Moving homelessness prevention *Upstream*
Reflections on the development and implementation of a promising school-based intervention

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Underpinning research

- Advancing a five-stage typology of homelessness prevention: Literature review, 35 KI interviews across UK, LA survey (CaCHE funded)

- Upstream Cymru action research: support intervention development, stakeholder reflective workshop, descriptive analysis of pupil survey data (ESRC IAA funded)

Why focus on youth homelessness prevention?

- **Specific impacts** e.g. neurocognitive development (Edidin et al, 2012) and **triggers**, particularly relationship breakdown and being asked to leave (Watts et al, 2015)

- Relationship between youth homelessness and **later adversity**, especially **adult homelessness** (England et al., 2022; Gaetz et al, 2021; Mackie, 2014)

- Intervention **opportunity** (e.g. through schools)

- Only limited evidence on what works (Morton et al, 2020)

Framing prevention

1. UNIVERSAL PREVENTION
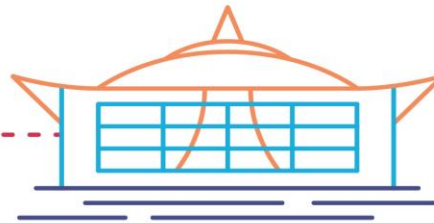Preventing or minimizing homelessness across the population at large

2. UPSTREAM PREVENTION
Early-stage prevention focused on high-risk groups, such as vulnerable young people and risky transitions, such as leaving prison

3. CRISIS PREVENTION
Preventing homelessness likely to occur within a foreseeable time period

4. EMERGENCY PREVENTION
Support for those at immediate risk of homelessness, especially rough sleeping

5. REPEAT PREVENTION
Prevention of repeat homelessness

(Fitzpatrick et al, 2021)

Reframing homelessness prevention by moving upstream

- Everyone's responsibility – working across boundaries

  "There absolutely needs to be a duty to collaborate and to prevent and relieve because that then places the duty with health, with criminal justice system and I would widen it. I'd have it in education, I'd have it in a whole range of places. I'd give it to social landlords!" (England KI)

- De-stigmatizing (Phelan et al, 1997)

  - No 'homelessness application'

  - Potential for a different vocabulary, centred on wellbeing
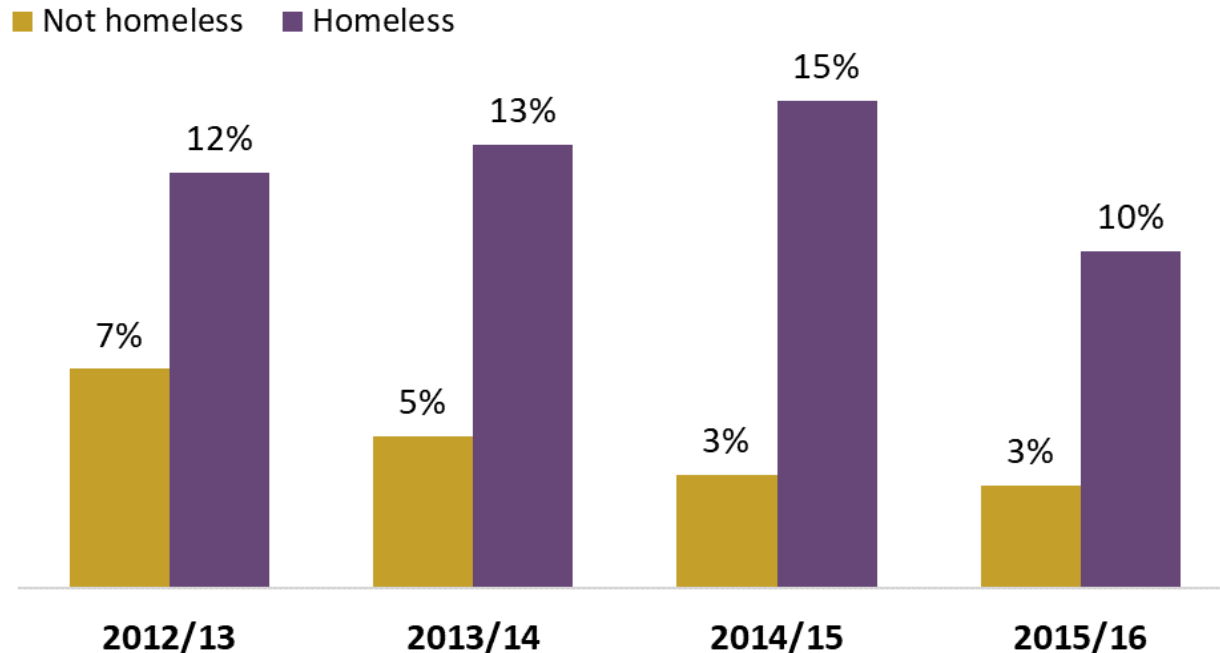
The 'Upstream' model

Identifying young people at risk of homelessness

Persistent absenteeism

Percentage pupils absent for more than 5 weeks of school
By academic year and pupil housing status

■ Not homeless   ■ Homeless

Linked National Pupil Data Set Wales to housing service data to explore schooling amongst young people living in homeless households (Thomas & Mackie, 2021)

Origins

- Through a process of international knowledge mobilisation (through networks of trust and relations) we were able to identify the Upstream model (Gaetz et al, 2021)

- Origins in The Geelong Project, Australia (Mackenzie, 2018)

- Being replicated in Canada, the US and Wales

- The model:

  - Collaboration of secondary schools and services
  - Universal population screening (homelessness, educational engagement, resilience, wellbeing) – young people's voices
  - Collaborative decision-making
  - Provision of flexible youth- and family-centred support

The Geelong Project outcomes
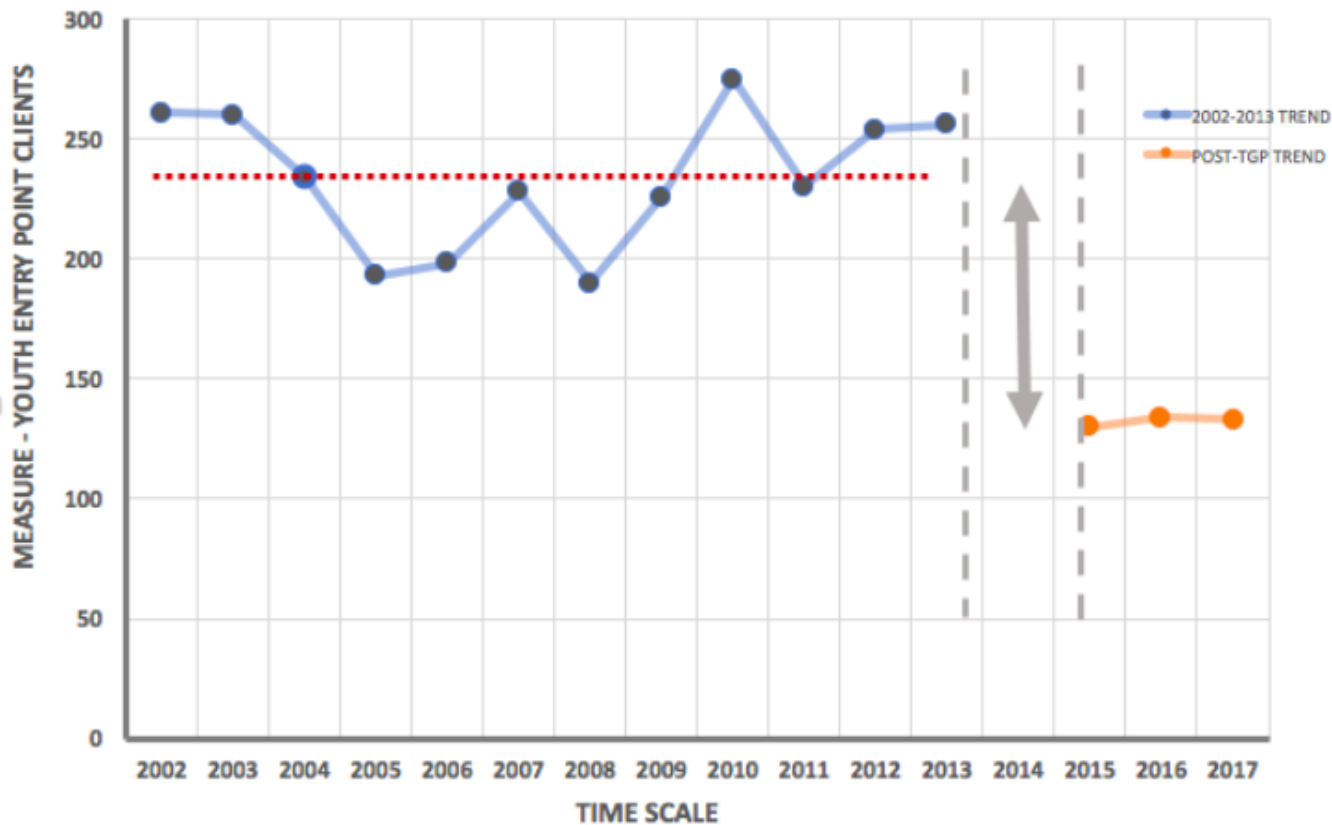
40% reduction in entries into homelessness services

20% reduction in early school leaving

(Mackenzie, 2018)

Support types

- Family Mediation support

  - Supporting a child's relationship within the family.

  - Developing the skills to manage conflict, understanding emotional literacy and relationship dynamics.

  - Equipping young people and their family to resolve future conflict without the need for services

- Emphasis support

  - Exploring barriers to engagement from the young person's perspective
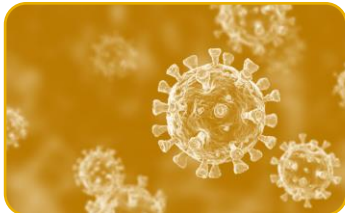
The implementation journey in Wales

2018... discovery and inception

- Meetings between academics, third sector and TGP
- Engagement with senior staff in two local authorities (LAs)

2019... building a coalition and adapting tools

- Ongoing movement building conversations in 3 LAs
- Adaptation and development of the screening tool

2020... launching in a global pandemic

- Recruitment of Upstream Cymru staff, including co-ordinator
- Initial remote delivery, with first surveys in September 2020

2021... emerging from the pandemic response

- Discontinued involvement of one LA during wave 2 lockdown
- Today (February 2023), operating in 9 pilot schools in 3 LAs

(Mackie et al, 2021a)

Early findings from the pupil survey

- Analysis of approximately 830 surveys conducted between September 2020 and May 2021

- Focus on findings relating to youth & family homelessness – new understanding of the degree of risk of homelessness amongst young people

(Mackie et al, 2021b)

Risk of family homelessness

- Pupils are asked 4 questions about home life that may indicate risk of family homelessness. E.g…

  - 4% (31 pupils) indicated that the family could not pay the rent or mortgage.

  - 5% (42 pupils) reported moving 3 or more times in the past year.

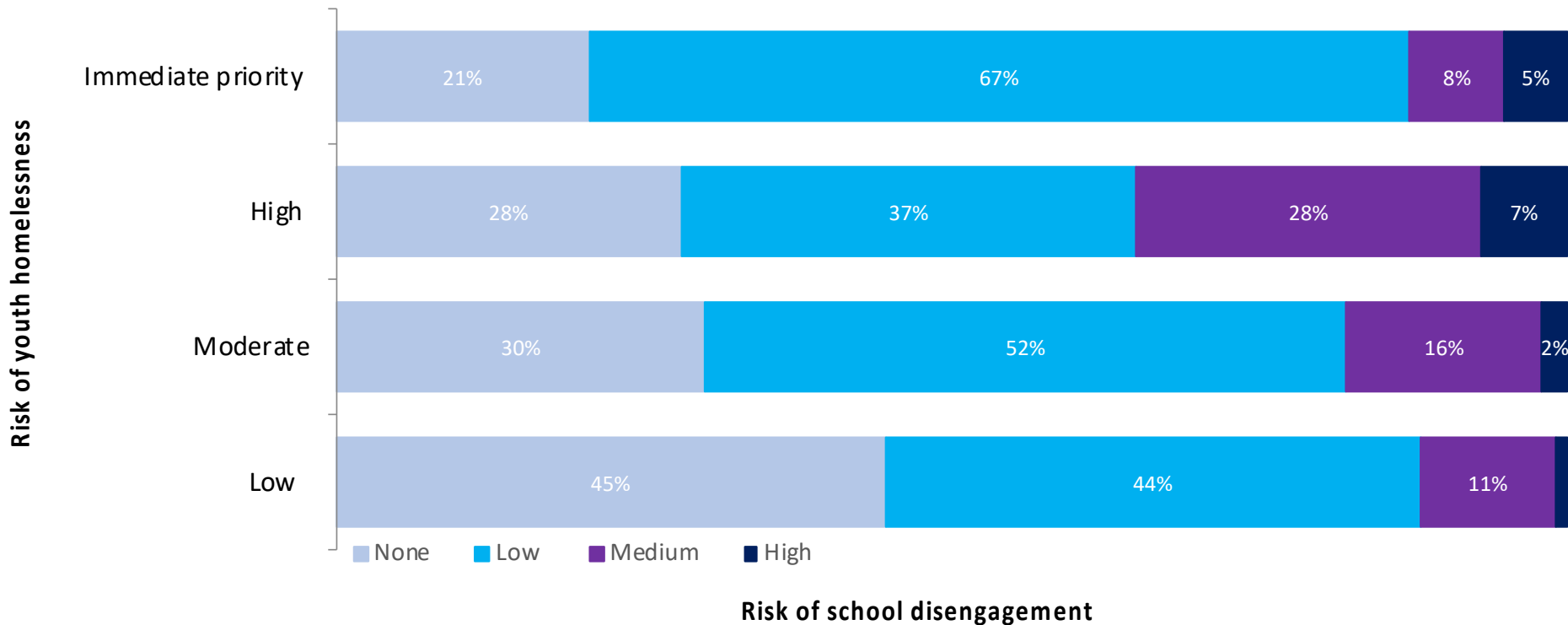| 87% | 11% | 2% |

■ low ■ high ■ immediate priority

Risk of youth homelessness

- Pupils are asked 4 questions about home that may indicate risk of youth homelessness. E.g…

  - 4% (29 pupils) strongly agree that they get into lots of conflict with parents/guardians.

  - 7% (59 pupils) slept away from home because they were kicked out, ran away or didn't feel safe to stay
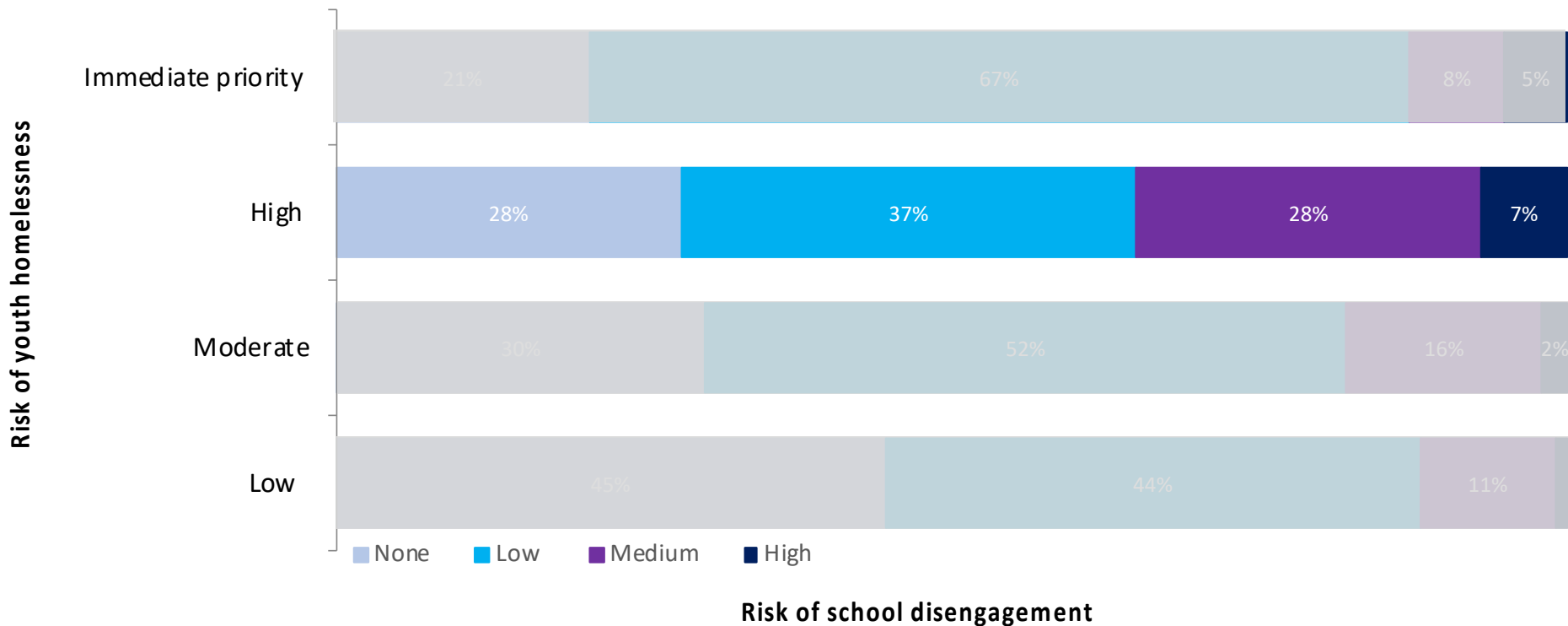
80%	10%	5%	5%

Low   Medium   High   Immediate priority

Are these young people already known to be at risk?

Conclusions

- The temporally-focused prevention typology advanced here spotlights the requirement for upstream intervention in the UK

- The Upstream Cymru model challenges some of our assumptions about who is at high risk of homelessness

- The model works collaboratively through schools and has the potential for considerable impact – particularly through the identification of young people otherwise not known to services

- The intervention is in early stages – requires an ongoing process of action research to demonstrate impacts

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