

## WHAT IS UPSTREAM CANADA?

**Upstream Canada** aims to tackle risk factors that are associated with youth homelessness, such as mental health issues, family dysfunction, housing precarity, poverty and school disengagement. Adapted from **Upstream Australia**, Upstream Canada is a social innovation led by the **Canadian Observatory on Homelessness** and **A Way Home Canada** and is operationalized through the collaborative and committed partnerships of schools and community-based social service organizations. As an early intervention prevention initiative targeting youth ages 12-16, it has demonstrated great success at two middle schools in **Kelowna, British Columbia** and it is currently being implemented in St. John's, Newfoundland.



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## YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IS A COMPLEX ISSUE

At least 35,000 Canadian youth experience homelessness annually. **Stigma, barriers to access** and **fear** prevent youth from overcoming this dire situation. Over 40% of youth first experience homelessness before they are 16, and a lack of supports means that many youth become entrenched into homelessness before being able to access help, when needs become chronic and **costly** to systems and more importantly, to human lives.

## UPSTREAM CANADA OFFERS A SOLUTION

Early school leaving can lead to homelessness and can cause a lifetime of limitations in young people's lives. Upstream Canada works to simultaneously lift social care burdens for educators and alleviate the load on health care systems and social services.

### Upstream Canada can identify and support youth through three steps:

**ONE.** Students complete a universal Student Needs Assessment (SNA) that flags a student's potential mild, moderate or high risk of school disengagement and homelessness.

**TWO.** Validation interviews (or "check in" meetings) are held between Upstream staff and students to confirm needs and desires to engage in supports.

**THREE.** Students are connected to coordinated care, based on their needs.

**The Upstream Canada process is privacy-protected and individualized to the unique needs and goals of the students.**



**The average cost per youth participant receiving Upstream support for a year was around \$800.**

## **THE COST OF HOMELESSNESS**

The cost of services for a person experiencing homelessness in Canada is **\$53,144 annually**. Over the course of adulthood, the total cumulative expenditure is exponentially higher. In Canada, **more than 300,000 students face significant barriers to graduating high school**, putting them at risk of homelessness with the potential to cost billions of dollars in lost tax revenue, social assistance, and health care costs. Importantly, 50% of all persons who are homeless had their first experience when they were youth. By not effectively helping them when they were young, many eventually become chronically homeless with complex health and mental health problems.

Preventing youth homelessness is not only the right thing to do, it presents significant long-term cost savings to public systems.

## **SNAPSHOT: UPSTREAM KELOWNA, B.C.**

Two middle schools in Kelowna offer the Upstream Canada program for grade eight students. In 2022/23, the average cost per youth participant receiving Upstream support for a year was around \$800. The total expenditure, including in-kind contributions, was \$567,038, which served approximately 59 youth per month, with services lasting for an average of 5 months. However, students with greater needs could receive support for twelve months or even longer. Since 2021, 155 students have used Upstream Kelowna supports and have been diverted from emergency services.

“We as teachers, obviously, care about them. But some of them don’t make that connection. And for them to be able to connect with someone and see that there’s a way out now, instead of waiting until they’re out of school to have a way out, I think it’s really cool.”

**UPSTREAM KELOWNA SCHOOL EDUCATOR**

Upstream Kelowna has been funded through **generous corporate and philanthropic donors** and requires sustainable funding to continue supporting youth to thrive and prevent homelessness.

# UPSTREAM KELOWNA BY THE NUMBERS

## 2022-2023 PARTICIPANTS DEMOGRAPHICS:

53% Children of separation or divorce

41% 2SLGBTQAI+

33% Indigenous, Metis, First Nations

24% Learning disabilities

18% Current or previous involvement in child welfare

3% Newcomer/refugee

## SERVICES REQUESTED BY PARTICIPANTS:



**MENTAL HEALTH**

**73%**



**MENTORSHIP  
(SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL  
SUPPORT)**

**86%**



**ACADEMIC, SCHOOL,  
ATTENDANCE**

**79%**

**UPSTREAM**  
CANADA



**TWO MIDDLE SCHOOLS WITH  
744 STUDENTS**

- 603 students participated in the Upstream Student Needs Assessment (SNA). That's 81% of the students.
- 100 students consented to Upstream supports
- 60% STUDENTS WERE UNDER THE RADAR and not known to the school as being at risk
- 266 students were identified as at risk of school disengagement

"I definitely wasn't obvious. I am almost a straight A student and I'm pretty good in class and stuff, but I was struggling with home stuff. And [teachers] would never know that. Kids are just pretty good at hiding it."

**UPSTREAM KELOWNA YOUTH PARTICIPANT**

## UPSTREAM KELOWNA IMPACT 2022-2023

The work of Upstream Kelowna has been impactful in increasing equity and access for the community's vulnerable youth, for better life trajectories. These outcomes demonstrate the potential for significant savings for social services and healthcare systems through preventing young people from needing complex care and urgent services down the road.

"I've had the vice principal pull me aside and say, 'we need you to stay. Don't leave!' They'll say, 'We want this in every school.'"

UPSTREAM SUPPORT PERSON

### INCREASING IMPACT

As Upstream Canada is sustained and scaled across communities, the goal is to continue supporting young people who experience extreme barriers to resiliency and preventing more youth from becoming homeless and disengaged from school.

Ultimately, the goal is to increase the impact of Upstream Kelowna by expanding to all eight public middle schools in the community.

### THE GOAL IS TO CONTINUE SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE

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