

The Upstream Project

Preventing Youth Homelessness by Working in Schools

The best way to address youth homelessness is to work upstream and prevent its occurrence in the first place. Countries such as Australia have achieved great success in addressing youth homelessness by developing integrated community responses that operate within the school system. Why schools? Because virtually every young person who becomes homeless was in school at one point, and very likely was in contact with an adult (teacher, guidance counselor, coach) who knew something was wrong.

In Canada, our approach to youth homelessness needs to shift from a focus on helping young people after they become homeless, to doing everything we can to prevent it altogether. The Upstream Project will support communities in the implementation of effective school-based strategies, in order to reduce the number of young people who become homeless. The good news is we already know how to do this.

What is the Upstream Project?

The Upstream Project is part of an international 'Living Lab' focused on taking the innovative approaches developed in Australia and adapting them to the Canadian context. The Upstream Project is particularly interested in adapting the evidence-based successes of **The Geelong Project (TGP)**, a ground breaking partnership that helps young people at risk of homelessness. TGP utilizes a 'community of schools and youth services' model of early intervention for young people who are at risk of disengaging from school, becoming homeless and entering the justice system. With TGP, all young people, in any given school, are assessed using an evidence-based assessment tool. Those who are identified as being at higher risk of homelessness are offered comprehensive interventions based on a determination of both needs and assets. Young people and their families are provided with necessary supports aimed at solidifying family relations (if it is safe for the youth to do so), increasing school engagement and success, and reducing the risk of family breakdown, dropping out of school and involvement in crime. The unique TGP model of youth homelessness intervention has been extensively evaluated over the past five years and has a strong evidence base.

What does the Upstream Project hope to achieve?

The goal of the Upstream Project is to transform the way we respond to youth homelessness by shifting the focus to prevention. Over the next five years, we hope to support 25 Canadian communities (up to five a year) with planning and implementation of school-based prevention programs modeled on the Geelong project. The outcome will be a demonstrated reduction in the number of young people who experience homelessness.

How will this be done?

Drawing on the strengths and capacities of core project partners, The Upstream Project will educate, inspire and support communities to do this work. The core objectives that will drive the activities of the project include:

- a) **Knowledge Generation** - Develop the knowledge base and resources to support communities and governments with the planning and implementation of school-based youth homelessness prevention strategies and practices.
- b) **Community Engagement** - Build interest, capacity and readiness in communities, schools and government to support a shift from emergency response to prevention.

- c) **Technical Support** – Provide communities with technical support to plan and implement school-based youth homelessness prevention interventions.
- d) **Program Implementation** – Provide funding to support implementation at the community level.
- e) **Evaluation** – Monitor implementation and results to demonstrate a reduction in youth homelessness.

Project Activities and Preliminary Budget*

Year 1 - Development phase

Activity	Description	Cost
Toolkit	Development of a web-based resource to give communities the tools they need to plan, implement and evaluate the program	\$50,000
Project Pilot	To adapt, test and evaluate the Canadian version of the Geelong Project	\$115,000
Community Facilitator	One FTE staff position (benefits included) to provide technical support and facilitate community adaptation of The Upstream Project	\$80,000
Community Engagement	Promoting the Upstream Project to communities and government, facilitating the selection of community sites eligible for funding	\$20,000
Overhead	Administrative costs	\$40,000
TOTAL		\$305,000

Year 2-6 - Operational phase

Community Facilitator	One FTE staff position (benefits included) to provide technical support and facilitate community adaptation of The Upstream Project	\$80,000
Community Engagement	Promoting the Upstream Project to communities and government, facilitating the selection of community sites eligible for funding	\$20,000
Community Start Up funds	Funds for communities to support planning and implementation of the Geelong project in their first year. Communities will be selected through a competitive process.	\$100,000 (x5 annually)
Overhead	Administrative costs.	\$60,000
TOTAL	Per year	\$660,000

*Budget numbers are estimates and subject to change.

The Upstream Project: A Collaborative Venture

The Upstream Project involves collaboration between the following national organizations, each of which will play a unique role in the planning and delivery of the project:

Raising the Roof: As Canada’s leading homelessness charity, RtR provides strong and effective national leadership and raises public awareness. RtR will be responsible for administration of funds and supporting communities in the planning and implementation of the Upstream Project.

Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, a university-based research consortium committed to conducting and mobilizing research so that it has a greater impact on policy and practice, will provide thought-leadership to the initiative, tool kit development and evaluation support.

A Way Home is a national coalition of organizations working together to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness. A Way Home will be responsible for pan-Canadian community engagement, government relations, and selection of communities for participation.

Push for Change is a national charity led by Joe Roberts, a successful businessman who was homeless as a teenager. Joe will push a shopping cart across Canada, raising awareness regarding youth homelessness prevention, engaging communities, and raising funds for the Upstream Project.