

Upstream Cymru Pupil Survey Findings Report

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Report authors

This report was written by Cardiff University researchers **Dr. Peter Mackie** (School of Geography and Planning), **Erin Doherty** (School of Geography and Planning) and **Dr. Ian Thomas** (Administrative Data Research Wales).

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Introduction

Context

Youth homelessness is a significant problem in Wales. Nearly 8,000 young people approached their local authority for help to address homelessness in 2018/19¹. We also know that many young people at risk of homelessness do not access the help they need and their support needs go unaddressed. It is a worrying statistic that around 50% of single homeless adults first experience homelessness before the age of 21².

While the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 ushered in a more preventative approach to addressing homelessness³, assistance in Wales is still largely concentrated on the point of crisis. If we are to truly prevent and end homelessness, assistance must be moved upstream, identifying those at risk of homelessness and ensuring that appropriate support is made available to young people and their families. A paradigm shift is required.

What is Upstream Cymru?

Upstream Cymru responds to the challenge of intervening far earlier in the lives of young people and their families. The intervention involves a collaboration between academia, schools, youth services, homelessness services and Llamau as the support organisation. It is a school-based intervention, where pupils complete a survey that identifies risk of homelessness, particularly because of family relationship breakdown, and support is then offered to the young people and their families.

Support is provided by Llamau's well-established and highly effective Family Mediation and Emphasis services. These services work with the young person and their parent/s/carer/s to enable the whole family to develop skills which enable compromise and understanding on both sides. Where pupils already have support from statutory services, they may not be offered additional 1-2-1 support unless the agency and school feel this is appropriate.

The approach is modelled on the pioneering and inspirational Australian Geelong Project, which resulted in a 40% reduction in youth homelessness and a 20% reduction in the number of young people leaving school early. The model is currently being adapted and piloted in the USA, Canada and Wales, with learning being shared through the Upstream International Living Lab. Upstream Cymru is currently being piloted in several schools in Wales.

About the survey

The keystone of Upstream Cymru is a pupil survey. The survey is self-completion and conducted online using the DoIT profiler system and whilst remote completion is feasible, to-date it has always been conducted in a classroom setting. Questions can be read by pupils or listened to, ensuring the survey is accessible to all.

Whilst the primary purpose of the survey is to identify risk of homelessness, the survey also includes questions on risk of educational disengagement, resilience and wellbeing.

Schools are given flexibility to determine which year groups they wish to survey. There is value in undertaking the survey with younger age groups (years 7-9) in order to act earlier to prevent homelessness, whilst also recognising that those most at risk of homelessness are likely to be older (years 10-11). Schools weigh this up alongside practicalities such as forthcoming examinations, space within form time etc. The goal is ultimately to survey all school pupils at least once each year.

The majority (70%) of data underpinning this report originates from surveys undertaken in South Wales secondary schools between September and December 2020, between the first and second period of lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the remainder were undertaken in April/May 2021 (around 30%). There are responses from 833 pupils in 6 schools from across 3 local authorities. All schools surveyed

¹ Stats Wales

² https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/20608/crisis_nations_apart_2014.pdf

³ <https://www.feantsaresearch.org/download/article-4592410342917616893.pdf>

pupils in either Year 10 or 11, two schools also surveyed Year 9 pupils, and one of these additionally included pupils in Years 7 and 8.

About this report

This report presents findings of the first completed Upstream Cymru pupil surveys. It is intended to provide the Upstream Cymru collaborators with an overview of key findings, potentially identifying service gaps and opportunities, whilst also providing a rare dataset on the risks of homelessness identified by young people themselves.

It is important to note that the pupil survey is only one component of Upstream Cymru – it provides the starting point for a conversation with young people and their families and for appropriate support to begin. This report focuses on the findings of the survey and we will report separately on the impacts and experiences of the wider Upstream Cymru work.

The next section of this report presents the headline findings, followed by sections on the four themes covered in the pupil survey: Education, Homelessness, Wellbeing, and Resilience.

Headline findings

School

- More than 1 in 10 (13%) pupils were at medium or high risk of school disengagement
- Nearly 1 in 5 pupils (18%) reported that they have been bullied at least 1-2 times per month

Youth homelessness

- At least 13 pupils (2%) recognised they had experienced homelessness in the past year
- 1 in 10 pupils were at high or immediate risk of youth homelessness
- There was no or low risk of school disengagement for 65% of pupils at high risk of youth homelessness

Family homelessness

- More than 1 in 10 pupils (13%) and their families were at a high or immediate risk of family homelessness
- 4% of pupils experienced a time in the past year when their family could not pay the rent or mortgage

Resilience

- Nearly a quarter (24%) of pupils had low levels of resilience
- 80% of pupils had an adult in their lives they can trust and talk to about personal problems

Wellbeing

- A relatively high percentage of young people (37%) had low levels of wellbeing

Education



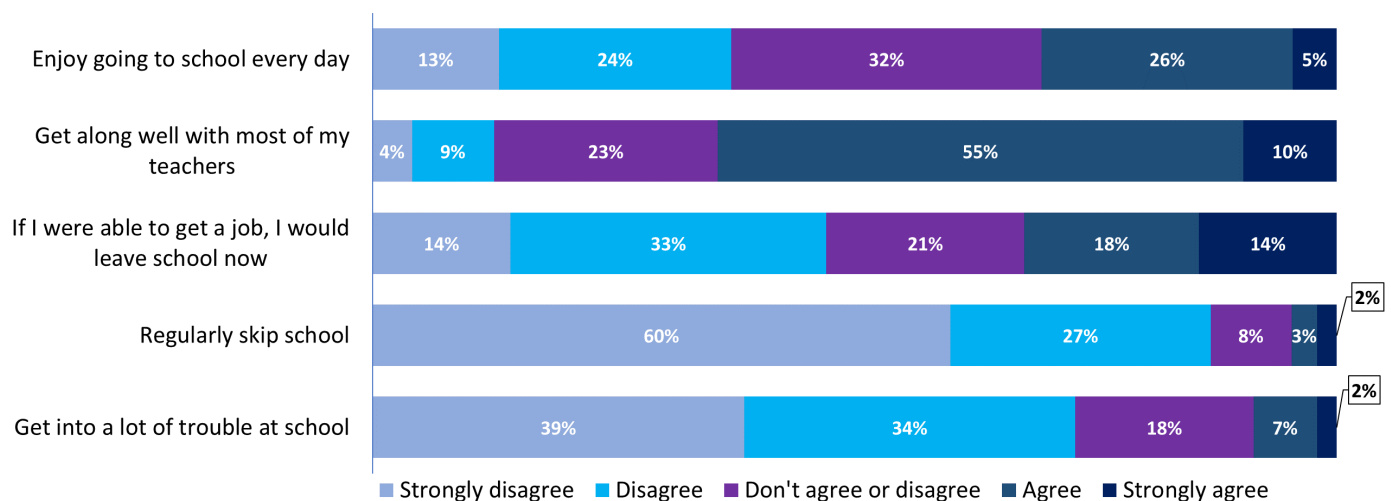
Key findings

- The vast majority (87%) of pupils were at no or low risk of school disengagement
- More than 1 in 10 (13%) pupils were at medium or high risk of school disengagement
- 65% of pupils agreed or strongly agreed that they get along well with most of their teachers
- 5% of pupils agreed or strongly agreed that they regularly skip school and 9% get into a lot of trouble at school
- Nearly 1 in 5 pupils (18%) reported that they had been bullied at least 1-2 times per month

Pupils were asked a series of questions about school life to identify possible risk of school disengagement. The questions are primarily adapted from the Australian Upstream survey⁴. This section first reports responses to individual questions, before presenting a composite measure of risk of school disengagement developed by the Upstream Cymru team.

Figure 1 shows the extent to which pupils agreed with five statements about school⁵. Focusing on responses that indicate potential risk of disengagement: 37% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they enjoy going to school every day; 13% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they get along with most of their teachers; 32% agreed or strongly agreed that they would leave school now if they could get a job; 5% agreed or strongly agreed that they regularly skip school; and 9% agreed or strongly agreed that they get into a lot of trouble at school.

Figure 1. Pupil responses to risk of school disengagement questions (n=833)

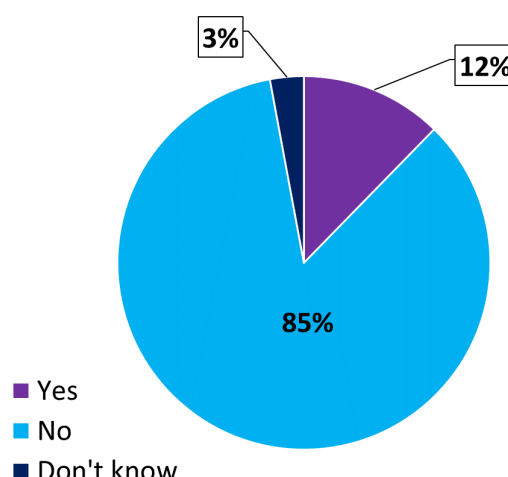


Pupils were posed a sixth question that teachers felt also needed to be included as an important indicator of school disengagement. Pupils were asked; '*Have you ever been excluded from school (either temporarily or permanently)*'. Figure 2 shows; whilst most pupils had not been excluded (85%), more than one in ten (12%) had been excluded.

⁴ Australian Index of Adolescent Development 2017 (AIAD 2017)

⁵ All 5 statements are adapted from AIAD 2017.

Figure 2. Proportion of pupils by whether they self-report exclusion from school (n=820)



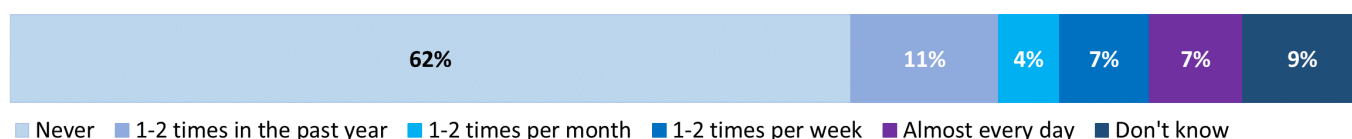
A pupil's overall risk of school disengagement was calculated by summing the number of negative responses to each of the six questions described above. These scores are then categorised into no, low, medium and high risk of school disengagement⁶. Figure 3 shows that 87% of pupils experienced no or low risk of school disengagement and 13% face medium or high risk.

Figure 3. Pupil overall risk of school disengagement (n=833)



Pupils were asked an additional question about experiences of bullying⁷. This question does not inform the overall risk of school disengagement measure as it is likely to impact school engagement differently from all other questions. However, it was deemed important by teachers and pupils and included in the survey to help schools identify potentially vulnerable students. Pupils were asked; *'During the past year, how often were you bullied, or picked on by other students?'*. Students were presented with possible frequencies and asked to select the one that applied to them. Figure 4 shows 62% of pupils never experienced bullying, 11% experienced bullying 1-2 times in the past year, 4% experienced it 1-2 times per month, 7% faced it 1-2 times per week, and a further 7% almost every day.

Figure 4. Proportion of pupils by frequency of being bullied or picked on by other students (n=833)



⁶ 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 no risk, 1-2 low risk, 3-4 medium risk, and 5-6 high risk.

⁷ This question is adapted from the Upstream US Survey (Chapin Hall Student Needs Survey 2019)

Homelessness

The Upstream Cymru survey distinguishes between **youth** and **family** homelessness because the triggers and responses to the two forms of homelessness differ. In broad terms, youth homelessness refers to exits into homelessness where the young person is not accompanied by a parent or guardian. A common trigger of youth homelessness is relationship breakdown and related conflict at home. Family homelessness refers to exits into homelessness where the young person remains with their family. A common trigger of family homelessness is eviction.

Youth homelessness

Key findings

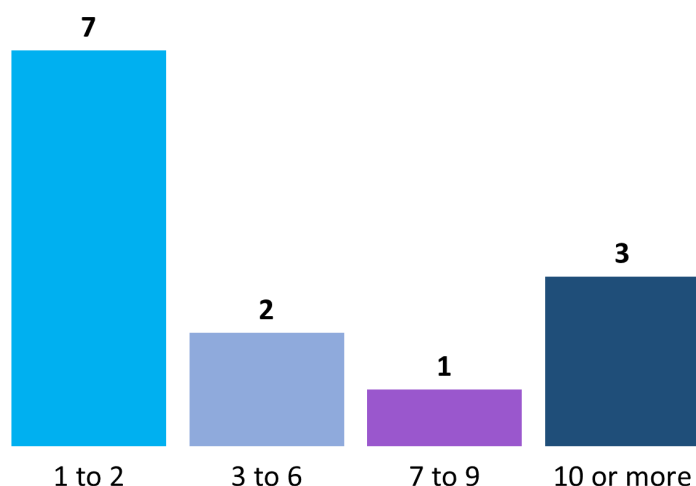
- At least 13 pupils (2%) recognised they had experienced homelessness in the past year
- 1 in 10 pupils were at a high or immediate risk of youth homelessness
- 7% of pupils had been forced to sleep away from home during the past year
- 15% of pupils got into lots of conflict with their parents or guardians
- 3% of pupils were worried they may run away or be asked to leave home this year
- There is no or low risk of school disengagement for 65% of pupils at high risk of youth homelessness

Current or recent experiences of youth homelessness

Pupils were asked two questions that indicate current or recent experiences of youth homelessness. The first question directly asked pupils how many times they had experienced homelessness, and the second was an indirect question that asked pupils where they usually slept in the past month – several responses to this question indicated possible homelessness. The responses are described below.

Pupils were first asked; *'During the past year, how many different times have you found yourself homeless for one or more nights? (Being homeless means sleeping in a place where people weren't meant to sleep because you didn't have a permanent place to stay; couch surfing; staying temporarily with your friends, family, or strangers; in a homeless shelter; or supported housing project)'*. Whilst the vast majority reported no experiences, 13 young people had experienced homelessness. Figure 5 shows 7 pupils experienced 1-2 homeless episodes, two pupils experienced 3-6 episodes, and 4 experienced 4 or more episodes.

Figure 5. Count of pupils who reported experiencing homelessness in the past year, by number of times homeless (n=806)



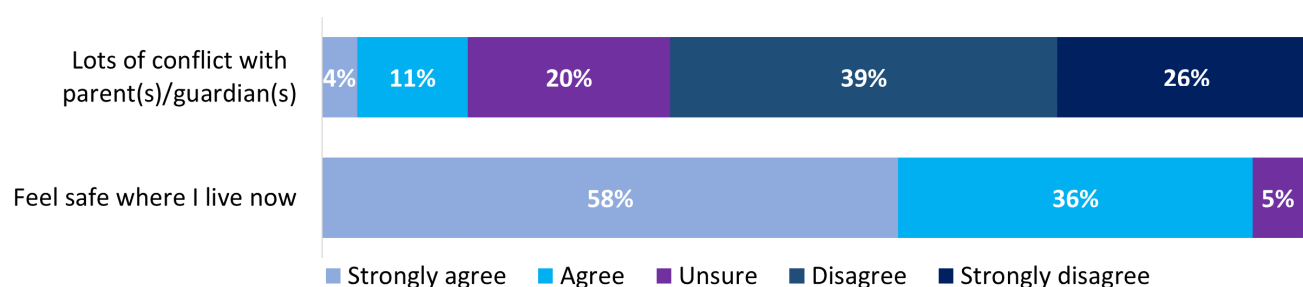
In the second question, pupils were asked; *'In the past month, where did you usually sleep?'* Whilst the vast majority of pupils (95%) usually slept at their parent(s)/guardian(s) home and a further 3% slept in another family member's home; 2 pupils slept in a hostel, hotel or B&B and an additional 2 pupils slept in a car, campground, park, or other public space. These 4 young people were usually homeless.

Risk of youth homelessness

Pupils were asked four questions about home life that indicate risk of youth homelessness. The questions are adapted from the Australian⁸ and US⁹ Upstream surveys. This section first reports responses to individual questions before presenting the results of a composite measure developed by the Upstream Cymru team.

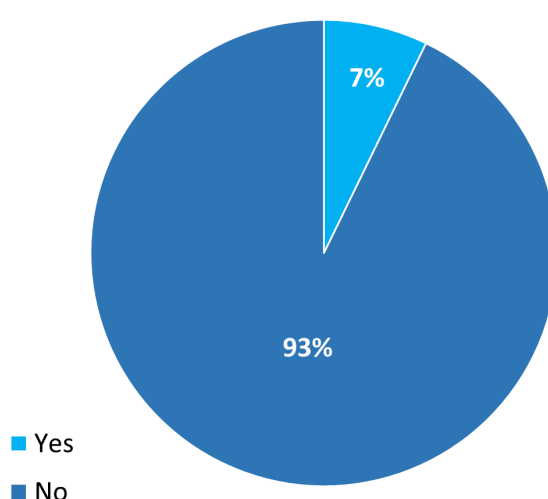
Pupils were presented with two statements about their current home life and asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with each statement (Figure 6). Approximately 15% of pupils agreed or strongly agreed that they get into lots of conflict with their parent(s)/guardian(s). A minority of pupils (6%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they feel safe where they live now.

Figure 6. Pupil perceptions of home life (n=819)



A third question about risk of youth homelessness asked; *'During the past year, did you ever sleep away from your parents or guardians because you were kicked out, ran away or didn't feel safe to stay'*. Figure 7 shows 7% of pupils had been forced to sleep away from home.

Figure 7. Proportion of pupils by whether they were forced to sleep away from home during the past year (n=819)



⁸ Australian Index of Adolescent Development 2017

⁹ Chapin Hall Student Needs Survey 2019

The fourth question asked pupils; ‘Are you worried that you might run away or be asked to leave home sometime this year?’ Most pupils were not worried (90%), 3% of pupils were worried and a further 7% of pupils were unsure (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Proportion of pupils by whether they were worried about having to run away or being asked to leave home this year (n=804)



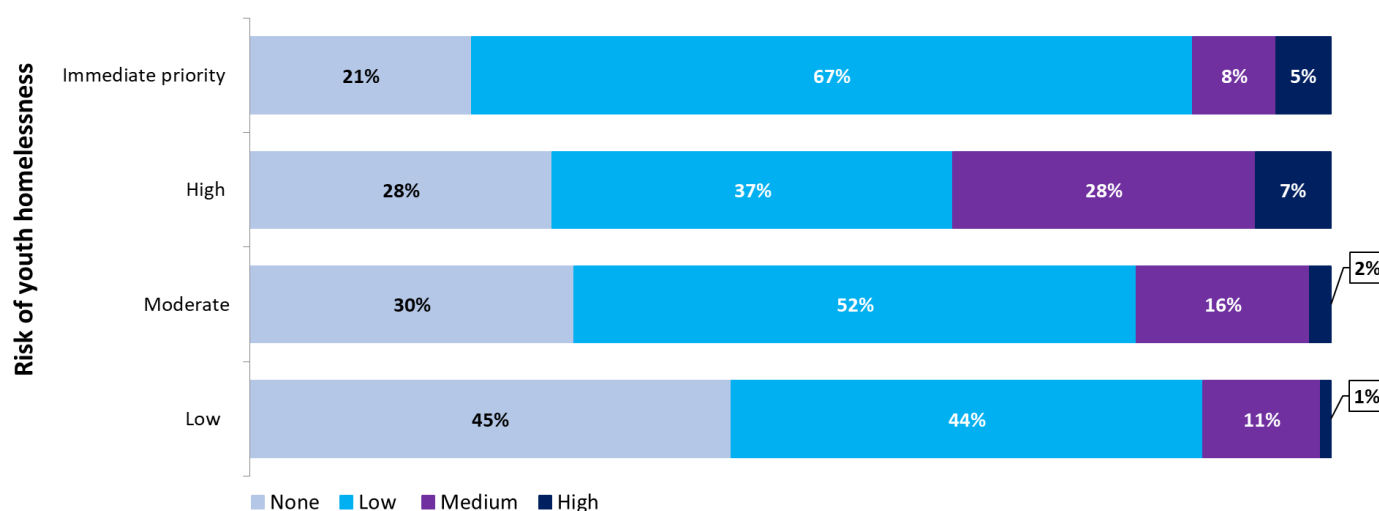
A pupil’s overall risk of youth homelessness is calculated using a composite of responses to individual questions about home life. These scores are then categorised into low¹⁰, medium¹¹, high¹² and immediate¹³ risk groups. Figure 9 shows the majority (80%) of pupils were at low risk of experiencing youth homelessness, 10% were at medium risk, and a further 10% were at high or immediate risk.

Figure 9. Overall risk of youth homelessness (n=819)



It is often assumed that young people at risk of youth homelessness will also be at risk of school disengagement. Figure 10 shows this is not always the case. There was no or low risk of school disengagement for 65% of the pupils at high risk of youth homelessness. Even more strikingly, there was no or low risk of school disengagement for 88% of the pupils at immediate risk of youth homelessness.

Figure 10. Breakdown of risk of school disengagement by youth homelessness risk bands (n=819)



¹⁰Pupils are low risk if they do not meet the criteria to be classified as medium, high or immediate risk.

¹¹Pupils don’t agree or disagree that they feel safe at home; OR they agree that they get into lots of conflict.

¹²Pupils 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.

¹³Pupils 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.

Family homelessness

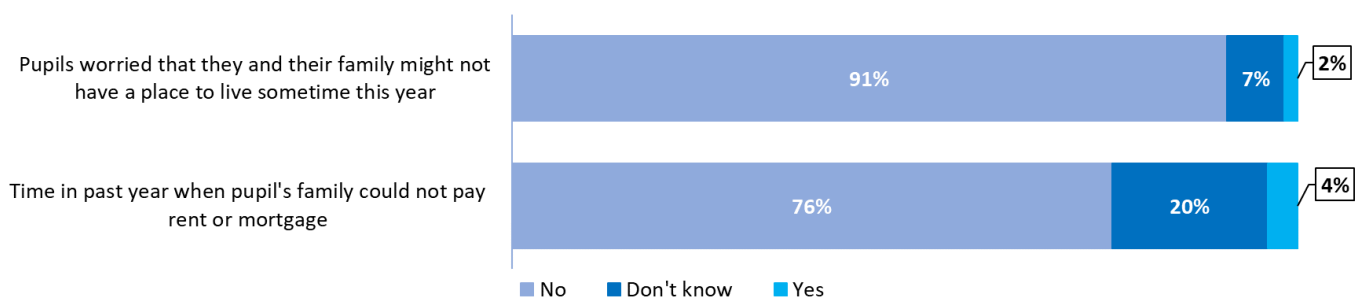
Key findings

- More than 1 in 10 pupils (13%) and their families were at high or immediate risk of family homelessness
- 4% of pupils experienced a time in the past year when their family could not pay the rent or mortgage
- 5% of pupils and their families had moved home 3 or more times in the past year
- 5% of young people and their families stayed with friends or relatives because they did not have a place to stay during the past year

Pupils were asked four questions about home life that indicate risk of family homelessness. The questions are adapted from the US¹⁴ Upstream survey. This section first reports responses to individual questions before presenting the results of a composite risk of family homelessness measure developed by the Upstream Cymru team.

Pupils were presented with two statements about the ability of their family to remain in their current home and they were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with each statement. Figure 11 shows approximately 4% of pupils experienced a time in the past year when their family could not pay the rent or mortgage and 2% of pupils were worried that they or their family might not have a place to live sometime this year.

Figure 11. Pupil concerns about the ability of their family to remain in their current home (n=798)



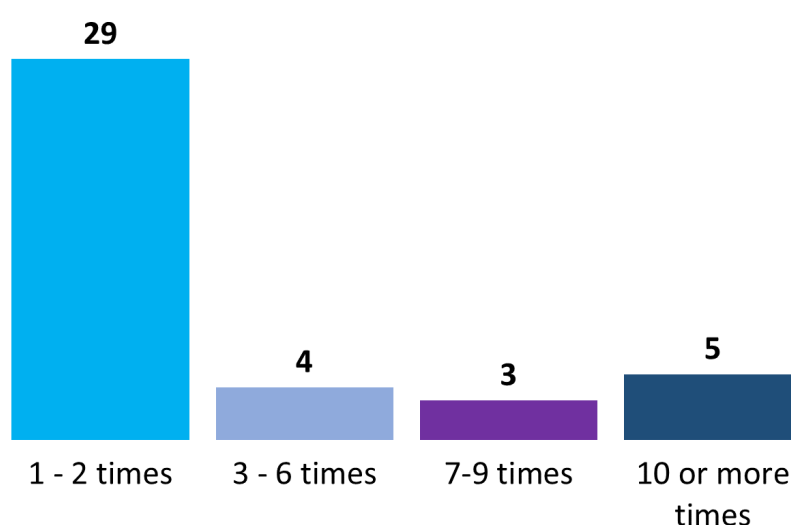
A third question asked pupils; *'How many times have you moved from one address to another during the past year?'* Frequent moves are a sign of housing instability and an indicator of potential homelessness risk. Most pupils had not moved (76%) or moved only 1-2 times (19%), and a minority (5%) had moved three or more times (Figure 12).

Figure 12. Proportion of pupils by number of times they and their families have had to move (n=819)



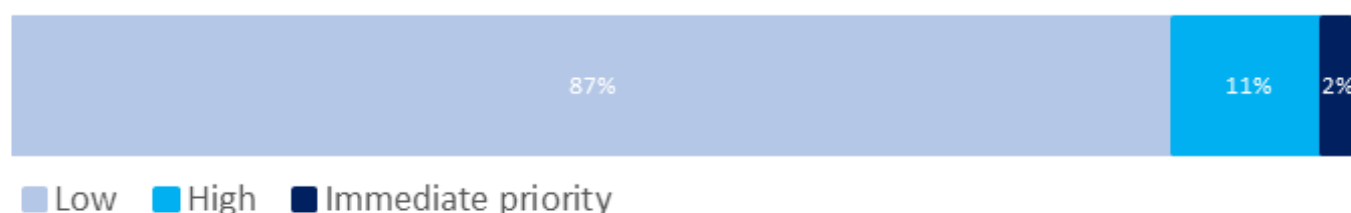
The fourth question asked pupils; *'During the past year, how many times have you and your family stayed with friends or relatives because you did not have a place to stay?'* Most pupils had not been required to stay with friends or relatives (95%). Of the 5% of young people and their families who had done so, 29 reported 1-2 occasions, and the remainder (12 pupils) reported three or more occasions (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Count of pupils who reported that their family had had to stay with friends or relatives because they did not have a place to stay, by number of times this has happened (n=819)



A pupil's overall risk of family homelessness is calculated using a composite of responses to individual questions about home life¹⁵. Pupils are then categorised into low¹⁶, high¹⁷ and immediate¹⁸ risk groups. Figure 14 shows the majority (87%) of pupils were at low risk of experiencing family homelessness, 11% were at high risk, and a further 2% were at immediate risk.

Figure 14. Overall risk of family homelessness (n=819)



¹⁵Responses to each of the four individual questions are categorised into 'at risk' or 'not at risk'. The following responses are categorised as 'at risk' of family homelessness: 1] YES, there was a time in the past year when their family could not pay the rent or mortgage; 2] YES, pupils were worried that they or their family might not have a place to live; 3] Three or more moves from one address to another; 4] One or more occasions when the pupil or their family stayed with friends or relatives because they did not have a place to stay.

¹⁶Pupils are low risk if they provide no 'at risk' responses to all four questions.

¹⁷Pupils are high risk if they provide one 'at risk' response to the four questions.

¹⁸Pupils are immediate risk if they provide two or more 'at risk' responses to the four questions.

Resilience

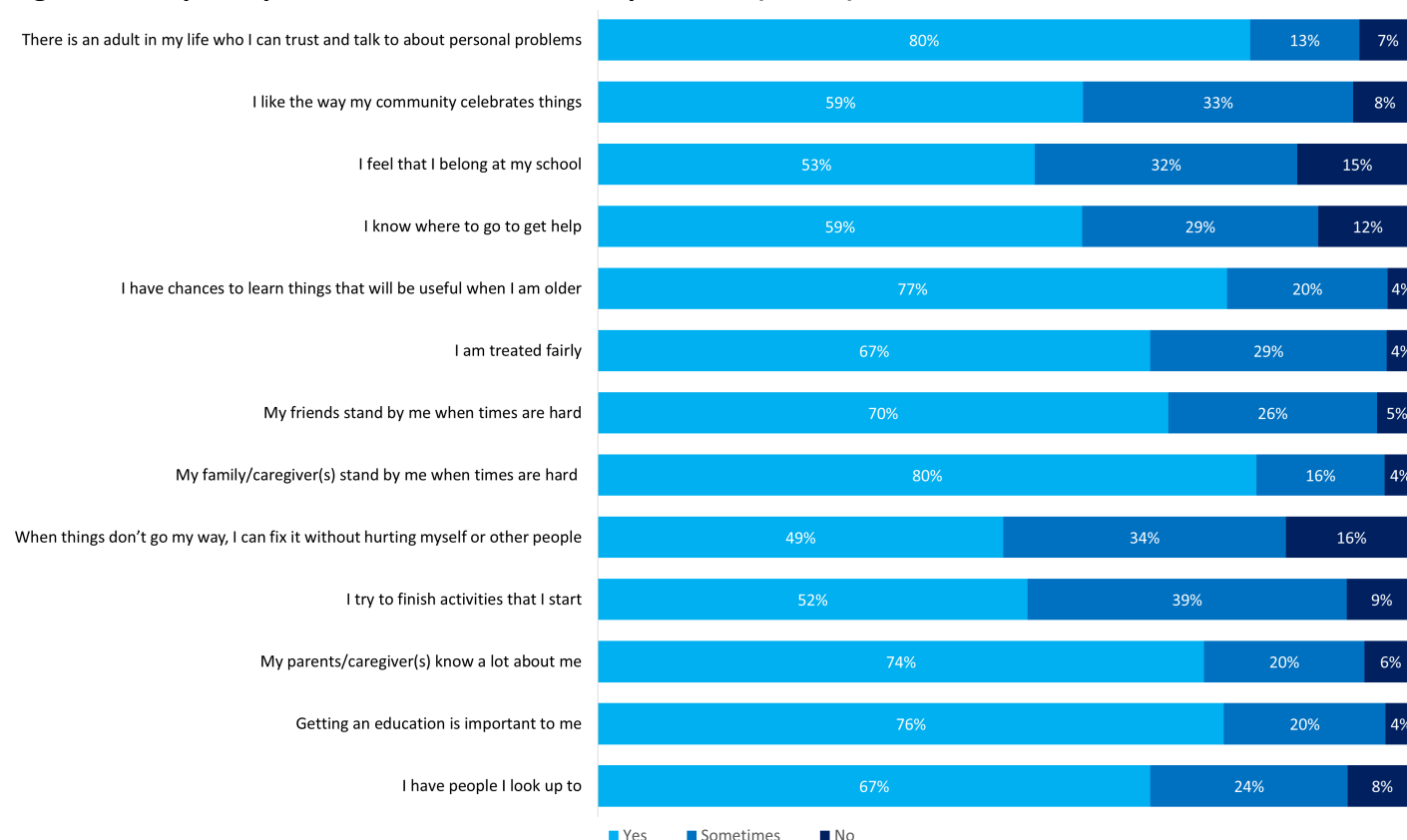
Key findings

- Three quarters (76%) of young people had high or medium levels of resilience
- Nearly a quarter (24%) of pupils had low levels of resilience
- Pupils were most likely to report 'yes' to having an adult in their lives they could trust and talk to about personal problems (80%)
- Pupils were least likely to report 'yes' (49%) to being able to fix things without hurting themselves or other people when things don't go their way

Pupils were asked a series of questions about their resilience. The questions are primarily drawn from the Children and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM)¹⁹. This section first reports responses to individual questions, before presenting findings on levels of overall pupil resilience.

Figure 15 shows pupil responses to the 12 individual statements in the CYRM. It also includes pupil responses to an additional statement on the presence of a trusted adult because previous research has demonstrated the importance of this in young people's resilience to homelessness²⁰. Pupils were *more likely* to report 'yes' to; having an adult in their lives they could trust (80%), having family/caregiver(s) who stand by them when times are hard (80%), and having chances to learn things that will be useful when they are older (77%). Pupils were *less likely* to report 'yes' to; being able to fix things without hurting themselves or other people when things don't go their way (49%), finishing activities that they start (52%), and feeling that they belong at their school (53%).

Figure 15. Pupil responses to CYRM resilience questions (n=780)

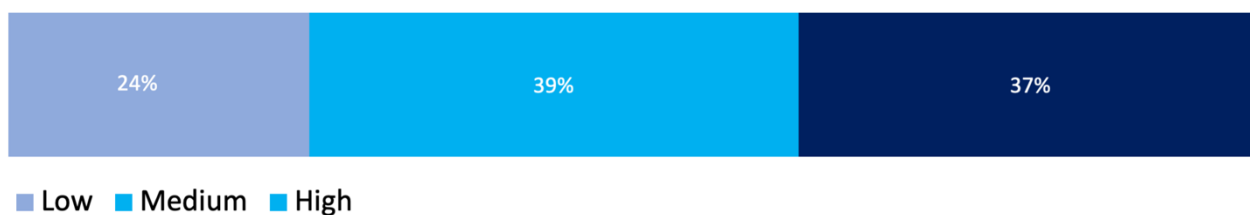


¹⁹We chose to use the 12-question, three-point response scale, easier reading level version of the CYRM. See Liebenberg, L., Ungar, M., and LeBlanc, J. C. (2013). The CYRM-12: A brief measure of resilience. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 104(2), 131-135.

²⁰See: <https://phw.nhs.wales/files/aces/voices-of-those-with-lived-experiences-of-homelessness-and-adversity-in-wales-informing-prevention-and-response-2019/PHW>

A pupil's overall resilience can be calculated by summing the score for each of the CYRM statement responses. These scores are then categorised into low, medium, and high levels of resilience using an adapted scoring system previously used by Public Health Wales²¹. Figure 16 shows nearly a quarter (24%) of pupils were experiencing low levels of resilience, 39% medium levels, and 37% high.

Figure 16. Pupil overall resilience (n=780)



²¹We have adapted a Public Health Wales scoring approach whereby pupils responding positively (stating 'yes' in their response) to fewer than 6 statements are categorised as having 'low' resilience, 6-9 as 'medium', and 10 or more as 'high'. We included an additional question and anticipate this will produce a slightly higher proportion of students scoring higher levels of resilience. See: [https://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/documents/888/ACE%20&%20Resilience%20Report%20\(Eng_final2\).pdf](https://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/documents/888/ACE%20&%20Resilience%20Report%20(Eng_final2).pdf)

Wellbeing

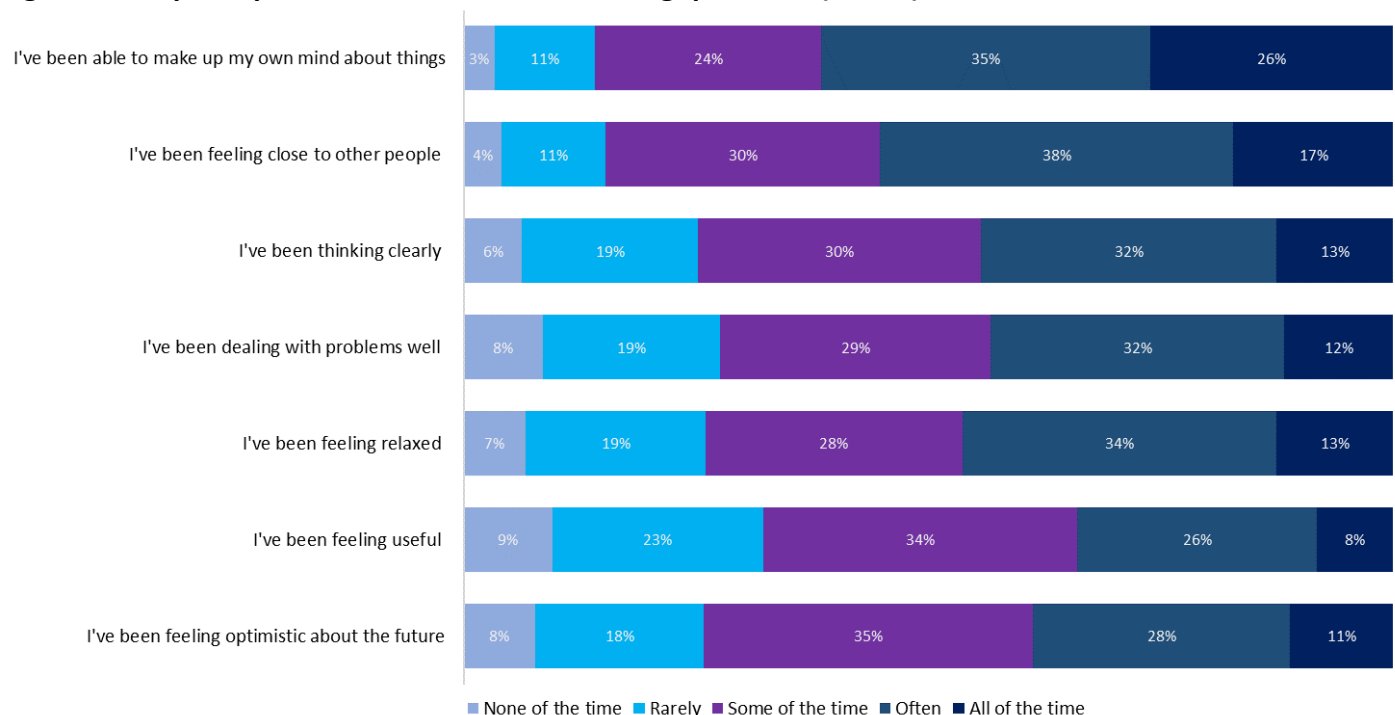
Key findings

- The majority (56%) of young people had medium levels of wellbeing and a small percentage (8%) had high levels
- A relatively high percentage of young people (37%) had low levels of wellbeing
- Pupils were most likely to report feeling able to make up their own mind about things (85% felt able at least some of the time)
- Pupils were least likely to report feeling useful (68% felt useful at least some of the time)

Pupils were asked seven questions about their wellbeing. The questions are drawn from Shortened Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS)²². This section first reports responses to individual questions, before presenting findings on levels of overall pupil wellbeing.

Figure 17 shows pupil responses to individual questions in SWEMWBS. Pupils are presented with seven statements about their feelings and thoughts. They are asked to choose the response which best describes their experience of each over the last two weeks. Pupils were more likely to report often or always being able to make up their own mind about things (61%) or feeling close to other people (55%). They were less likely to report feeling useful (34%) or feeling optimistic about the future (39%).

Figure 17. Pupil responses to SWEMWBS wellbeing questions (n=802)



²²© University of Warwick, 2006. S(WEMWBS) was developed by the Universities of Warwick, Edinburgh and Leeds in conjunction with NHS Health Scotland.

A pupil's overall wellbeing can be calculated by summing the score for each of the SWEMWBS statement responses. These scores are then categorised into low, medium and high levels of wellbeing based upon UK population norms²³. Figure 18 shows 37% of pupils experienced low levels of wellbeing, 56% medium levels, and 8% high.

Figure 18. Pupil overall wellbeing (n=802)



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

Conclusion

This early analysis of the first 833 completed Upstream Cymru pupil surveys provides important insights on the scale of homelessness risk amongst young people in the six pilot schools in Wales. Most notably, approximately 1 in 10 pupils were at high or immediate risk of youth homelessness and the majority of these young people showed no or low risk of school disengagement. Additionally, more than 1 in 10 pupils and their families were at high or immediate risk of family homelessness. We can be confident that the risks facing many of these young people and their families are not known to schools and services and the Upstream Cymru survey provides a starting point for intervention.

As Upstream Cymru develops and more students complete the survey, this analysis will be updated.