and a fund established to buy in specialist mediation and other services as required:

> *"...others [countries] - had mediators. Per region they would often have two members of staff, one mediator and one generalist...[We weren't] sure whether or not there would be that level of demand for formal mediation, so rather than...employ a mediator [we] allocated a separate budget...So on top of the [Rock Trust] staff... in I've got a £30,000 budget per year...That could be mediation sessions, but also it could be counselling or advocacy, whatever's required...that...give[s] us a more flexible approach."* (Rock Trust staff)

Second, Rock Trust identified the areas and schools in which they wanted to pilot Upstream. This required working closely with local authorities to establish the operational plans for delivering Upstream. In Scotland, the provision of education falls under the statutory duty of local authorities. Rock Trust therefore needed to liaise closely with local authorities to get Upstream up and running across schools. Notably, as Upstream is a youth homelessness prevention model

implemented in schools, it required input from both homelessness and education departments, which at times proved challenging given questions of capacity and siloed working cultures.

> *"What we tried to do was figure out who was the key contact for taking it forward, and it did look a little bit different in all three areas. We wanted a key contact in education and a key contact in housing/homelessness, and unfortunately they're busy people. Often the councils are quite siloed in their approach so there wouldn't necessarily be great existing relationships between housing and education, even though the two in our eyes should be intrinsically linked."* (Rock Trust staff)

Despite challenges in regard to different local authority teams typically not working closely with each other, Upstream presented an opportunity to bridge this gap and build new professional networks.

> *"We saw Upstream as also an opportunity to…become a little bit of a connector, break down those silos a little bit…I was able to reach out to key members of staff there who at the time were working on the RRTP, the rapid rehousing transition plans… Now, we were very lucky in [location] because they already had someone who was looking at the link between homelessness and education, so we were able to piggy on the back of that a little bit. This was a Deputy Head Teacher who'd been seconded into the housing [team]…"* (Rock Trust staff)

Having a key contact within schools who was bought into the initiative, could stay up to date with developments, and enact any actions, was fundamental.

> *"I think that's been a really important part of it, actually, building those good relationships with the schools so that we can work together."* (Rock Trust staff)

Time was required initially to find the appropriate member of staff who was best placed to assist Rock Trust. Uncertainty was expressed as to where responsibility for Upstream would best lie within a school setting. One Deputy Head Teacher remarked that they did not feel like the right key contact but lacked an obvious colleague to pass the work onto, with most staff also being limited in terms of capacity.

> *"…I'm loathed to pass it on to one of the pupil support leaders because they're just as busy…It does need somebody to coordinate…It doesn't sit that neatly in terms of areas of responsibility for PSE [personal and social education] because there isn't an express responsibility around homelessness…It's across the year groups, so for us, that's an in-house matter, it doesn't really fit that neatly with an obvious person. I think because I'm the initial contact and I was the one sort of bringing it to the departmental meeting and so on, it's kind of sat with me."* (school staff)

Despite these reservations, Deputy Head Teachers were often identified as key contacts and successfully assisted in advocating and facilitating Upstream within their schools.

> *"We had an initial meeting with either the head teacher and/or the Deputy Head Teacher, but what we found would happen is the Deputy Head Teachers are the ones taking it forward now. They're the ones that we work more closely with…"* (Rock Trust staff)

Area identification was heavily driven by the existing relationships with local authorities, leading to the following three being chosen as pilot sites: Edinburgh, West Lothian and Perth & Kinross.

> *"We did decide to use existing local authorities that we were already working in, so that made it easier to a certain extent. Edinburgh, West Lothian, and Perth [& Kinross] were all areas where we already had services and connections. It was different in each area because the relationships we had in each area were different."* (Rock Trust staff)

Within geographical areas however, identification of schools was multilayered. Two schools were selected in each of the three areas. Some local authorities steered the selection of schools, whereas, for local authorities less involved, school selection was primarily motivated by Rock Trust's existing relationships:

> *"In some areas, we had a lot of communication with the local authority, and they were quite influential and picked the schools that we went to. Whereas for [area], that didn't happen. We actually already had relationships with the schools...They [local Rock Trust team]...had direct conversations with two of the schools...and that's how we got our [area] schools for Upstream."* (Rock Trust staff)

One local authority representative reflected on their own process for selecting local schools, noting keenness to identify those that they trusted and were confident could deliver the model, which was viewed as particularly important during the pilot phase.

> *"I wanted to take it to schools where I had a bit of trust in the teams there, because I am not hands-on with the project at all. I'm really there to enable the relationship...I wanted to put it places where I'd have a bit of face and a leadership-type team to take that forward...When you run a pilot, you don't want any grit getting in the way of the actual project itself."* (local authority representative)

Local authorities differed in their approach to identifying schools, with one authority using a data-driven method to identify candidate schools.

> *"For [local authority], they took, I guess, a more data-heavy approach...they went away and did a lot of work around the areas where most young people were presenting as homeless, and trying to trace back where they might have gone to school, depending on that catchment area...that's how they came up with their schools."* (Rock Trust staff)

There were cases, such as those detailed above, where local authorities and or the Rock Trust directly approached schools and encouraged participation in the pilot. There were also examples of a more bottom-up driven process, whereby schools themselves expressed an interest in Upstream.

> *"From what I've understood, there was some cases where the interest came from them [the school]. In other cases, it was the other way around..."* (Rock Trust staff)

Irrespective of the precise approach taken to identifying schools, careful consideration was given across the board to ensuring a mix in terms of school profile. Rock Trust were keen to include a combination of rural and urban schools, across different levels of need and deprivation, along with variance in school size.

> *"We didn't just want to go to the schools that had the highest number of young people becoming homeless. We wanted a mix, so we've got some of those schools but we've also got some schools that you describe as middle-of-the-road in terms of that measure."* (Rock Trust staff)

Underscoring this was a desire to test Upstream across different settings and explore its applicability according to different local needs. This was viewed as enabling Rock Trust to understand how widely Upstream could be applied.

> *"...it would be useful to get schools that were maybe slightly different in terms of socioeconomic backgrounds...it was to allow us to get a feel for how Upstream would work across various settings, rather than just city centre schools or schools that looked like they were doing really well, or schools that didn't look like they were doing really well..."* (Rock Trust staff)

The third key stage in setting up the pilot projects was to establish the exact parameters of what was to be implemented. Consideration was given to how Upstream had thus far been implemented internationally, with Rock Trust reflecting on relevant adaptations that should be made due to the local context (discussed further in Chapter 3). Plans were then established for implementation in each school, in recognition that the precise details of delivery would vary according to the specifics of the six different school environments.

> *"The past year has been a focus on developing best practice pathways...implementing a brand new process in each of the six schools, while taking into consideration there are nuances between our schools, in terms of how they're set up, how their teaching staff are set up, the number of pupils they have."* (Rock Trust staff)

Readiness for implementation

A substantial part of preparing for implementation involved Rock Trust discussing ways of working with partners, namely schools and local authorities. In acknowledging challenges such as the extent to which school staff already felt stretched, it was possible to identify available resources and plan realistically.

> *"I think it was really important to manage expectations...We all know how hard it is to work in education and how busy they all are, particularly during term time. So, for us, it was key...during that very first meeting...to make it quite clear that the input we'd require from them is relatively minimal..."* (Rock Trust staff)

Key to preparation plans were Rock Trust meeting with schools to discuss timetabling opportunities for the survey, with a view to minimising any demands on the school.

> *"...the whole point was there wasn't a lot of pressure on the schools, that Rock Trust wanted to make it as easy for us as possible. In terms of myself being able to timetable when the kids should be there, for me is relatively straightforward. As long as I give enough notice to our staff, it is a straightforward process."* (school staff)

There was evidently a fine balance to strike between clarity in demarcating what is being implemented as part of Upstream whilst also creating space for collaboration and adapting the model to the local context and need. One example was the style and nature of pre-survey presentations to school students (discussed further in Chapter 3).

> *"...we've done some presentations, and we've had schools that haven't asked for presentations...and thought, 'If we're approaching new schools, would it be better to approach it and say, 'Here's what we can offer,' rather than 'what would you like us to do?'"* (Rock Trust staff)

Building upon discussions of operational design, another preparatory activity involved onboarding the relevant school staff who were present during survey implementation, explaining Upstream and what it involved. Some of these school staff then prepared classes in advance of the survey.

> *"...I had meetings with...the guidance teachers who would be teaching the classes where we were going to deliver all the work...got them up to speed...then it was a case of doing a little bit of pre-empting some of the classes, letting them know what was coming...so that it wasn't, 'Why are we getting this out of the blue?'"* (school staff)

One school reported challenges onboarding some internal staff. It was reported that they expressed a degree of discomfort about asking students questions about their home life off the back of targeting schools due to apparent elevated homelessness risk. This occurred even though, as noted above, the selection of schools was deliberately varied.

> *"Yes, I think there was a bit of resistance because of the stigma that's attached to the word homeless...there's a small bit of worry from my colleagues that it was basically saying that this is an area of deprivation...I guess that sort of cultural barrier in thinking of are you just taking deprived young people and asking them about their experiences of homelessness?"* (school staff)

Another element of preparedness was organising the data protection arrangements, data sharing agreements, and data management flows (discussed in more detail in Chapter 3). This involved Rock Trust meeting with local authorities and schools to ensure that plans complied with GDPR and that partners were informed and aligned with one another. Data protection was a particularly sensitive topic that generated some trepidation on the part of school staff, and so it was vital to tackle it head on from an early stage.

> *"I had maybe two or three meetings with [Rock Trust service manager] to make sure that we were doing the right thing, and we had all of our ducks in a row, if you like, in terms of letters going out at the right time, information being shared, passwords being private, GDPR, all that kind of thing..."* (school staff)

School engagement and onboarding

Rock Trust worked closely with schools to secure their buy-in, pitching the value of Upstream and the benefit it can bring to schools, all while promoting a cooperative working relationship. Upstream was viewed as a totally new initiative[4], which attracted substantial interest due to it being innovative, but simultaneously a sense of uncertainty in terms of its potential impact.

> *"I think trying to get buy-in for something that's so new and something that we're doing for the first time in Scotland is tricky. So, I'd say that was probably our biggest challenge, to be honest."* (Rock Trust staff)

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[4] Note, however, that at the time of implementation, Aberdeen Foyer were already running Upstream in a college setting in Scotland.

A key element of Rock Trust's pitch was to emphasise the ambition of Upstream as a model and its potential for addressing local need, rendering participation in the pilot a worthwhile investment.

> *"...we're the sixth-most deprived area in Scotland, so obviously we have a lot of children that would be at risk in terms of poverty, of potentially finding themselves in homeless accommodation...We know our children really well, but I think the appeal of the pilot was the fact that this is really getting to all of the children, so it means that if there was somebody that was vulnerable to that situation then nobody would be missed."* (school staff)

Moreover, although Upstream had not yet been evaluated in a UK context, Rock Trust were able to draw upon the international evidence base, albeit in its nascence, which may have alleviated reservations.

> *"...learning from elsewhere in the world. I think the whole screening idea, that's the unique thing in the model and that's what's come from abroad. From Wales, Australia, America, now Belgium, Ireland soon, England, that's where we're learning, and we're sharing that now."* (Rock Trust staff)

Schools and local authorities appeared particularly interested in the opportunity to identify students who may potentially be at risk of homelessness, but who were unlikely to be known to schools as vulnerable.

> *"it [the survey] had the opportunity to turn up some unexpected stuff. You know, middle-class families whereby there's no obvious signs of depravation or distress, it might well be there's an early warning comes out of it. That was very attractive to schools...."* (local authority representative)

As noted above, as part of these early efforts to pitch Upstream, it was crucial to emphasise that participation in the pilot would require minimal input from schools. This was in recognition that resources were limited, and staff already stretched, with little to no capacity to take on further responsibilities. Rock Trust appeared to manage these challenges successfully through working in a highly flexible manner. For example, scheduling meetings according to the availability of school staff, even if these were outside of typical working hours.

> *"The DHTs [Deputy Head Teachers] perhaps were really busy. There was a lot going on for them at that point, so trying to pin them down... some of the staff and [Rock Trust Service Manager] were having meetings at 6:00 in the morning and things because there was that much going on for the DHTs."* (Rock Trust staff)

Conclusion

Rock Trust's awareness of Upstream as a model and interest in piloting it in schools across Scotland arose from ongoing international collaboration and interest in staying up to date with recent developments in the sector and promising practice. Two timely donations enabled the organisation's ambitions to be set in motion.

Rock Trust approached piloting thoughtfully and analytically, maximising opportunities for learning, for example, using insights from the existing international evidence base and liaising with key stakeholders involved in previous implementation of the model. In particular, this phase

of scoping and development was facilitated by colleagues from Llamau leading on Upstream in Wales.

One notable departure from the model in Wales, however, was the staffing of Rock Trust's Upstream team, which did not include a family mediator, unlike Upstream Cymru. Instead, the Upstream Scotland team comprised generalist project workers and a fund which could be tapped into to purchase specialist mediation and other services, as required.

Rock Trust were effective in recruiting and onboarding six schools across Scotland. Importantly, they successfully recruited schools with a mixed profile, with variation across school size, level of need, and rural versus urban locations. This success was partly a result of liaising closely with local authorities and obtaining their buy-in.

There was evidently strong rapport between Rock Trust and partners, both local authorities and schools. Underlying this were several key ingredients. First, recognition and accommodation of the existing pressures schools face and to minimise additional demands. Second, consistently reiterating the underlying aim of Upstream to identify young people who are at potential risk of homelessness who otherwise may not be easily identified by schools. Third, striking a balance between collaboration/flexibility and promoting clarity as regards the model. This latter point was one of learning, as Rock Trust increasingly move towards a clearer sense of what Upstream is, what its implementation involves, and best practice for delivery.

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 implemented using an opt-out approach, whereby parents and carers were sent a letter informing them of the survey, alongside a privacy notice, in advance of students completing the survey. This privacy notice was revised to make clear that, for those young people flagged by the survey as in need of support, schools would share parental contact details so Rock Trust could reach out to them to seek their consent to offer their child support (see Chapter 6). This approach was modelled on Llamau's implementation of Upstream in Wales, after sharing copies of their own documentation with Rock Trust to amend to a Scottish context.

> *"They [Llamau] shared with us a lot of their paperwork which we were able to look at and adapt for a Scottish context…I was very keen that that be an opt-out because my concern was, if it was opt-in, we might miss some of the individuals who perhaps need the support the most. To take part in the initial questionnaire we did the same approach as they did with Llamau, so letters were sent home to say that children would be taking part in the screener, what the purpose was, who we were, and they could opt out if they didn't want to take part in that."* (Rock Trust staff)

Sending the letter in advance gave parents and carers reasonable time to consider their child's participation in the survey and an opportunity to discuss any element with them, the school or Rock Trust. The young person also had the choice of opting out on the day itself. Broadly speaking, participation in the survey was well received, with few opt-outs from either parents/carers or young people.

> *"This allows parents to talk about it with their children, talk about it amongst themselves, and then contact the school to say, actually, no, I would rather not, or equally, if there's any questions in regards to that, they can phone up, speak to the school. Sometimes the school will ask us to make contact with a parent if it's a little bit more intricate."* (Rock Trust staff)

The survey was undertaken anonymously, meaning that Rock Trust could only view survey results as pertaining to ID numbers (as opposed to student details). Schools matched the IDs to names ahead of the survey so they knew which young person had which ID when handing them out. Schools then matched the survey results with their master list so they knew which young people had been flagged in the survey results. Once schools had completed this exercise, the Rock Trust team met with them to discuss the results (see Chapter 5). If a young person was flagged as potentially at risk of homelessness and needing support, 'opt in' parental consent was sought before any support began, and here there were significant challenges around obtaining consent as discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

Establishing the most appropriate approach to data protection and consent is an ongoing process for Rock Trust. Interviewees emphasised that consideration needs to be given to balancing the importance of compliance with GDPR whilst ensuring young people who need support can access it easily through Upstream.

> *"The handling of data is really important, and it is really important that we safeguard and protect the reputation of the council when it comes to handling data. On the other hand, there's risk if we don't carry out the surveys, because there's risk of homelessness, so there's a balanced risk that has to be taken into account."* (local authority representative)

Introducing the survey to schools, parents, carers, and pupils

The exact operational design for implementing the survey varied from school to school, adjusting to local context and need. This included the framing of the survey to students, communication to parents and carers, and at which point in the school timetable the survey was conducted.

Rock Trust staff reflected on the importance of providing flexibility during this initial phase of implementation, as it helped to explore best practice and created space for collaboration with schools. Yet, they flagged that moving forward being more prescriptive could be beneficial.

> *"...we gave options at this point, which in hindsight we've learned was not the best idea, hence, we've changed things this year in terms of how we implement....So, for the first year, we had different ways of doing it...now we know what works better."* (Rock Trust staff)

When introducing the survey to the school community, Rock Trust worked collaboratively with schools on tailoring communications to parents and guardians which informed them of plans to distribute the survey to students at the school. The communication was shared either via email or a letter sent home.

> *"We did suggest some changes to the letter last year, which they [Rock Trust] took on board."* (school staff)

Rock Trust also delivered presentations to students in advance of them completing the survey, providing context on homelessness and introducing themselves as an organisation and provided information on Upstream. In some schools, this was initially delivered during large assemblies, but later was presented in small classroom settings directly before the survey was completed. Several participants raised questions relating to the purpose and effectiveness of these initial presentations. There were concerns the presentations were too broad in focus, not sufficiently grounding the specific model of Upstream, and instead giving a general overview of youth homelessness. As a result, Rock Trust have changed their approach to these presentations for the second year of survey implementation.

> *"The first time that we did the surveys, it was more a presentation around the theme of homelessness, but on reflection, we felt that that was possibly too much to do. Again, because we hadn't actually done the surveys... it was hard for us to put all that into context for our young people. So, this year, we've changed our presentations; a much shorter one as well...it's much more specific to, this is an overview of Upstream, this is what this is."* (Rock Trust staff)

More broadly, there were varying perspectives on whether the Upstream service should explicitly be framed to students and parents as addressing homelessness risk, or whether it would be

better to package it more broadly. There were concerns around the sensitivity of homelessness as a topic, and fears that being explicit may lead to resistance from parents/guardians.

> *"We are not saying your child is at risk of homelessness because they come to this school or live in this authority, but we want them to take part in this survey. I think the way that we framed it was quite helpful and parents did see it as a supportive mechanism rather than something that's going to end up in millions of child protection cases and parents having their kids taken off them. I think that's sometimes the worry that people can have."* (school staff)

The framing of Upstream was made more challenging by the fact that Rock Trust is a youth homelessness charity.

> *"...there is that stigma of what we're trying to do, because we've had this kind of, we don't really want to say we're a homeless charity...it's a bit awkward... a parent that might go, 'do you think my child's going to be homeless, do you think I'm a bad parent?'...we've had to try and figure a way to say this without saying it, it's quite hard."* (Rock Trust staff)

Therefore, there was a tension in terms of wanting to be transparent and acknowledging Rock Trust's association with the work, whilst also implementing a model that some viewed as sitting adjacent to homelessness given its focus on very *early* prevention.

> *"...it's early intervention, so it's tackling issues that may, at some point, lead to a risk of homelessness... We do have the understanding that this is about, for example, conflict in the house and arguments. I know that's one of the questions that the kids respond to in the questionnaire...We understand that talking to a young person or a parent about that is not the same as saying your child is going to be homeless."* (school staff)

All that said, the survey element of Upstream was notably well received with, as has been noted in Chapter 2, very little resistance among students and their families/carers.

Targeting the survey

All of the participating schools initially conducted the survey with S3 (ages 13-14) and S4 students (ages 14-15) in 2023/24. The need to track the evolving profile of students over time meant that S5 (age 15-16) were then surveyed in the second year of the Upstream initiative, in 2024/25, as well as the incoming S3 and S4 groups, drawing more young people into the remit of Upstream and potentially widening the range of needs identified.

> *"So we surveyed third year and fourth year. [Service Manager] came to me and said, 'Next year we're going to survey third year, fourth year, and fifth year,' because obviously we want to follow them through so we've got year-on-year data for the young people. I was thinking, 'What if we end up with loads of fifth years that now have needs that didn't before? We could end up with huge numbers very quickly.'"* (Rock Trust staff)

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.

Delivering the survey to students

Each student was given a username and password which they entered onto the survey platform, to complete the survey. Students chose whether they wish to complete the survey and if so, signed a consent form, which was embedded within the digital survey.

For the most part, surveys were completed by students during a personal and social education class (PSE). In some schools, students completed the survey during assemblies, but this was viewed as a less satisfactory arrangement because it was viewed as a less supportive environment than a smaller classroom setting.

> *"What we've learned is best practice is delivering it in PSE lessons. So, a 50-minute slot to deliver, coming in, doing your year groups in those slots whenever they come, and then that's that. We did originally kick off doing it in an assembly environment with hundreds of pupils, and it was just a riot. In theory, it sounds great, but even just from that presentation aspect, you're not getting that engagement with young people. They're less likely to ask questions. It's just too distracting.* (Rock Trust staff)

It was felt crucial by some schools to have a guidance teacher present during survey completion, to promote psychological safety.

> *"...the kind of model that we've...adopted...It's completed within PSE time as opposed to a mass class. It's completely with a trusted adult if you like...We felt quite strongly that you're completing something that's personal and sensitive to you...you want to be in there with someone that you trust...Although it might take slightly longer in terms of you might be talking only days or the matter of a week, but I think that gives us a nicer space."* (school staff)

This also helped to address concerns around classroom management

> *"I think the smaller groups in the PSE classes with support from the PSE teacher...was ideal. They were already in an environment that they knew entailed that kind of topic...it was helpful to have a PSE teacher there...to also help manage the class...to try and help them complete the survey in a way that felt most comfortable for them.."* (Rock Trust staff)

Key challenges to survey implementation

There were numerous challenges to survey implementation which primarily related to the practicalities of delivering a survey to a large number of students within a school setting. This stage of implementing Upstream was labour-intensive and required substantial staffing, detailed planning, and regular communication with schools

> *"...there could potentially be 30 of them at one time doing the survey, school internet, things like that, passwords not working, there's a lot that can go wrong in the surveys."* (Rock Trust staff)

Operating within the school environment, at such a scale, was a point of learning for Rock Trust, particularly as regards navigating rigid school timetabling. This learning process was helped by regular meetings with schools to better understand timetabling restrictions and identify important periods during the school calendar.

"We're learning about the academic year...We have always had some sort of schools' programme but not at this scale. I know that [Service Manager]'s taking some key learning in terms of, almost the day the teachers are back after the summer holidays, saying, 'Right, what date can we have? Can we get it done in October so we're nowhere near Christmas?' That then gives the staff the time to start working with the young people before the Christmas break." (Rock Trust staff)

Key milestones in the school calendar that required consideration included: summer holidays, post-holiday settling in period, Christmas and exams. Navigating these meant that the window for survey implementation was relatively narrow, therefore Rock Trust had to identify slots sufficiently in advance to ensure that they were able to direct efforts and resources during this period.

"We were thinking, because they went back in August, so that's giving them a few weeks to settle in, it's not going to disrupt exam periods or anything like that...September felt like quite a good time of the year to do it. We're not too close to Christmas...I think that'll work much better this year." (Rock Trust staff)

On top of this, there was a desire to conduct the survey sufficiently early in the academic year so that Rock Trust had a longer period to work with students who went on to receive support.

"Of course, doing the screeners earlier means we'll have longer to work with them before that Christmas break." (Rock Trust staff)

Numerous dates needed to be identified in order to reach all relevant students. Even with a key contact located within the school, typically the Deputy Head Teacher, this remained complicated, because they did not always have oversight of all schedules.

"So all of the children follow different timetables, so it's a case of liaising with teachers, looking at all the individual timetables for each of our children, booking an appropriate space, making sure there's IT access...all that organisational stuff has been the most time-consuming element of it." (school staff)

Implementing the survey in schools with larger pupil numbers appeared more challenging than in smaller schools. This was due partly to sheer resourcing, for example, identifying enough laptops for students to use.

"...you've got over 300 kids in S3, so an online questionnaire means 300-and-odd laptops getting found from somewhere, and other machines. They had these logistical challenges in the bigger school, which I think was probably good in terms of a pilot, because there's a bit of learning for everybody..." (local authority representative)

A key lesson for Upstream roll out is that delivery of this model will inevitably require input from schools in terms of classroom space, technology, such as iPads or laptops, and internet access.

"My understanding was that there were some logistical difficulties in some schools. So getting all young people devices, Wi-Fi in certain rooms, obviously getting young people from the classrooms to wherever you're delivering, because they've done it differently in some schools in terms of taking classes out, some delivering it in the class." (Rock Trust staff)

Some schools relied on substitute teachers in certain classes, which sometimes undermined student behaviour and created a difficult dynamic for survey completion. For these and other reasons, and as noted above, conducting the survey during PSE lessons, with a guidance teacher present, was considered the optimal approach.

A challenge across all schools was ensuring that students who were absent for the actual implementation day were given an additional opportunity to complete the survey. This was a particularly salient consideration for schools with lower attendance rates.

> *"...the attendance at the school is lower. I think we missed really large numbers because of the fact that they don't attend school often, and I think that's obviously made even worse around Christmastime...we offered to go back in and do a mop-up of smaller groups, but again, that ties back into the timetabling of schools. It was really, really tricky."* (Rock Trust staff)

Another key challenge pertained to the survey platform itself. During implementation there were technological issues whereby the platform required students to reset their passwords. This step was unknown to Rock Trust and partners, and therefore not accounted for in their plans and framing to students of the task. This resulted in a degree of disruption on survey days.

> *"...my very first school...the pupils had to change the password when they logged in to do their survey, and that caused quite a lot of upset. That was really unexpected because we didn't realise that the system that we were using was going to ask them to do that..."* (Rock Trust staff)

Rock Trust were unsuccessful in their lobbying to have this changed, so relying on the digital platform undermined Rock Trust's ability to respond to feedback from schools.

> *"...we spoke to [platform provider] and it turns out they decided to add that in. We did advocate against it...they were saying, it was for data protection, because we're holding individual data, but we were saying, but it's anonymised data...They've not budged on that, unfortunately...That was a really big challenge for us."* (Rock Trust staff)

These difficulties with the login processes could undermine the students' willingness to complete the survey as they became disengaged with the process.

> *"It took so long to actually get on to completing the survey that by the time they were starting to answer questions they were fed up, which I was like, fair enough, to be honest! ...I think as a result of that, a lot of young people either didn't do it or didn't finish it..."* (Rock Trust staff)

Rock Trust worked in an agile and pragmatic manner, creating work arounds when, for example, it was discovered that some of the IDs generated by the system didn't work.

> *"So, what we did from that moment on was make sure that each school, we add on an extra, usually about ten IDs for each year group just in case something isn't working or goes wrong, and it's quicker just to hand them a new ID and change it than try.'"* (Rock Trust staff)

Conclusion

Rock Trust successfully delivered the Upstream survey to two-year groups (S3 and S4) across six schools in three local authority areas, and are now entering their second year of implementation which will target three year groups across these schools (with the addition of S5).

This stage of Upstream is resource intensive, requiring sufficient staffing, good planning and strong communication with partners. Implementing Upstream within a school setting proved challenging given rigid timetabling and a full curriculum. Challenges were more pronounced in larger schools, due to the sheer volume of pupils and resources required, including staff cover and technology (e.g. laptops, iPads). Issues with the digital platform added complexity to the logging in process and may have undermined some student's patience and willingness to participate. A key lesson learned was that delivering Upstream during PSE lessons, with a guidance teacher present where possible, was optimal, balancing the need to efficiently reach a large number of students while providing a supportive environment within which to complete surveys.

Managing data protection issues effectively was an early priority. The opt-out approach used at the survey stage worked well, with few parents/carers or young people opting out of completing the survey (opt-in parental consent for support work was a different matter, discussed later in the report). It was acknowledged that the pre-survey presentation has been initially too wide-ranging and 'homelessness heavy', and a more focussed approach specific to the Upstream initiative thus was instituted. More generally, it was clear that careful and sensitive handling of the homelessness dimension of the initiative was required, to avoid unnecessarily alarming young people and parents. At the same time, interviewees noted that, given that Rock Trust is well known as a youth homelessness organisation, it is important to be upfront that this is homelessness prevention initiative but to do so in a way which fully contextualises Upstream as a very early stage and preventative intervention.

4. Initial findings of the student needs survey

Introduction

This chapter outlines analysis of the first Upstream surveys completed by pupils between November 2023 and September 2024. Appendix 1 provides more detail on how we created the data set prior to analysis, and the procedures used to round data presented in this section of the report. We begin by describing pupil characteristics, before moving on to explore findings relating to the different sections of the Upstream survey, including 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 categorised as being at different levels of risk. In the other sections, analysis considers the relationship between youth homelessness risk and family homelessness, school life, resilience and wellbeing.

Pupil characteristics

The baseline characteristics of pupils who responded to the Upstream survey are provided in Table 2 (n = 1330). Rates of missing data were relatively low (<11%) on key demographic characteristics, enabling monitoring of equality, diversity and inclusion of the Upstream programme in Scotland. Breakdowns by ethnicity have not been provided due to issues with the Upstream survey instrument; currently a single question asks pupils to categorise their race and ethnicity and enables pupils to select multiple options to describe themselves. Future iterations of the Upstream survey should limit pupils to selecting one category. If the survey is to be used to track change in the risk of homelessness for the same pupil over time, consideration might also be given to collecting date of birth, rather than age at date of survey, to enable age to be calculated accurately, consistently, and at fixed timepoints within an academic year, e.g., age at the start of the academic year.

Table 2. Pupil characteristics at baseline survey

	n	%
Age:		
14 years	650	55
15 years	525	44
16 years	10	<1
17 years	0	<1
Gender:		
Female	590	47
Male	650	51
Other	25	2
Sexuality:		
Heterosexual	1030	87
Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual	110	9
Other	40	3
Anonymised school identifier:		
School A	300	23
School B	100	8
School C	110	8
School D	340	25
School E	265	20
School F	215	16

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 low[5], medium[6], high[7] risk and immediate priority[8]. A breakdown of youth homelessness risk categories for the available sample (n = 1290) is presented in Figure 1. Most young people (89%[9]) were categorised as either low or medium risk, 6% of the sample were categorised as high risk of youth homelessness, and 4% were immediate priority.

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[5] Pupils are low risk if they do not meet the criteria to be classified as medium, high or immediate risk.
[6] Pupils don't agree or disagree that they feel safe at home; OR they agree that they get into lots of conflict.
[7] 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.
[8] 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.
[9] Percentage differs slightly from combined percentages in Figure 1 due to rounding of percentages.

Table 3. Reponses to questions indicating risk of youth homelessness

	n	%
Situation in which pupil usually slept in past month:		
Housed	1255	98
Sofa-surfing	20	2
Homeless	5	<1
Ever been homeless for more than one night in past year:		
No	1260	97
Yes	35	3
Feel safe where I live now:		
Strongly agree	775	60
Agree	410	32
Don't agree or disagree	75	6
Disagree	10	<1
Strongly disagree	20	2
Get into lots on conflict with parent(s)/guardian(s):		
Strongly agree	50	4
Agree	105	8
Don't agree or disagree	305	23
Disagree	525	41
Strongly disagree	305	24
Ever slept away from home due to being kicked out, running away, or not feeling safe:		
No	1240	96
Yes	50	4
Worried about having to run away or being asked to leave home:		
No	1165	90
Don't know	95	8
Yes	30	2

Figure 1. Breakdown of youth homelessness risk categories

| 81% | 9% | 6% | 4% |

■ Low ■ Medium ■ High ■ Immediate priority

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 age (band), gender, sexuality, and school, for each youth homelessness risk category are provided in Table 4. The significance of associations between risk of youth homelessness and age, gender, school and sexuality were explored—detailed outcomes of association tests are provided in Appendix 1, Table A1. Table 4 and subsequent statistical analyses exclude pupils with missing data. Due to the small sample size in some of the risk categories, 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	380 (45%)	35 (50%)	35 (62%)	20 (40%)	475 (46%)
Male	465 (54%)	35 (46%)	20 (37%)	20 (49%)	545 (52%)
Other	10 (1%)	5 (4%)	0 (2%)	5 (11%)	20 (2%)
Heterosexual	775 (90%)	65 (85%)	50 (85%)	35 (76%)	920 (89%)
Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual	65 (7%)	10 (15%)	5 (10%)	10 (18%)	90 (9%)
Other	20 (2%)	0 (0%)	5 (5%)	5 (7%)	25 (3%)
School A	210 (24%)	15 (18%)	10 (18%)	10 (20%)	240 (23%)
School B	70 (8%)	5 (9%)	0 (0%)	5 (16%)	85 (8%)
School C	65 (8%)	5 (9%)	5 (10%)	0 (2%)	80 (8%)
School D	235 (27%)	20 (27%)	15 (28%)	10 (20%)	280 (27%)
School E	170 (20%)	15 (20%)	15 (22%)	10 (22%)	210 (20%)
School F	110 (13%)	10 (16%)	15 (22%)	10 (20%)	140 (14%)
14 years old	460 (54%)	50 (66%)	30 (52%)	25 (51%)	565 (54%)
15 years old	390 (46%)	25 (34%)	30 (48%)	20 (44%)	465 (45%)
16+ years old	5 (<1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (4%)	10 (<1%)
Total (Row %)	860 (83%)	75 (7%)	60 (6%)	45 (4%)	1035 (100%)

Both gender and sexuality were found to be statistically significantly associated with youth homelessness risk category. Within the immediate risk category, 76% of pupils reported that they were heterosexual, compared to 90% 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, 11% of pupils in the immediate priority category reported that their gender was 'Other', whilst 1% reported 'Other' gender in the low-risk category. Extreme 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.

Age (band) and school attended were not significantly associated with youth homelessness risk category.
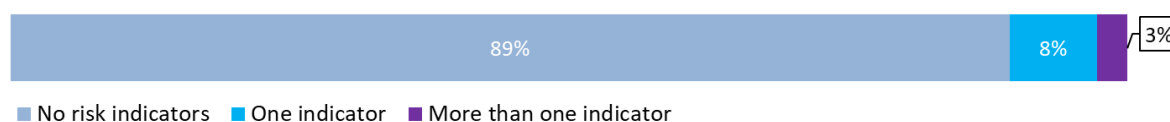
Family homelessness

Pupils were asked a series of questions related to risk factors for experiencing family homelessness (Table 5). Responses to these questions were binarised 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 (n = 1290) is presented in Figure 2. Most pupils surveyed had no indicators of risk of family homelessness (89%), 8% displayed one indicator, and 3% had more than one indicator.

Table 5. Reponses to questions indicating risk of family homelessness

	n	%
Family had trouble paying for accommodation last year:		
No	940	95
Yes	50	5
Family stayed with friends/relative due to a lack of housing:		
No	1230	95
Yes	60	5
Worried family may not have a place to live in coming year:		
No	1165	90
Don't know	105	8
Yes	25	2
Number of times pupil/family has had to move in past year:		
Not moved	1080	84
1 to 2 moves	165	13
3 or more moves	45	3

Figure 2. Breakdown of number of risk indicators for family homelessness

89%   8%   3%

■ No risk indicators   ■ One indicator   ■ More than one indicator

Overlaps between family & 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. In all, 11%[10] of pupils were categorised as being at elevated risk of youth homelessness and 3% were at elevated risk of family homelessness.

The region of overlapping circles represents pupils who were at elevated risk of both forms of homelessness. 1% of pupils were only at elevated risk for family homelessness, 9% only elevated risk for youth homelessness, and 2% at elevated risk for both youth and family homelessness. Interestingly, 18% of pupils who were flagged as elevated risk of youth homelessness, were also elevated risk for family homelessness. However, more than two thirds of pupils (69%) 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, as categorised by the Upstream screening tool, tends to also imply elevated risk of youth homelessness but not necessarily vice versa.

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

All pupils (n = 1290)

Youth homelessness (11%)

Family homelessness (3%)

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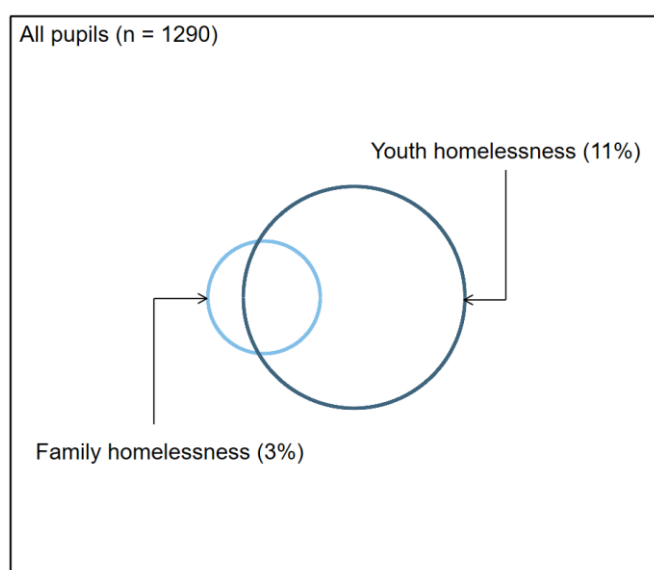
[10] Percentage differs slightly from combined percentages in Figure 1 due to rounding of percentages.

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 both cognitive, emotional, and behavioural elements—what pupils feel and think about school, and how they act in school[11]. Questions around school disengagement were primarily adapted from the Australian Upstream survey[12]. An additional question was asked relating to the extent of bullying experienced by pupils, though this was not included as an indicator of disengagement. Responses to indicators of school disengagement and the question related to experience of bullying are presented in Table 6.

Reponses to questions related to (dis)engagement from school 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 disengagement[13]. Figure 4 provides a breakdown of school disengagement categories for pupils who responded (n = 1315). Most pupils were either engaged or demonstrated low levels of disengagement (91%). 8% of pupils were categorised as moderately disengaged, whilst a small minority 1% were highly disengaged.

It is notable that more than one third of pupils reported experiencing some degree of bullying or being picked on.

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

[12] Australian Index of Adolescent Development 2017 (AIAD 2017)

[13] 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
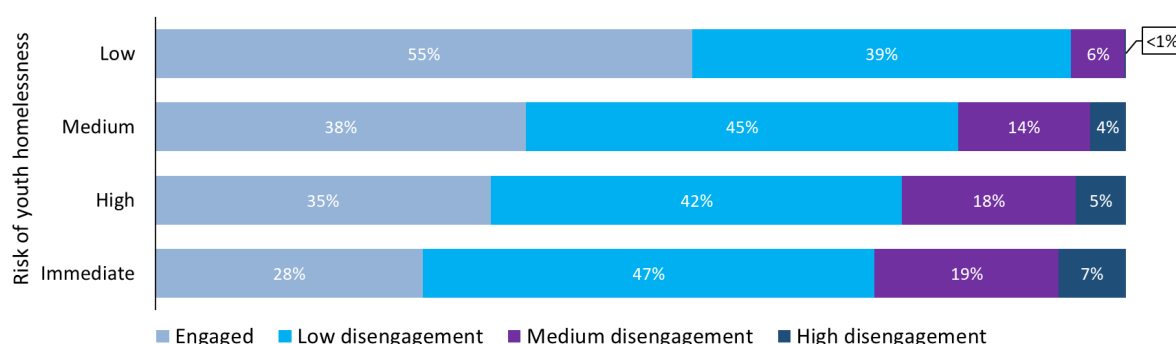
Table 6. Reponses to questions indicating (dis)engagement from school and bullying

	n	%
Enjoys going to school every day:		
Strongly agree	75	6
Agree	410	31
Don't agree or disagree	475	36
Disagree	215	16
Strongly disagree	145	11
Gets along well with most of their teachers:		
Strongly agree	120	9
Agree	730	56
Don't agree or disagree	335	26
Disagree	90	7
Strongly disagree	35	3
Would leave school if they were able to get a job:		
Strongly agree	140	11
Agree	205	15
Don't agree or disagree	285	21
Disagree	480	37
Strongly disagree	210	16
Regularly skip school:		
Strongly agree	25	2
Agree	65	5
Don't agree or disagree	140	11
Disagree	330	25
Strongly disagree	755	57
Get into a lot of trouble in school:		
Strongly agree	20	2
Agree	75	6
Don't agree or disagree	235	18
Disagree	500	38
Strongly disagree	485	37
Been excluded or suspended from school:		
No	1220	93
Yes	95	7
Frequency of being bullied or picked on by other students:		
Never	655	62
1-2 times in the past year	185	18
1-2 times per month	70	7
1-2 times per week	60	6
Almost every day	85	8

Figure 4. Breakdown of categorisation of school disengagement measure

51%	40%	8%	1%

■ Engaged ■ Low disengagement ■ Moderate disengagement ■ High disengagement

The relationship between school (dis)engagement & youth homelessness

Figure 5 provides a breakdown of school disengagement for each of the youth homelessness risk categories (n = 1290). 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. An important finding is that of pupils categorised as immediate priority for youth homelessness intervention, 74%[14] were either categorised as engaged or demonstrating low disengagement from school. Similarly, of pupils identified as high risk of youth homelessness, 77% were either engaged or demonstrating low disengagement from school. 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 schools using traditional measures.

Figure 5. Disengagement from school by risk of homelessness categories

Risk of youth homelessness

	Engaged	Low disengagement	Medium disengagement	High disengagement
Low	55%	39%	6%	<1%
Medium	38%	45%	14%	4%
High	35%	42%	18%	5%
Immediate	28%	47%	19%	7%

■ Engaged ■ Low disengagement ■ Medium disengagement ■ High disengagement

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[14] Percentage differs slightly from combined percentages in Figure 5 due to rounding of percentages.

Resilience

Resilience is the ability to meet challenges and cope with adverse situations[15]. Pupils were asked to rate a series of twelve statements related to resilience originating from a validated measure, the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM)[16]. 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. High resilience may have a protective effect in preventing youth homelessness or reducing some of the negative impacts of homelessness if it occurs. Support provided by Upstream Scotland may help to boost resilience by increasing resources available to young people; measuring resilience is therefore potentially an important element in determining the impact of Upstream Scotland. Table 7 provides the breakdown of ratings for the twelve CYRM statements. Table 7 also includes responses to an additional statement related to whether young people felt they had an adult in their lives who they trusted and could talk to about problems. This additional statement does not form part of later calculations of overall resilience as it has not been validated for use within the CYRM.

Table 7. Ratings for CYRM resilience statements and additional statement related to a trusted adult

	n	%
I have people I look up to:		
Yes	860	69
Sometimes	285	23
No	95	8
Getting an education is important to me:		
Yes	940	76
Sometimes	250	20
No	45	4
My parents/caregiver(s) know a lot about me:		
Yes	890	72
Sometimes	270	22
No	75	6
I try to finish activities that I start:		
Yes	630	51
Sometimes	520	42
No	85	7
When things don't go my way, I can fix it without hurting myself/others:		
Yes	710	57

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[15] https://phw.nhs.wales/files/research/resilience/resilience-understanding-the-interdependence-between-individuals-and-communities/

[16] 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.

Sometimes	405	33
No	120	10

I know where to go to get help:

Yes	805	65
Sometimes	320	26
No	115	9

I feel that I belong at my school:

Yes	630	51
Sometimes	460	37
No	145	12

My family/caregiver(s) stand by me when times are hard:

Yes	960	78
Sometimes	230	19
No	45	4

My friends stand by me when times are hard:

Yes	815	66
Sometimes	350	28
No	75	6

I am treated fairly:

Yes	795	64
Sometimes	395	32
No	45	4

I have chances to learn things that will be useful when I am older:

Yes	1010	82
Sometimes	200	16
No	25	2

I like the way my community celebrates things:

Yes	810	65
Sometimes	345	28
No	80	7

There is an adult in my life who I can trust/talk to about problems[17]:

|		
Yes	960	78
Sometimes	195	16
No	85	7

[17] Additional statement, not part of CYRM

Overall resilience

Ratings of the twelve CYRM resilience statements were given a numerical value or score[18]. Overall resilience was calculated by summing scores across statements. Higher overall scores indicate greater resilience. By using the twelve validated CYRM statements in generating the overall score, findings in this report can be compared to other studies using the CYRM. Only pupils who responded to all twelve CYRM statements and were assigned a youth homeless risk category were included in the following analysis (n = 1235).

Figure 6 represents the distribution of overall resilience scores for pupils. The mean resilience score was 31.2 points. The minimum possible resilience score was 12-points and the maximum possible score was 36.

Figure 6. Distribution of overall resilience scores, bars of width 2-points
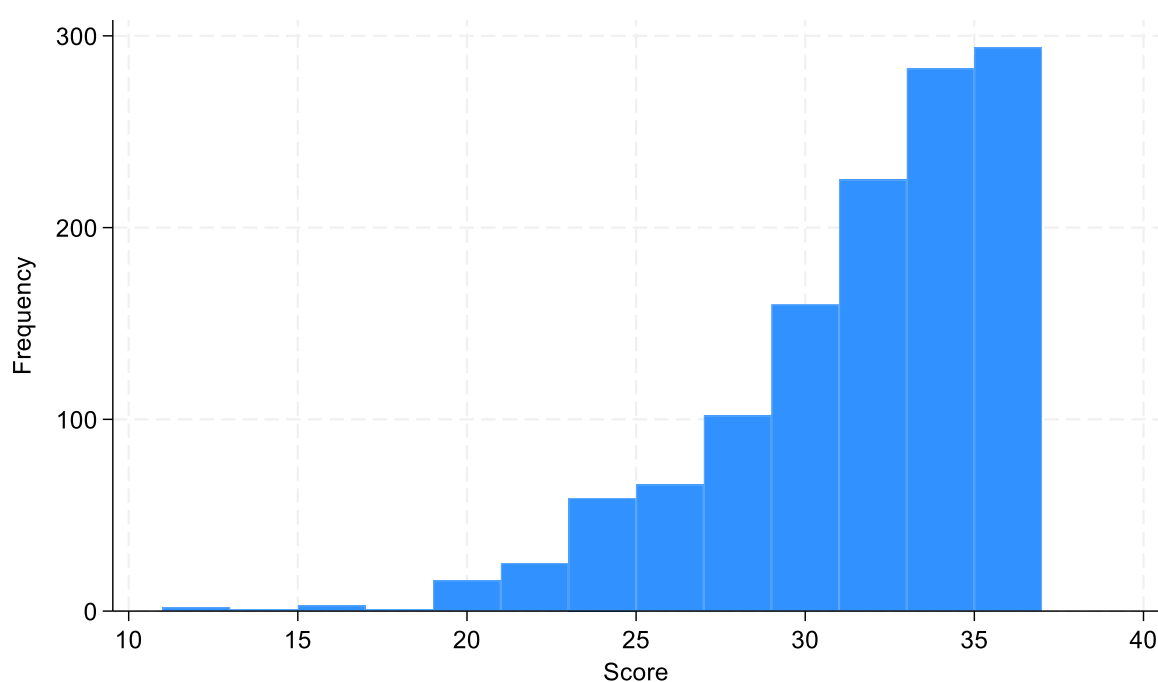
The relationship between resilience & youth homelessness

To explore whether resilience varied by risk of youth homelessness, we compared mean resilience scores for the youth homelessness risk categories. The mean resilience scores for those at high, medium, and low risk of youth homelessness were 27.6, 28.4, and 32.0 points, respectively. Pupils in the immediate priority category had a mean resilience score of 27.4 points. Analysis to compare resilience scores across youth homelessness risk categories found that there was a statistically significant difference. More detailed analysis (See Appendix 1, Table A1) found that the mean resilience score for the low-risk category was statistically significantly different to all other categories. However, there were no other significant differences between the remaining youth homelessness categories. This is an important finding: pupils experiencing any degree of youth homelessness risk had lower levels of resilience.

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[18] Yes = 3, Sometimes = 2; No = 1

Wellbeing

Pupils were asked to rate seven statements about their mental wellbeing. By mental wellbeing we mean feeling good and functioning well[19]. The statements were drawn from the Shortened Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS)[20]. 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	135	11
Often	390	31
Some of the time	475	38
Rarely	180	14
None of the time	85	7
I've been feeling useful:		
All of the time	115	9
Often	420	33
Some of the time	470	37
Rarely	185	15
None of the time	70	6
I've been feeling relaxed:		
All of the time	150	12
Often	435	34
Some of the time	390	31
Rarely	235	19
None of the time	55	4
I've been dealing with problems well:		
All of the time	155	12
Often	450	36
Some of the time	430	34
Rarely	165	13
None of the time	70	5
I've been thinking clearly:		
All of the time	170	13
Often	460	36
Some of the time	425	34
Rarely	175	14
None of the time	40	3
I've been feeling close to other people:		
All of the time	255	20

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[19] https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/research/framework

[20] © University of Warwick, 2006. S(WEMWBS) was developed by the Universities of Warwick, Edinburgh and Leeds in conjunction with NHS Health Scotland.
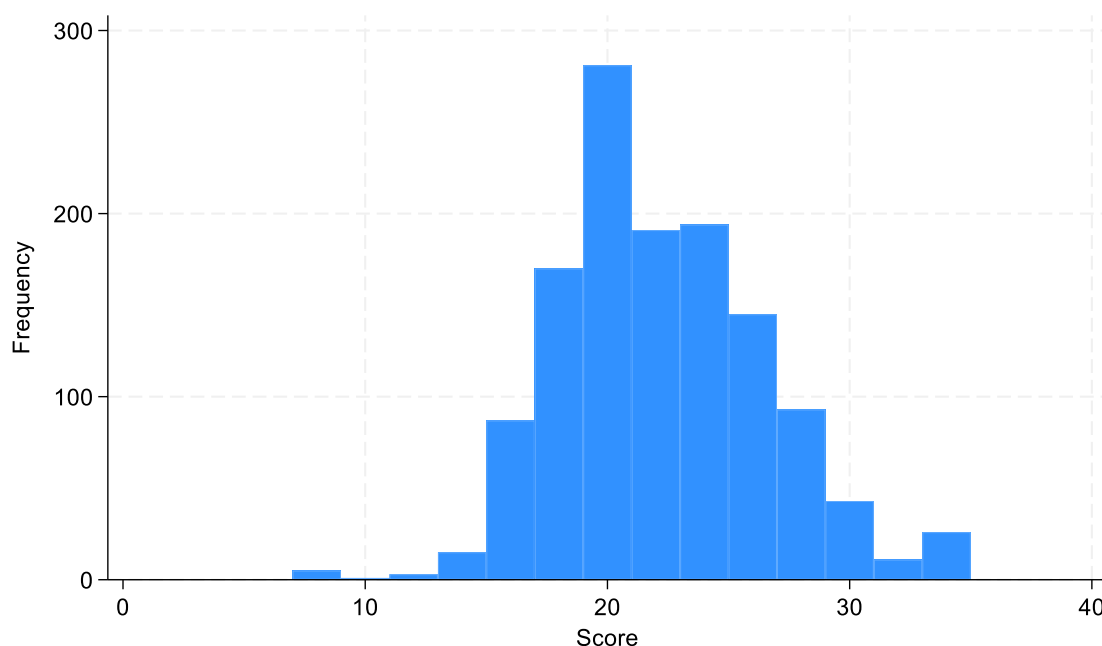
Often	535	42
Some of the time	325	26
Rarely	120	10
None of the time	30	2
I've been able to make up my own mind about things:		
All of the time	315	25
Often	535	42
Some of the time	300	24
Rarely	85	7
None of the time	30	2

Overall wellbeing

As with the resilience measure, a pupil's overall wellbeing was calculated by assigning point scores to responses to each statement[21] 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 guidance[22]. Only pupils who responded to all seven SWEMWBS wellbeing statements and were assigned a youth homeless risk category were included in the following analysis (n = 1,265). Figure 7 represents the distribution of overall metric wellbeing scores for pupils. The mean wellbeing score for pupils in the study was 22.1 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 points (Page *et al*, 2023).

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[21] All of the time = 5; Often = 4; Some of the time = 3; Rarely = 2; Never = 1
[22] https://www.corc.uk.net/outcome-experience-measures/short-warwick-edinburgh-mental-wellbeing-scale-swemwbs/

Figure 7. Distribution of overall wellbeing scores, bars of width 2-points

The relationship between wellbeing & youth homelessness

The mean wellbeing score for those at immediate risk of youth homelessness was 19.7 points. The mean wellbeing scores for those at high, medium, and low risk of youth homelessness were 19.5, 19.9, and 22.7 points, respectively. Analysis to compare differences in wellbeing scores across youth homelessness risk categories found that there was a statistically significant difference. Further tests found that the wellbeing scores for the low risk of youth homelessness category differed significantly from all other risk categories (See Appendix 1, Table A1 for results). Echoing the finding from the resilience analysis: pupils experiencing any degree of youth homelessness risk had lower levels of wellbeing.

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 categories employed in the Upstream survey) to be explored within Scotland for the first time. Interestingly, the rate of one in ten young people being at high-immediate risk of youth homelessness that has emerged from the Rock Trust pilot, closely matches findings from Upstream Cymru in Wales and Upstream in England.

Youth homelessness emerged as relatively distinct from family homelessness – only 18% of young people at elevated risk of youth homelessness were also at elevated risk of family homelessness. Additionally, the results show that there is some level of association between youth homelessness risk, gender, and sexuality – albeit the small sample size for certain populations means extreme caution must be taken in generalising to the wider student population. Further detailed analysis controlling for multiple characteristics simultaneously, would be needed to conclusively state that either gender or sexuality were independently associated with belonging to 'higher-risk' categories. Importantly for the Upstream intervention, there is limited evidence to suggest youth homelessness risk is higher within specific schools or

age groups in this pilot study, though we recognise that the surveys were largely undertaken with pupils within a narrow age range.

The results also offer a new understanding of the associations between youth homelessness risk and engagement with school, pupils' resilience and their wellbeing. Two key insights emerge. First, and most importantly, of the pupils categorised as high or immediate risk of youth homelessness, nearly three quarters were either considered engaged or demonstrated low levels of disengagement from school (based on the measure of disengagement used by the Upstream survey tool). Therefore, Upstream is delivering on its intent to help identify young people who may not be picked up by schools using traditional measures. Second, pupils categorised as experiencing any degree of youth homelessness risk have lower levels of overall resilience and wellbeing.

5.Survey content, analysis and the identification of risk

Introduction

This chapter turns to consider the survey content, as well as 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, focus and mode

Broadly speaking, the survey appeared well regarded among key informants. The questions were viewed as informative, appropriately focused and generally clear.

"Yes, it's worked really well. I think it's all accessible, and clear, and the children understand it, so I think that element of it has worked fine." (school staff)

There was a sense that the survey successfully probed sensitive topics without doing so intrusively. This is important to emphasise as some schools expressed concern during the set-up phase, in advance of seeing the survey, as to the tone of the survey, given its focus on a sensitive topic area. It is also important with regards to students' willingness to answer questions honestly.

"I think that the survey gets the information that we need without being too invasive. Although it asks quite direct questions, they're not particularly confronting. So, I don't think as a young person, you wouldn't be worried about answering those questions. You would just answer it." (Rock Trust staff)

Informants felt that the survey content aligned well with the underlying narrative of the programme, namely identifying young people who may be at risk of homelessness who typically may not be known to schools as being at risk.

"I think the survey does ask the right questions in the right way. It's actually quite smart how it does it...they're [surveys] really good for getting the young people involved that need that support that normally wouldn't be targeted from the school..." (Rock Trust staff)

It was also felt that the length of the survey was suitable, using existing school-based surveys as a point of comparison.

"...the length of it seems okay. It doesn't take them particularly long. It's good that it's multiple choice questions, so they're not being expected to put down long answers as well." (Rock Trust staff)

Especially in light of the fact that students are already asked to complete several school-based surveys, avoiding survey fatigue is important in maintaining interest in Upstream.

"We were also really mindful that young people were asked for their views and their opinions a lot. They're quite often asked to complete these big, long surveys from lots of

different organisations, so we were quite pleased to see that there wasn't too much in the way of questions and they were worded quite fairly, so easy to understand." (school staff)

The fact that students were able to complete the survey online for example, using iPads or mobile phones was viewed positively and said to promote accessibility.

"...they're quite happy to fill it in as long as they can do it on their phones. That's really important for them...it's quite accessible on their phones, so that's a bonus..." (school staff)

In terms of a high-level overview, there appeared to be few substantive issues in terms of understanding.

"Sometimes we'll get surveys to do and the kids won't understand the questions and things. We didn't have that, to my knowledge, there wasn't anything that the kids fed back that they didn't understand." (school staff)

However, there were some helpful reflections on the degree to which students may have understood particular survey items, and consequently their ability to meaningfully engage with the content.

"There was a couple of questions that we got asking to clarify, what did resilience mean, and things like that... That's [survey wording] not really within Rock Trust's control...but those are all good things to feedback in the wider Upstream forums..." (Rock Trust staff)

In particular, the item pertaining to optimism raised challenges across schools. Students were often not familiar with the term and did not fully understand its conceptual meaning.

"...there was a question about feeling optimistic about the future, and I think we all found across the board that a lot of young people were asking what optimistic meant.." (Rock Trust 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, Do-IT Profiler, that weights certain item responses and generates a traffic light rating, referred to as a RAG rating (red, amber and green). From this output, Rock Trust specifically focused on three domains: youth homelessness risk, family homelessness risk, and conflict at home.

" We specifically look at youth homelessness, family homelessness and conflict at home, because we know relationship breakdown is one of the main causes of youth homelessness." (Rock Trust staff)

The generation of a RAG rating was considered helpful by some of the Upstream team, as it enabled them to digest the large volume of information created as output from surveys and therefore identify students who may need support. Being able to also navigate back and forth between overall RAG ratings and specific item answers enabled the team to better understand the RAG rating and more comprehensively understand the areas of risk for the young person.

"...it's quite helpful because then you can go through each individual question, see how they've answered each question, and then go, 'All right, okay, now I can see how they've got that overall rating.'" (Rock Trust staff)

The RAG ratings from the three categories - youth homelessness risk, family homelessness risk and conflict at home - were then aggregated to build a triage list whereby young people were ordered as regards their overall risk score. A triage approach enabled the team to prioritise young people who appeared to have higher levels of need and potentially require greater or more imminent support. It also enabled the team to manage their caseloads, working within their capacity.

"...the way they [school] do triage with us is really good, because you're meeting the highest needs first, and then getting to know them, and then you can work your way down ...start to build your caseload." (Rock Trust staff)

Another step within the process of analysing survey results was identifying any young people where there may be safeguarding concerns. 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. Rock Trust raised any safeguarding concerns with school staff before leaving the site.

"...one of the questions in the survey is, 'Do you feel safe where you live now? Do you feel safe at home?' If any young person says no, before we leave the building, we're telling the school, 'User XYZ has said they don't feel safe at home,' so they can immediately follow that up, because that's a safeguarding concern as well." (Rock Trust staff)

The RAG rating and triage list were supplemented by follow-up conversations with both the school (detailed in the subsection below) and young person flagged as potentially at risk (the latter only after parental consent was obtained). These conversations were conducted to better understand their survey responses and to have the opportunity to sense check, clarify any errors and probe areas for further clarity.

"it [meeting] gives you that opportunity to find out whether they were messing about with the answers, or they weren't listening, or it was at the time, but things have changed, or yes, that's exactly how it is, and that's how things are now." (Rock Trust staff)

Moreover, not all students who flagged as at risk on the survey wanted support through Upstream (see Chapter 6), so these follow up conversations also served to find out whether support would be welcomed.

"The survey's great as a tool to see who to target, but until we... meet that young person face to face, we don't know. You might meet some that are like, oh no, they're totally fine...Then you meet some that you're like, oh yes, definitely, you need support, and let's get this up and running for you." (Rock Trust staff)

Rock Trust used their triage list as indicative, recognising they needed more in-depth knowledge to fully understand a young person's situation, and that there may have been more to someone's situation than their aggregated score suggested.

"...you want to make sure that you're supporting the ones that are higher need, but also the ones that are at the bottom of your triage list, there might be more to the story than what meets the eye as well...I think you have to be open-minded and look at a survey different ways than just simple, is it red, right okay they're supported. You have to use your own professional judgement on that. (Rock Trust staff)

Rock Trust seemed keen to speak to any young person who may have been flagged via the survey as having a homelessness risk, even at a relatively low level. On the other hand, several Rock Trust staff had reservations regarding the threshold potentially being too low for those sections of the survey pertaining to wellbeing and mental health. Very negative findings on wellbeing and mental health have been reported from various Upstream projects across England, Wales and Scotland. This raises questions as to the accuracy of the instrument and the thresholds being applied.

"I do have a concern about the mental health and well-being one. When that came through we went [gasp] because it was so high, but then we're seeing it high across all the schools in all the areas and down in Wales... and England actually as well... it makes you think. Are we measuring it correctly? Do we need to change the bar a little bit there?" (Rock Trust staff)

This discussion relates to a broader point around the perceived opaqueness of the algorithm embedded in the online platform. Even though the weighting used is publicly available, key informants expressed some uncertainty in terms of how the RAG ratings were generated.

"Obviously, I'm not entirely sure how the weighting is worked out." (Rock Trust staff)

Lastly, as part of survey analysis, Rock Trust provided schools with data on other non-homeless outcomes which the survey captures, for example mental health and bullying. This was viewed as a helpful additional benefit to the schools.

"I suppose for us we would always take it back to homelessness...but I think the beauty of the questionnaire...is that it can be used to also feed data into other systems...If we found, for instance, that one school had low mental health and well-being rates of 70 per cent and every other school was 10 per cent then we would be saying to that school, 'Listen, something's going on here. We're not necessarily the best organisation to be providing loads and loads of mental health support in the school, but maybe this organisation can,' and we would work together." (Rock Trust staff)

The role played by schools in decisions to offer support

As Rock Trust attempted to build a comprehensive and holistic picture of the young person and their needs, schools played a crucial role in supplementing the triage list with further information. A forum, referred to as the data analysis meeting, was established to discuss the triage list with schools. These meetings typically included a Rock Trust project worker, Rock Trust service manager and school staff responsible for students' pastoral care such as the Deputy Head Teacher, principal teacher of guidance and/or principal teacher of support for learning.

"...sometimes the school say, 'Actually, I think I would be contacting the parent of this one over this one because of this.' Or, 'this young person has already got a lot of involvement with social work. Now is maybe not the time, so let's move them further down

the list,' or whatever...That's then agreed in collaboration with the school, because they hold a lot of information that we don't have." (Rock Trust staff)

As school staff knew students well, they were often aware whether a young person was already receiving support. This was relevant as some schools were of the view that receiving support on top of existing support may at times, be overwhelming and counterproductive.

"...if there's children that have loads and loads of support around them, some of our children might have 14 agencies working with them, then I'd say to [Rock Trust] it'd be better to use the resource for somebody who didn't have anybody or very much. So we would go through that and try and balance it." (school staff)

It was notable that there was variance across schools as regards the degree to which they influenced decisions regarding which students received support through Upstream.

"...with one of my schools, they had a bit more of a say. We gave them the list and they said, we think you should offer support to these people. It was more like a referral process where they were like, this person yes, this person no. With the other school, which came after, we put together that list and then ran it by the school to check if they agreed that it looked okay to them. Or if there was a young person that they were aware of that had fallen slightly lower in the triage but they felt would benefit from support sooner. Or there were certain people they told us not to contact because it wasn't appropriate at this time to be getting in touch with parents." (Rock Trust staff)

It was acknowledged that schools may have blind spots regarding student needs, or preformed views of students which may not always be constructive:

"I could make the same assumptions I've always made and therefore that young person never gets the help or the intervention that they maybe need...if we're saying that schools, in general, are missing young people who are at risk, how do we know that I'm then not just supplying them with the answers that I've always given or the assumptions that I've always made?" (school staff)

Rock Trust have therefore revised elements of the data analysis meetings to minimise opportunities for such biases to affect judgements.

"We now shape things very differently when we're having discussions with the school ahead of the data meeting...we really highlight that there's likely young people on this list that you're not expecting to see...the fact that they're flagging and they're not on your radar shows that Upstream actually works." (Rock Trust staff)

At the same time, Upstream seemed well integrated into the broader workings of the school. This appeared to work symbiotically in that schools could refer students into Upstream as additional suggestions, but school staff may also make note of students who were identified through Upstream but who did not wish to take up that support.

"I would say the number of young people that Upstream then worked with was probably lower than I thought it was going to be, and that was partly to do with parents not wanting to engage, or young people not wanting to engage. On the flipside of that, it then put them

on our radar...So if they didn't engage with staff from Rock Trust, they were additional to our radar, to support." (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.

"It's been really positive, I think engagement's really good, communication's clear. So far from the first round everything's worked really well, we've managed to hit most of the young people that we're wanting to target in terms of investigation of their circumstances and [whether they are] appropriate for support." (school staff)

Some school staff stressed that they anticipated many of the names identified through the Upstream survey, which they interpreted as confirmation that students had meaningfully engaged with it.

"I think we know our young people really well, so I think when the names came up in the survey of those that were identifying as potentially being at risk, I don't think there was any surprises in terms of who came up." (school staff)

On the other hand, several school staff expressed surprise at some of the young people flagged, which suggests the survey was effectively picking up cases of hidden risk. These were young people not flagged through other school surveys and, given the absence of traditional measures, such as disruptive classroom behaviour or poor attendance, they were unlikely to be picked up as vulnerable by the school.

"There was a few young people who surprised us because through our survey they didn't come up as a flag, but through the Upstream survey, they did. So for us, that was quite beneficial..." (school staff)

The survey was therefore seen as complementary to the work already done by schools, providing an additional layer of safety to prevent young people falling through the cracks of existing assessments and provisions.

Conclusion

Overall, the Upstream survey content was viewed positively by key stakeholders as informative, appropriately focused and generally clear. It was broadly felt that the survey successfully probed sensitive topics without doing so intrusively and that its length was suitable. That said, there were some concerns regarding young peoples' comprehension (or lack thereof) of certain items, particularly the question relating to optimism. Also, the very negative findings on mental health and wellbeing raised questions as regards the appropriateness of these aspects of the instrument.

The analysis of survey data seemed to run successfully. Rock Trust had a clear focus on three domains: youth homelessness risk, family homelessness risk, and conflict at home. Identification of risk involved multiple layers of input to build a more comprehensive picture of young people's situations and needs. RAG ratings were reported as helpful, allowing the Upstream team to navigate large volumes of information and prioritise those who may require

greater or more imminent support, albeit that a lack of clarity regarding the algorithm which underpinned the RAG ratings was identified.

Rock Trust's approach to the RAG ratings and triage list was a notable strength. They utilised these outputs as indicative of potential need but, crucially, supplemented insights with further information from the young person in one-to-one meetings, and schools in 'data analysis' meetings where Rock Trust and school staff discussed the survey outputs in detail. These meetings were highly beneficial, although it was noted that certain blind spots or biases in teachers' understanding of students meant that it was important to balance schools' input with insights from the survey.

The survey was viewed as successful in identifying young people at risk of homelessness, and viewed as complimentary to other survey work undertaken by schools. While some school staff stressed that most of the names flagged were already known to them, confirming the accuracy of the instrument, others acknowledged being surprised by some of those found to be at high risk. This indicated that Upstream was identifying hidden cases of potential homelessness and other risks among students who were not known by schools due to a lack of presenting distress or disruptive behaviour.

6.Offering support

Introduction

This chapter reflects on the reception of both parents/carers and young people to offers of support, on the types and nature of support offered, and the evolution in this, and the role of multiagency working. It also offers some key informant reflections on the timing and other practical challenges of offering support.

Reception to offers of support by parents/carers

As described in Chapter 3, parents were given an 'opt out' option as regards their children participating in the Upstream survey. For those children flagged as requiring support, however, explicit 'opt in' parental support was required.

> "*So this is the bit that we've had a bit of trouble with. That initial bit, there's no issue with them opting out of the taking part in the survey. It's the next bit [offering support] that has proven difficult, because at the moment we're still saying explicit consent from the parents*." (Rock Trust staff)

In five out of the six pilot schools the parental contact details were shared with Rock Trust for those young people flagged as in need of support after the data analysis meeting, as permitted by the privacy notice incorporated into the initial opt-out letter sent to parents prior to the survey (see Chapter 3). In one school, however, parents had to respond positively to an initial letter from the school before Rock Trust staff were permitted to access their details to reach out to them:

> "*So, what was agreed at that point was that the school staff would send out the letter and everything to the parents...let them know it's available, and then if parents came back and said they wanted it, they would then email us the information to contact the parent. We've had no referrals...from that particular school.*" (Rock Trust staff)

This 'one step removed' pitching of the service was clearly highly problematic for Upstream's implementation.

> "*...that's been challenging because...[t]hey're not experts in youth homelessness and providing one-to-one support in that setting.*" (Rock Trust staff)

It is therefore unsurprising that no referrals were forthcoming from this school and thus no support could be offered to the young people flagged.

In the five other schools, Rock Trust had access to parents' details and could contact them directly. But even here there were considerable challenges in securing parental consent, slowing down the offer of support. Few parents outright refused the support, with the issue more often simply being difficulties in reaching them.

> "*There were some families that [were] quite challenging to contact. We weren't getting responses. At that point, you're thinking, well, if the young person has identified a potential need, and we are unable to get consent from parents, we weren't able to then make contact with the young person. So, that was quite frustrating at times, because you don't know at that point if there is something.*" (Rock Trust staff)

That said, there was evidence of a level of concern, hesitation or resistance on the part of some parents. These anxieties sometimes centred on whether Upstream was a statutory and, specifically, a social work intervention, but direct contact with parents could usually put their minds at ease on this point.

> "...we've found once we've got the chance to speak to them and explain, we're a charity...there's always this fear...are we a statutory body basically...We don't talk about social work, that's not mentioned, but I think maybe they [parent] just weren't sure if there was something a little bit underhand, but actually then getting the chance to speak to mum, we were able to put her mind at ease ..." (Rock Trust staff)

Equally, however, and as discussed in Chapter 3, Rock Trust staff were sensitive to the fact that being a homelessness charity may in itself generate anxiety, given the associated stigma and suggestion of potential future harm. Project workers reported being upfront that they worked for Rock Trust, while at the same time contextualising this by laying emphasis on the early stage and preventative nature of their work for Upstream.

> "I try to be fairly general about it...at the same time, you want to make sure you're giving the correct information, you want to get informed consent, you want to make sure that people understand who you are...the first thing you see with Rock Trust is it's a homelessness charity. So, I really try to get across that message of, we're not saying that the young person is at risk of homelessness as such, we're just recognising that there could be some support needs there to help, and it very much is prevention support that we're offering, that early intervention." (Rock Trust staff)

Striking the right tone in any prior written communications to parents was just as important, and more challenging to achieve, than being sensitive when speaking directly to parents. Some problems were reported with regards to parents' reactions to the email sent out before project workers tried to reach them by phone.

> "The idea was that the parent would read that email and when you called them, they'd have a sense of who you are and why you're calling. A lot of the time they hadn't read the email, and I'd say to them, like, whenever you've got a minute just go away and have a quick read through that email, then I'll call you back or you can call me back and we can resume the conversation. We'd have engagement to that point, and they'd sound really positive. Then they'd go away, and I presume read the email and then when I would try and get back in touch they would just not engage. That's where I think, my interpretation has been that they've seen this letter from a youth homelessness charity, referring to youth homelessness, and they're like 'no!'" (Rock Trust staff)

Overall, however, it was reported that parents were generally receptive to support once the Rock Trust team managed to speak with them.

> "...some parents are a bit surprised that we're phoning. They're like, 'oh, I can't believe they've answered that, I didn't expect them to.' So there is a wee bit of resistance, but then once I explain who I am and what I can offer that young person, they're quite like, if you feel my child needs that, then totally go for it. They're normally on board once you have the conversation, but initially they're a bit like, who is this, how are you phoning me, how did you get my number?" (Rock Trust staff)

Nonetheless, given the time delays in obtaining parental consent noted above, active consideration was being given to switch to 'legitimate interest' as the legal basis for offering support to young people. It was felt that this would make roll out much easier.

> *"Down in England I know they've used legitimate interest. There's a lot of conversation about this. I've got hold of the DPIA from [partner organisation] and...we're hoping to get guidance on that. If it comes to it and we have to pay for expert legal advice to make sure that we're covered then we'll go down that route. At the moment we're just being cautious."* (Rock Trust staff)

It was felt that this approach might also help to address concerns that, in certain scenarios, parents may not consent to support work despite the young person likely benefitting from the offer.

> *"...a parent or carer, they could say, no...but actually, that young person can still really benefit from it, and we're never getting the chance to have that conversation to see if that's something that they would like...So, that's why for this year, we're looking to see if we can...go down the legitimate interest route..."* (Rock Trust staff)

It is possible that there may be some tension, however, between obviating the need for parental consent and offering 'whole family' supportive interventions, as discussed further below.

Reception to offers of support by young people

Fewer complications seemed to arise as regards how Upstream 'landed' with young people than with parents (albeit it was felt that changes were required to the initial format of the pre-survey presentation to students, see Chapter 2). Nonetheless, some school staff felt that more needed to be done on facilitating pupils' familiarity with Upstream, so that the initiative had an ongoing visibility and presence in the school. Rock Trust staff agreed.

> *"More visibility for kids...increase visibility so that they don't think it's just X that rocked up a year ago to do an assembly and you done that small questionnaire and heard nothing else...there needs to be a drip-feed in order to promote familiarity with it. Just revisiting it by physical reminders and posters and things, maybe social media..."* (school staff)

> *"It's important [that]...we have a presence, and that's part of the reason why the team are working with a marketing company to develop some graphics and posters and things to have in schools, so they know the support's there if they need it."* (Rock Trust staff)

The time lag between survey completion and the commencement of support could make it difficult for young people to link the two together and frame them as part of a single initiative. Nonetheless school staff reported that young people had generally responded well to the informal, voluntary and supportive approach taken by Upstream in offering support.

> *"I think they've actually been quite receptive to be fair. That sort of non-threatening approach works quite well. I think [Project Worker] is always quite good at reminding them that it's totally voluntary, you can opt-out at any time. I think that's worked quite well for us, rather than someone who is suited and booted coming in, saying, you've not done what you're meant to do and this is serious."* (school staff)

Data collected by Rock Trust suggests that around half of young people offered the support accept it and half turn it down. Key reasons for turning it down included not feeling that the

support is needed, having other support in place, and things having moved on since the survey. Comments by some of the key informants reflected this mixed picture in terms of young people's receptiveness to the support.

> "… it's too early to say. We've just done one round, so we've had four or five young people picked up. I think it's been mixed…some people have wanted to engage, and others perhaps haven't. But it just could be to do with various factors in terms of if they feel they need it or not.…" (school staff)

The potential switch to legitimate interest as the legal basis for offering support was also linked to a desire to resolve the situation whereby parental consent was given, after a long period of pursuit, only for the young person not to consent to support.

> "You might have spent a week or two trying to have a conversation with the parent for the young person to then say they don't want the support, which is absolutely fine. If we could just flip it the other way round…it would just save a lot of time and resources and mean that we're actually getting to the young people who do want the support…" (Rock Trust staff)

A specific issue was flagged amongst pupils whose first language was not English:

> "We've got quite a significant amount of Polish young people and I think there's a bit of an opt-out…there. It may be a cultural thing, I don't know. It's a 'why are you asking this, why are you interested?'…We've got a translator that works in the school and she was quite good at breaking down the barriers to say this is not social work ." (school staff)

Types and nature of support

As described in Chapter 1, in each of the three pilot local authority areas there was an assigned Rock Trust project worker who can provide general support to young people. In addition, an annual budget of £30,000 was set aside that the staff can tap into to purchase additional specialist support, where it was not possible to secure this by referring to existing local services (see further below).

In terms of the support offered by Upstream project workers, a premium was placed on flexibility, with a personalised support plan being developed in conversation with each young person.

> "We'll meet with [young person] in person, develop a personal plan. See what their needs are, what are their goals, what would they like support with, where do they want to be, what do they want to work on?" (Rock Trust staff)

The specific tasks/activities undertaken by way of support could therefore be very broad ranging, with both emotional and practical forms of support mentioned. However, the central focus seemed to be on mentoring, delivered mainly in schools on a one-to-one basis.

> "There's one young person for example, we've gone and signed up for a gym membership together…so that's something a bit more practical…Creating study plans…emotional support…" (Rock Trust staff)

> "I'm not a counsellor, but low-level mental health support, or just emotional support, being there for somebody. Also as well we potentially do a lot of stuff like CV writing and job applications, UCAS as well…Things like college and applying for different things, giving

different options as well, because they might have not heard what the options are, apprenticeships, things like that." (Rock Trust staff)

Possibly as a result of this very flexible and open-ended nature, some of the school staff seemed a bit unclear on the Rock Trust support 'offer' and would have appreciated more clarity.

> *"I think you want to start by a very clear roadmap of what the support looks like…if their goal is to prevent youth homelessness, what is the roadmap? What would you start with, what's on offer? If it was a social work intervention, you might know that they could put in direct support…do one-to-ones…refer you to an active programme. I guess, looking back, it might have been…helpful for other schools to know, not to just assume that people are going to research into what the Rock Trust offers."* (school staff)

There seemed to be some difference of emphasis within the Rock Trust team on the extent to which these supportive activities ought to be explicitly aimed at homelessness prevention.

> *"I just feel like in my role I'm not there to prevent them from being homeless necessarily…I'm there to support them in any way that I can to prevent them from any number of things that could potentially happen to them. Helping them create building blocks."* (Rock Trust staff)

> *"…it has really varied from quite practical things to discussions around mood, bullying within schools…obviously ultimately, great, but what I want to see is that these individuals who are identified at risk of homelessness don't end up as homeless."* (Rock Trust staff)

What was clear was that the support offered thus far has focussed on supporting the young person themselves, and increasing their resilience and coping mechanisms, rather than attempting to intervene directly in wider family dynamics.

> *"I haven't seen a context at home changing or anything like that, but we have now got pupils who are more resilient and have techniques to be able to cope with things a bit better, and I think that's important."* (school staff)

While some work with families has been undertaken, this seemed mainly on an ad-hoc and relatively informal basis.

> *"One young person I'm working with, there's a lot of issues with that relationship with dad, and I've actually built up quite a good rapport with dad as well just over the phone."* (Rock Trust staff)

This reflected the current scope of Rock Trust expertise, which has not traditionally extended to broader-family based support, albeit that some onward referral to family-orientated services had taken place (see further below). At the same time, there was acknowledgement of the limits to what could be achieved working solely with the young person themselves, given the central role that family conflict plays in driving youth homelessness. This meant that the potential for the Upstream team to upskill on 'whole family' approaches was floated by both Rock Trust and school staff.

> *"I suppose if the issue with the young person is their relationships at home, I feel a bit like how can we manage, how can we support them if it's just me supporting this one young person? They can't change the relationship they have with their parents on their own."* (Rock Trust staff)

"...we might starting moving towards a family-centred approach and supporting the whole family, because there could be homelessness within that family, and there could be other things for that family, like we can move them on to other services for support with their benefits or a support with a child with additional support needs or things like that." (Rock Trust)

It was pointed out that such a development may also contribute to helping obviate the risks of family as well as youth homelessness.

"I did have a concern - hasn't transpired yet but I keep an eye on it - about the risk of family homelessness. We work with 16-to-25-year-olds...That's our job, and if there is a risk of family homelessness the likelihood is that...the family will be older than 25, so there's a little bit of conversation about how we would manage that." (Rock Trust staff)

Multiagency working

Successful multiagency working was felt to be essential to Upstream's effectiveness. First and foremost, the Rock Trust team had to build positive partnership with school staff. The project workers emphasised they did not work *for* the schools, but rather worked alongside the teachers in a supportive and complementary way.

"...we don't work for the school, which is really important...we're not part of that school, but at the same time we are because we've got so much to offer them. We are helping them with their students... so I think that building the relationship is so key...getting to know people. Because the teachers might know something that can be really helpful for me." (Rock Trust staff)

Part of this positive relationship building was to ensure that schools were kept appropriately appraised about Rock Trust staff engagement with individual pupils.

"...we are keeping the schools informed at every step. So, these people have consented, these haven't, we can't get hold of them. Making sure we've got quite clear communications about where we are with each young person. Not sharing, when we're supporting, unless we have permission to do so." (Rock Trust)

For their part, the teachers seemed to appreciate the extra support for their pupils that Upstream could provide. They also recognised the strong rapport that Rock Trust staff built with young people.

"You can give [support] in a classroom context but not always enough, and that's why we rely on...outside agencies to come in and support our kids. Also, they quite like speaking to people who aren't teachers. So I think that's key for these kind of things too." (school staff)

At the same time, it was emphasised that Rock Trust was only one amongst a number of external support partners that schools engage with, and it was crucial that all acted in concert.

"...it's important moving ahead that Rock Trust are pitched as only one of a range of partners. We've got other partners that we work with, third-sector organisations of all sorts as well as our own council teams, so outwith education. If it's pitched as being part of that package of care and support, I think that is the key thing...An integrated team of health, police, social worker, third-sector partners.." (school staff)

Second, and linked with this last point, Rock Trust project workers made considerable efforts to link in with a wider range of community services in each of the Upstream pilot local authorities. A service 'mapping' exercise was undertaken in each of the pilot areas so that both formal referral, and also more informally signposting, of young people to specialist external support could be undertaken by Upstream project workers. All formal referrals to date have been to counselling services, whereas signposting has included a wider range of services, including family support and employability.

> *"The areas where we're not experts in or we can't support with, we'll get consent to refer, if that's something we can refer into, or if it's not appropriate, what we'll do is maybe signpost or say, have you thought about this, and plant the seed for that. So, we'll do both. We'll do the support directly ourselves, but refer or signpost in the areas that we're not experts in."* (Rock Trust staff)

However, it was acknowledged that accessing these external forms of support could be very challenging, especially in the mental health field.

> *"Counselling is a big one. We have massive waiting lists for counselling, which is concerning. Again, that's a national thing…A couple of our schools have got their own routes into counselling, so we're able to link in with the school and get them in a little bit quicker, but not all schools have them."* (Rock Trust staff)

As described earlier, when Upstream was set up the intention was that, if project workers could not supply the required support directly, or refer on to a suitable service, then the funds noted above would be called on to 'buy in' relevant support. However, this does not seem to have been actioned as yet to fill any gaps for counselling support.

Likewise, there had been no call as yet on these funds to buy in specialist family mediation support. Conversations had been initiated with a potential partner with relevant expertise in conflict resolution and family mediation. This was on the basis of purchasing a 'block' of support at a reduced cost. The relevant 'critical mass' of demand had not yet been reached amongst the cohort of young people being supported by Upstream to make this kind of block purchase, though Rock Trust staff stressed they did have the capacity to purchase mediation support on an individual basis if required.

> *"We've had contact with [charity]… <u>so, we can refer, for example, ten families…for conflict resolution, but we're just not quite at that point of having …the number of families that either need it or feel they would benefit.</u>… We did have two young people that thought that might be useful, so we got consent to speak to the parent or carer, but they didn't feel it was necessary at that point."* (Rock Trust staff)

Moreover, there seemed to be some hesitation on the part of some Rock Trust staff about the practicalities and sensitivities around family mediation, with a sense that it may seem a little too formal and 'confronting' for families still some distance from experiencing relationship breakdown.

> *"One thing we're not experts in is conflict resolution. Although we support young people to manage their emotions and help improve relationships, where there's also conflict coming from a parent, carer, or whatever that dynamic is, although the team have basic conflict resolution training, they're not experts in that… there's not been a massive need for it so far…*

both parties have to be willing to do it, otherwise the whole process is a waste of time" (Rock Trust staff)

Going forward, it was envisaged that the Upstream project workers may participate in multiagency meetings and forums within schools, where these exist. This has already happened in one school in respect to one young person flagged by the Upstream survey, and was felt very helpful in coordinating support across the range of professionals that may be involved in a young person's life.

Practical challenges in offering support

The expectation is that Upstream project workers will be supporting up to 16 young people each. This case load reflects the mixed, and generally lower, level of needs amongst the school cohort flagged as compared with the young people Rock Trust usually work with.

> *"...we're used to working with 16, 17, 18-year-olds who could leave home tomorrow and you're having to help them find accommodation, move into accommodation. You could spend three full days with them. It wasn't need on that level for most of the young people, so they're able to increase the numbers that they're working with."* (Rock Trust staff)

However, caseloads were slow in building up, in part because of the parental consent issues noted above. There could also be delays in the triaging process caused by difficulties timetabling meetings with relevant school staff. As noted above, these time lags meant young people's situation might have moved on by the time support was offered, and/or both parents and young people may by that time be sketchy on what Upstream could offer by that point.

> *"I think a lot of parents don't know what Upstream is, because there is a wee bit of a gap between doing the surveys and me phoning them, because we're waiting on the school and things happen, life happens. So I think they forget who we are and what we're doing..."* (Rock Trust staff)

Another practical concern related to limited private space for the one-to-one support which raised confidentiality and other concerns.

> *"Not having the space is having a really big impact on how comfortable the young person feels and how comfortable I feel and also the limits for what we can do...People can see you, it doesn't feel confidential. We're having quite intense, personal conversations, even if we're just going back through their survey in the middle of the dining room, it just doesn't feel right. That's my biggest frustration at the moment."* (Rock Trust staff)

Rock Trust have since resolved this challenge of procuring an appropriate support space and embedded this as a point of discussion during initial conversations with schools to ensure a suitable physical space is lined up in time for the implementation of Upstream.

Conclusion

This chapter has made clear that the Rock Trust team has established very positive relationships with the pilot schools, and also made a concerted effort to connect with other relevant organisations in the local areas, enabling referral and signposting to specialist services. They seem to have skilfully managed the sensitivities around both parent and young people's suspicion that Upstream may be a statutory intervention, and also the understandable anxieties that its association with a homelessness charity may cause. Further attention is being paid to

enhancing the visibility of the initiative to the general body of pupils in the pilot schools, but when direct contact is made with young people and their families to offer support this often leads to positive engagement.

The key practical challenge identified with the roll out of the initiative thus far has undoubtedly been securing parental consent to offer support to young people. Despite the privacy notice on the initial survey opt-out making allowance for this, one school refused to share parental contact details with Rock Trust, instead writing out to the parents themselves; a highly problematic approach that resulted in no referrals for support. In the other five schools Rock Trust had access to parental contact details but reaching them to obtain their consent has absorbed considerable time and resource on the part of project workers, and also introduced substantial delays in getting support underway. Active consideration is therefore being given to switching to 'legitimate interest' as the legal basis for engaging young people with support, still requiring their consent but not that of their parents. This is the route that Centrepoint have taken in England but it does imply a tension with potentially taking a more 'whole family' approach to supporting young people in the future, as was floated by some Rock Trust staff, and would clearly have to involve explicit consent by parents/carers. Widening out the focus from young people to encompass their families would require substantial upskilling within Rock Trust, whose expertise has not traditionally extended to conflict resolution or broader family-orientated interventions, but would be a strong fit with the central driver of youth homelessness, which is family disputes.

The decision was taken when first establishing Upstream Scotland not to employ specialist family mediators, but instead to use a flexible fund to purchase mediation, counselling and other specialist services as required. This is a very different approach to that taken in both Upstream Cymru in Wales (where specialist family mediators are employed) and in England (where Centrepoint work closely with Depaul to provide specialist family mediation). This fund has not been called upon as yet as the need for it has not been established. It is also unclear how risks of family homelessness flagged by the survey can best be addressed within the current configuration of Upstream Scotland.

7.Early impacts

Introduction

This short chapter discusses perceived early impacts of Upstream Scotland. It focuses on increased understanding and awareness of homelessness and relevant support services, and possible improvements in student circumstances. It must be emphasised that the Upstream pilot is still in its early stages and more complete findings on impacts based on a wider range of evidence will be provided in the final report.

Perceived early impacts of Upstream

Broadly speaking, it was viewed as premature to try to assess the impact of Upstream Scotland given that it had not long been running in Perth & Kinross, Edinburgh and West Lothian.

> *"I think it's too early to say. We've only done one round of it. Rock Trust are in for the follow-up just now, and they're targeting different year groups, so it's expanding…I think it would be hard to evaluate [impact] at the moment."* (school staff)

A local authority representative also emphasised that a preventative intervention like Upstream involved a 'long game' that would be difficult to capture even in the lifetime of this evaluation.

> *"We won't know [if they become homeless] until they're 26, 27. You can't actually look to figures in terms of impact, so it's going to be softer data, isn't it? Some of the risk factors that were identified around them, have they improved?"* (local authority staff)

However, there were some promising early indications across a number of fronts. First it was said that understanding of homelessness had been increased amongst the student body in pilot schools as a result of the initiative. Importantly, this included young people who may currently be in a homeless situation but who may not have recognised it as such.

> *"We've had a few people who, through conversations with them, they've said, 'Oh I'm sleeping on such and such's sofa,' or 'I'm staying with such and such,' and actually them not realising that actually, you are homeless…It's like a lack of awareness that then we can help support them with more now."* (school staff)

Second, there was a strong sense that teachers', as well as students', knowledge base on homelessness had increased considerably as a result of the pilot initiative.

> *"Just simply the awareness raising of what constitutes homelessness. I don't think anybody particularly had a great grasp in this building of what that actually meant. So I think that's really important."* (school staff)

> *"…having spoken to some teaching staff, there's quite a lack of knowledge around homelessness. A lot of misconceptions around it as well, so that's been quite good getting in and doing that. I think some of the teachers have said how they've valued that, and they've used it in subsequent lessons and stuff with young people."* (Rock Trust staff)

A linked positive impact was the raised visibility of Rock Trust and, it seemed, other supportive services that might help young people who were struggling.

"...we've actually had referrals to some of our other services...because now they're [school] more aware of [Rock Trust] and what we do, and understanding what the indicators and what the risk and stuff are...There was a school that I went to and worked in, got two referrals and they were like...'I've been scrambling, looking for something. We didn't know that you guys had something in Perth....' So, that's been really good." (Rock Trust staff)

Third, and linked with the points on improved understanding and awareness above, was potentially a reduced sense of stigma around homelessness.

"...we have had some pupils who are more open, probably, about what's going on...this is something that we need to continue working on and be mindful within our wellbeing curriculum, that if you do find yourself in a situation where you're sofa surfing, or you've become homeless, that there's no stigma around that, and actually it's about trying to get the support." (school staff)

Fourth, improvements in the lives of some of the young people being assisted by Upstream were identified by Rock Trust staff, mainly focussed on enhanced resilience and improved management of relationships.

"...we've noticed a pattern...that young people are managing their emotions a bit better. They're able to manage relationships, they're able to be more objective and see things from other points of view, because they've got that space to explore how they feel...So, that helps manage conflict at home." (Rock Trust staff)

The vulnerability and isolation of some of the young people supported by Rock Trust staff was emphasised.

"...a parent that I'm working really closely with just now, and she was just like 'you've came at the most perfect time.' The child doesn't have many friends, they eat lunch alone ... she's like 'the one place I can't support him with is school...I'm just so glad he's got another person to text.'...you don't realise a simple thing of just giving a young person your work number and having a wee chat with them can help them so much." (Rock Trust staff)

This can mean that even small steps forward can feel very significant in terms of their wellbeing.

"Even a young person making a friend is a massive impact. Achievements don't need to be big massive ones where they get into university, it could just be simply that young person has went to youth club because we've supported them to do that and they've made a friend." (Rock Trust staff)

Conclusion

At this stage, it is too early to draw any substantive conclusions on the impacts of Upstream Scotland. However, there are some promising early indications of positive effects of the initiative, including improved understanding and awareness of homelessness on the part of both students and teachers in the pilot schools, reduced stigma, raised visibility of Rock Trust and other support services, and enhanced wellbeing on the part of young people assisted. Such outcomes 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 can be attributed to Upstream Scotland, and to which particular aspects of Upstream.

Thus, the final report will have a stronger focus on outcomes, and will draw upon a broader and more substantial array of both quantitative and qualitative data. This will include project outcome data, and perspectives from young people assisted through the initiative, as well as comparisons of levels of risk amongst those assisted across successive 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

Rock Trust has recently taken the exciting step of piloting an innovative youth homelessness prevention intervention in the Scottish context. Upstream, first developed in Geelong in Australia, and since adapted for implementation in the US, Canada, Wales, England 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 examined Rock Trust's journey with Upstream, from set up through to the first year of implementation. The report explored the implementation process, barriers and enablers, and delved into key areas of interest including the survey content and the 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.

It is clear that Rock Trust, leaning heavily on learning from Upstream Cymru's approach, has met with great success in recruiting, engaging and working with schools in the pilot initiative in Scotland. Six targeted schools – representing a good mix of geographies and deprivation levels - have participated in Upstream, and have generally formed strong and positive relationships with the Rock Trust team. These positive relations are reflected not only in successful survey roll out, but also in the evidently high levels of trust and respect between the schools and the Upstream project workers. Both parties reported enhanced levels of understanding and awareness of homelessness across both the student and staff bodies as a result of the Upstream initiative. A particularly notable benefit of Upstream included increased knowledge on the part of teachers about the support services available to help young people who may be struggling. Teachers in the targeted schools appreciated the flexible, friendly and positive approach taken by the Upstream team, and recognised the efforts taken to minimise any additional burden on the schools as a result of the initiative.

Substantial numbers of surveys have been completed across all six schools. There has been strong coverage of two year groups (S3 and S4) in the first round of Upstream, as analysed in this report, with Rock Trust now pushing ahead with tracking the initial two cohorts into S4 and S5 respectively, as well as surveying incoming S3s. To achieve a high level of survey success across all six schools is a remarkable achievement, especially in the face of the numerous challenges that this exercise posed. Not least amongst these challenges is the rigidity of school timetabling, and the relatively narrow time window in the school year when surveying is feasible. Both were adroitly navigated by Rock Trust team, who recognised the need to 'fit in' with school life and rhythms. The team also deftly dealt with technical difficulties arising with the digital platform, managing to minimise what could have otherwise been significant survey disruption. The 'opt out' approach to parental consent for young people to participate in the survey appeared to cause few problems in the Scottish pilot, with very small numbers of young people excluded as a result. Efforts were also made to include young people absent on the day that the survey was administered, albeit that this was more challenging in schools with lower attendance levels.

Key learning from this first year of implementation included the additional challenge in rolling out the survey in larger school environments, and the advantages of administering it in (smaller) classrooms rather than (bigger) assembly settings. An optimal approach for conducting the survey has emerged, which involves administration during 'personal and social education'

classes with an experienced guidance teacher present to manage classroom behaviour and dynamics.

Key informants felt that the Upstream survey successfully probed sensitive topics without doing so intrusively. The survey was viewed as effective in identifying young people at risk of homelessness, and viewed as complimentary to other survey work undertaken by schools, identifying hidden vulnerability among students who were not known by schools due to a lack of presenting distress or disruptive behaviour. However, the very negative survey results on mental health and wellbeing raised question marks over the appropriateness of these aspects of the instrument, and there were also concerns regarding young peoples' ability to comprehend the question relating to optimism. The Upstream team utilised the survey-based RAG ratings as indicative of potential need but, crucially, supplemented these insights with further information from schools in 'data analysis' meetings, and from the young people flagged as potentially at risk in one-to-one meetings.

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 Scotland for the first time. Interestingly, the rate of around one in ten young people being at high-immediate risk of youth homelessness that has emerged from the Rock Trust pilot closely matches that found by Upstream Cymru in Wales and Upstream in England led by Centrepoint. Importantly, youth homelessness emerges as relatively distinct from family homelessness – fewer than one in five young people at elevated risk of youth homelessness were also at elevated risk of family homelessness. Conversely, more than two-thirds of pupils with elevated risk of family homelessness were flagged as also being at elevated risk of youth homelessness.

Further important learning included the finding that those young people who have lower levels of overall resilience and/or well-being are at higher risk of homelessness. Crucially, though, nearly three-quarters of young people at risk of homelessness are not disengaged from school, demonstrating the value of Upstream in getting vulnerable young people on the radar that schools may not be aware of.

Undoubtedly the most significant practical challenge faced by Upstream Scotland to date has been securing parental permission to offer support to young people flagged by the survey as at risk. Unlike the survey stage, where an opt-out approach was taken to parental consent, parents had to actively opt-in to their child receiving support. The key difficulty was tracking parents down in order to speak with them and gain their consent, with this process reported as being very time-consuming for the Rock Trust team, delaying the offer of support to young people in need. In the case of one school, Rock Trust were not given parental details, with the school instead reaching out and requiring the parents to respond and actively opt in before being put in contact with Rock Trust. It is notable that in this case no referrals were forthcoming and thus no support could be offered to the young people flagged.

In the other schools, few parents actively refused their consent, but reassurance was sometimes needed that Upstream was not a statutory social work intervention. Moreover, sensitivity was required as regards Upstream's core purpose as a (very early stage) homelessness prevention intervention, given potentially loaded and stigmatising associations. The Rock Trust team reported navigating this awkwardness by being upfront with parents/carers that they worked for a homelessness organisation – as was required for both ethical and practical reasons - but also stressing that Upstream had wider aims and a more preventative orientation than Rock Trust's

mainstream work. It seemed that prior written materials sent out to parents before Upstream staff reached out by telephone could sometimes be offputting – however carefully phrased - but once Rock Trust staff managed to speak to parents they generally responded positively to the offer of support. Nonetheless, given challenges and time delays associated with the securing of parental consent, advice was actively being sought on using an alternative legal basis – 'legitimate interest' – for offering young people support, as has been implemented by Centrepoint in England.

Young people as well as their parents have to consent to receiving support, and about half did so, with the others refusing on grounds that it wasn't needed, they already had support, or circumstances had changed since the survey. In terms of the support offered to young people flagged as at risk, Rock Trust has placed a premium on flexibility, with the Upstream team offering a range of emotional and practical support to relevant young people based on a personal plan developed in one-to-one conversations with them. Possibly associated with the relatively open-ended nature of the intervention offered by the Upstream project workers, some school staff reported being unsure what the support 'offer' was from Rock Trust and would have welcomed greater clarity, while there seemed some difference of view within the Rock Trust team on how central homelessness prevention was to Upstream's work, with some viewing it as extending well beyond this.

In addition to the core support offered by the Upstream project workers, considerable efforts have been made by the Rock Trust team to undertake service mapping in each of local authority areas where the pilot is being implemented. This has enabled the Upstream project workers to signpost or refer young people, and their families, on to more specialist services as required. At the same time, a fund has been set aside (£30,000 per annum) to buy in specialist support, where this cannot be sourced from existing local services. However, there has been no call on these funds as yet, despite long waiting lists for counselling services, for example, being acknowledged as a significant problem across the pilot local authorities and beyond.

Most notably, there has been no use made thus far of specialist family mediation or conflict resolution services by Upstream Scotland, despite disputes with family being the principal trigger to youth homelessness. This is very different to the approach taken in Upstream Cymru, where family mediators are employed as part of the core team, and in England, where Centrepoint have worked closely with Depaul as mediation specialists. Conversations have taken place with specialist family mediation providers which allow Upstream Scotland to spot purchase mediation services where required but no demand has been established to date.

At the same time, there was recognition on the part of both Rock Trust and school staff that the core objective of Upstream – to prevent youth homelessness – requires engagement with broader family dynamics, given that breakdown in these relationships lies at the heart of most young people's initial experiences of homelessness. Potential reorientation of the core Upstream support offer to support families as well as young people was therefore floated by a number of interviewees. This would also provide a means of addressing family homelessness risks, which Upstream Scotland is not currently designed to address. Such a reorientation would require significant upskilling on Rock Trust's part, as traditionally their expertise does not extend to supporting whole families, but may also be viewed as an exciting developmental opportunity. It is worth noting that Centrepoint seem to have embarked on a similar journey in terms of a more family-orientated support offer in England, based on the learning from their first year of Upstream implementation.

It is very early days to be considering the outcomes of Upstream. However, it was encouraging to hear key informants flag increased understanding of homelessness amongst both students and teachers in pilot schools, as well as enhanced well-being amongst young people supported, as potential early impacts. How well any such impacts map onto reduced homelessness risks, and the particular elements of Upstream associated with any such positive outcomes, will be the key focus for the final report of this evaluation study.

In the meantime, preliminary learning to emerge from this interim report based on the first year of implementation suggests that evolving a tighter focus on homelessness risks within the remainder of the pilot initiative, and clarifying the nature of the support offer made by Rock Trust, will be helpful. So too building on operational changes that have been identified as improving the effectiveness of Upstream. This will be aided by:

- giving consideration to whether a 'whole family' re-orientation of the Upstream support offer, which would be fully supported by the existing evidence in terms of family conflict being the key trigger to youth homelessness, is feasible for Rock Trust within the current pilot initiative. If this step is taken, resources and time must be devoted to the upskilling of Rock Trust staff for whom working with whole families will be a new departure;
- reflecting on how family mediation support is most appropriately framed at this very 'early' stage of intervention before relationships have broken down;
- ensuring consent and data sharing practices evolve in a way that enables Upstream to be most effective, reducing current barriers. But also being alert to the need for any expert advice on legally-compliant approaches to seeking parental consent takes on board the need to work with at least some parents/carers directly, if the focus on family-orientated work strengthens. Reflection will be needed on how to appropriately balance the rights and interest of both parents and young people in complex and sensitive whole family work;
- giving ongoing attention to optimal communication with parents about Upstream Scotland, and also to enhancing the visibility of the initiative across the student body in the pilot schools;
- being involved in school-based multi-agency meetings/fora wherever possible/appropriate, such as that captured in the 'COSS' approach in Australia (MacKenzie, 2018);
- 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, particularly on ethnicity, revisiting the appropriateness of questions on optimism which many students struggled with, and reflecting on the usefulness and appropriateness of the wellbeing and mental health measures; and
- participating in the development and finessing of a UK-specific 'fidelity' statement on Upstream, ensuring that any departures from the approach are fully justified.

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Appendix 1. Additional detail on survey data analysis

Creating the study data set

The original data set covering the six schools participating in the Rock Trust Upstream pilot included a total of 1365 surveys, completed between November 2023 and September 2024. Pupils could complete multiple surveys, with some having completed two surveys during the study period. The first survey completed by a pupil, their 'baseline' survey, was retained, leading to a total of 1330 unique pupil baseline surveys available for analysis in this report.

Protecting pupil anonymity

Responses to some of the questions were grouped together to reduce detail and the chances that a pupil might be identified ('disclosed') based on a unique set of circumstances or characteristics. For example, in relation to sexuality, the groups 'gay and lesbian' and 'bisexual' have been combined to create a larger grouping 'gay/lesbian/ bisexual'. To further reduce disclosure risks, rounding and suppression of data were applied in this publication following the approach adopted by the Higher Education Statistics Agency in reporting data[23], specifically:

- Counts were rounded to the nearest multiple of 5
- Counts less than 2.5 are rounded to 0
- Percentages were calculated based on unrounded counts (i.e. based on actual numbers, not the rounded numbers)
- Percentage are presented rounded to the nearest percentage point
- Percentages less than 1 are represented as <1
- Percentages were not reported if they are fractions of a small group of young people (fewer than 22.5)
- Averages (like average wellbeing score) were not published if they are averages of a small group of young people (7 or fewer)

Statistical testing

When analysing Upstream survey data, statistical tests were sometimes used to explore associations within the data and to compare outcomes (e.g., wellbeing scores) between groups. Below is a summary of the statistical tests conducted under each section of the 'Initial findings of the student needs survey' chapter, along with several pieces of information generated by the different tests ('Test statistics'). We report the relevant probability values ('p-values') used to determine if tests are significant or not. We take $p \leq 0.05$ as the cutoff for a significant finding. Where p-values are so small they are less than 0.01, we simply report '< 0.01'. Qualitative interpretations of p-values have also been provided.

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[23] https://www.hesa.ac.uk/about/regulation/data-protection/rounding-and-suppression-anonymise-statistics

Table A1: Summary of statistical tests used in Upstream survey data analysis chapter, and their results

Section & association being tested	Test	p-value	Interpretation	Test statistics
Youth homelessness:				
Gender by youth homelessness risk category	Fisher's Exact Test	< 0.01	Significant	-
Sexuality by youth homelessness risk category	Fisher's Exact Test	< 0.01	Significant	-
School by youth homelessness risk category	Fisher's Exact Test	0.13	Not significant	-
Age (band) by youth homelessness risk category	Fisher's Exact Test	0.12	Not significant	-
School life:				
School disengagement by youth homelessness risk category	Fisher's Exact Test	< 0.01	Significant	-
Wellbeing:				
SWEMWBS score by youth homelessness risk category	Welch's Analysis of Variance	< 0.01	Significant	F = 34.29
SWEMWBS score immediate vs SWEMWBS score high risk	Games-Howell post hoc test	1.00	Not significant	t = 0.23
SWEMWBS score immediate vs SWEMWBS score medium risk	Games-Howell post hoc test	1.00	Not significant	t = -0.16
SWEMWBS score immediate vs SWEMWBS score low risk	Games-Howell post hoc test	< 0.01	Significant	t = -3.74
SWEMWBS score high risk vs SWEMWBS score medium risk	Games-Howell post hoc test	0.94	Not significant	t = -0.59
SWEMWBS score low risk vs SWEMWBS score high risk	Games-Howell post hoc test	< 0.01	Significant	t = -6.35
SWEMWBS score low risk vs SWEMWBS score medium risk	Games-Howell post hoc test	< 0.01	Significant	t = -7.88
Resilience:				
CYRM score by youth homelessness risk category	Welch's Analysis of Variance	< 0.01	Significant	F = 51.09
CYRM score immediate vs CYRM score high risk	Games-Howell post hoc test	1.00	Not significant	t = -0.15
CYRM score immediate vs CYRM score medium risk	Games-Howell post hoc test	0.70	Not significant	t = -1.08
CYRM score immediate vs CYRM score low risk	Games-Howell post hoc test	< 0.01	Significant	t = -5.30
CYRM score high risk vs CYRM score medium risk	Games-Howell post hoc test	0.59	Not significant	t = -1.26
CYRM score low risk vs CYRM score high risk	Games-Howell post hoc test	< 0.01	Significant	t = -7.71
CYRM score low risk vs CYRM score medium risk	Games-Howell post hoc test	< 0.01	Significant	t = -8.87

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