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Dissertation:

**How a youth work approach can work towards  
preventing youth homelessness in Wales.**

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## Abstract

Youth homelessness in Wales remains a critical and complex issue, affecting *“individuals between the ages of 13 to 26, and who experience rooflessness, houselessness or insecure housing without a legal guardian”* (Perez, 2020, p.4). Despite policy efforts and statutory interventions, fragmented systems continue to leave many young people without timely or effective support. This research study explores how a youth work approach, grounded in relational practice, voluntary engagement and rights-based support, can contribute to the prevention of youth homelessness in Wales.

The study is situated within a shifting policy landscape, including the proposed Statutory Framework for Youth Work and the Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Bill (2025). These exciting developments reflect growing recognition of youth work’s potential to address complex social issues, yet its integration into statutory systems remains inconsistent. The research aimed to bridge the gap between theory and practice, offering an evidence-based insight into how youth work can be embedded more effectively within homelessness prevention frameworks.

Using a phenomenological methodology, the study draws on the lived experiences of Youth Homelessness Coordinators across all twenty-two local authorities. Data was collected through an anonymised survey and semi structured interviews, allowing for rich thematic analysis. The findings were presented through a narrative citation approach, reflecting the study’s interpretivist epistemology and commitment to relational practice.

Six key themes emerged from the literature and data analysis, early intervention and prevention, youth work values and principles, challenges and limitations, collaborative working, measuring impact and future practice and policy development. Participants consistently emphasised the importance of early intervention, not just as a reactive measure but as a proactive, youth-led process. Relational engagement before crisis points was identified as essential, with youth workers uniquely positioned to build trust and resilience amongst young people.

Systemic barriers such as funding instability, fragmented services and statutory tensions were found to constrain youth work's preventative potential. The study also highlighted the limitations of traditional impact measurement tools, which often fail to capture the relational and developmental outcomes central to youth work. Participants advocated for a mixed-methods evaluation framework that prioritises youth voice and qualitative feedback.

The conceptual framework underpinning the study is grounded in critical realism, supported by Thompson's PCS model (Thompson, 2006) and the ethical lens of Bessant and Watts phronetic practice (Bessant and Watts, 2024). These frameworks enabled a nuanced understanding of youth homelessness across personal, cultural and structural dimensions.

Ultimately, the study concludes that youth work offers a distinctive and transformative lens for preventing youth homelessness in Wales. However, its potential can only be realised through strategic integration into national and local frameworks, sustainable funding and recognition of its relational ethos. The findings inform a series of recommendations aimed at embedding youth work more effectively into homelessness prevention strategies, ensuring that young people receive developmentally appropriate, rights-based support tailored to their evolving needs.

## Introduction

Youth homelessness remains a pressing social issue in Wales, with increasing numbers of young people experiencing housing instability and insecure accommodation. Recent data shows that more than 10,800 people, including 2,500 children, are living in temporary accommodation across Wales (Welsh Government, 2025), illustrating the scale of unmet housing need. Under the Housing (Wales) Act (2014), a young person is considered homeless if they have no accommodation they are entitled to occupy, cannot gain access to, or it is unreasonable for them to remain due to significant risk or other special circumstances. However, youth homelessness is not only a housing issue, but a complex phenomenon shaped by personal, cultural and structural factors. The impact on young people is profound, often resulting in long term trauma, disrupted development and exclusion from education, employment and community life (Donaldson et al.,2021).

## Rationale

This study is driven by a critical need to explore alternative approaches to preventing youth homelessness in Wales, as evidence shows that many young people continue to ‘fall through the cracks’ of fragmented services despite ongoing policy efforts and statutory interventions (End Youth Homelessness Cymru, 2020). Research highlights that almost half of people experiencing homelessness in Wales first became homeless before the age of 21, and the majority experienced repeated episodes, demonstrating systemic failures in early prevention and joined up support (End Youth Homelessness Cymru, 2021). Traditional responses have historically centred on crisis management rather than sustained prevention, a pattern the Welsh Government acknowledges in its call for a radical shift towards early, preventative action across public services (Welsh Government, 2021).

Within this context, youth work is understood as a distinct rights-based educational practice that engages young people voluntarily, builds supportive relationships, and promotes holistic personal and social development. Sessions are delivered across both formal and informal educational settings and in collaboration with other services (Welsh Government, 2024; Council of Europe characteristics as summarised in FEANTSA, 2024). Crucially, youth work encompasses different models. Some focus on the personal, relational support, informal education, therapeutic and developmental

work. While others emphasise structural change, collective action, rights-advocacy and tackling the systemic drivers of exclusion. This breadth is recognised in contemporary Welsh policy (statutory guidance proposals and youth-work entitlement) and in European frames that stress both relational practice and youth participation in shaping services (Welsh Government, 2024; FEANTSA, 2024). In addressing youth homelessness, the study therefore interrogates both layers of causality, the personal impacts and trauma experienced by young people, and underlying structural conditions. Underlying conditions could include housing scarcity, cost of living crisis and service fragmentation which have been highlighted by policy reviews in Wales as requiring earlier, coordinated prevention (Welsh Government 2022/2024; Senedd Research, 2018). On this basis, the argument advanced here is that youth work offers a distinctive preventative lens precisely because it can operate at both levels, building voluntary trust with individuals, whilst brokering multi-agency responses and advocating for systemic change (FEANTSA, 2024; Welsh Government, 2024).

Given these conceptual and structural tensions within current homelessness prevention approaches, the rationale for this research stems from the researcher's previous professional experience as a Local Authority housing officer, during which time they frequently engaged with young people at a time of acute crisis. Through this work, the researcher observed the limitations of reactive service models that intervene only once homelessness has occurred, as well as the transformative potential of youth work when applied proactively. These experiences highlighted a clear need for preventative, youth-centred approaches within statutory systems. Consequently, this study aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice by providing evidence-based insights into how youth work can be embedded more effectively within homelessness prevention frameworks.

### Contextual Statement

In Wales, youth work is undergoing a period of reform with the Welsh Government consulting on, and now moving toward, the implementation of a Statutory Framework for Youth Work. This includes statutory directions, and an entitlement-based approach to planning and delivery (Welsh Government, 2024; consultation outcome updated 2026). This agenda has sat alongside national work to strengthen the legislative and institutional basis for youth work, culminating in ministerial statements on a national

body for youth work, and confirmation that the statutory framework will be brought into force (Welsh Government, 2025; CWVYS, 2026). In parallel, Youth Homelessness Coordinator roles have been introduced within local Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF) partnerships, to coordinate early identification and multi-agency support for young people at risk of homelessness (Welsh Government, 2022).

These developments reflect a growing recognition of youth work's potential to address complex social issues including homelessness, and to embed early prevention within public services (Welsh Government, 2023; Senedd Research, 2018). However, despite policy momentum, integration of youth work into statutory systems remains inconsistent, with the sector itself acknowledging historical vulnerabilities in the legislative basis and uneven local implementation. Issues the statutory framework aims to resolve (Merthyr Tydfil CBC 2025; Welsh Government, 2024). Consequently, youth work's preventative contribution can be undervalued or misunderstood within multi-agency settings, a concern repeatedly flagged in national reviews calling for clearer accountability, sustainable funding and a stronger profile for youth work across public services (Interim Youth Work Board, 2021; Welsh Government, 2025).

The proposed Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Bill (2025) introduces a promising statutory 'Ask and Act' duty, requiring specified public authorities to identify individuals at risk of homelessness and make appropriate referrals to ensure early prevention (Welsh Government, 2025). Although encouraging, the Bill does not fully embed youth work into education or housing systems, missing a critical opportunity to utilise its relational and developmental strengths. While the Bill introduces the new duty to strengthen early identification, it does not integrate youth work into key structures such as schools or housing services, despite evidence showing that youth work's voluntary, rights-based and relational approach can support early prevention within multi-agency systems (Welsh Government, 2025; Interim youth Work Board, 2021). This study is situated within this evolving policy landscape, aiming to inform future practice and contribute to a more coherent, youth-centred approach to homelessness prevention.

## Aims and Objectives

The overarching aim of this study is to explore how a youth work approach can contribute to the prevention of youth homelessness in Wales. This aim is addressed through the following critical questions:

1. What are the perceptions of Youth Homelessness Coordinators regarding the effectiveness of youth work in preventing homelessness?
2. What challenges and limitations do practitioners face in delivering youth work-led prevention?
3. Which youth work principles and practices are most effective in supporting young people at risk of homelessness?
4. How can youth work be embedded more effectively within national and local homelessness strategies?

These questions are explored through a phenomenological methodology, capturing the lived experiences and professional insights of Youth Homelessness Coordinators (YHC). YHC's are specialist youth work practitioners within local Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPf) who lead early identification, coordinate multi-agency support and target intervention for young people at the risk of homelessness (Welsh Government, 2022) across all twenty-two local authorities in Wales.

## Chapter 1 - Literature review

### Introduction

Recent evidence shows that levels of homelessness continue to rise, not only in Wales but across the United Kingdom, with 358,370 households assessed by local authorities in England in 2023-24 – a 10.4% increase from the previous year (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2024). Defining youth homelessness is not straightforward, as there is no single, universally accepted definition across the UK, with statutory and voluntary sector bodies applying different thresholds and criteria. This lack of consistency presents challenges for monitoring, comparison and designing effective preventative strategies. However, it can be agreed that youth homelessness is widely recognised as a complex social issue with significant personal, cultural and structural dimensions. Its impact can be profound, affecting young people's safety, wellbeing, participation in education and long-term life choices.

Youth homelessness is frequently characterised by early onset and repeated episodes, with young people often cycling in and out of statutory services, due to limited early prevention and fragmented support pathways. However, re-presentation rates in statutory services are shaped by their open and closed nature. The data also reflects the limitation of legally mandated services, a sentiment echoed by Gallon (2017), as support often ends once statutory duties are discharged. This limitation of statutory services is echoed by Fitzpatrick and Davies (2021), who argue that rigid frameworks and procedural silos often prevent sustained support upon case closure, leaving young people without continuity of care. High workloads amongst housing officers restrict their ability to assess and respond to young people's broader support needs. It is anticipated that the proposed Homelessness and Social Housing Allocations (Wales) Bill will address these gaps by embedding a more proactive, rights-based approach to youth homeless prevention.

Using Thompson's PCS model (2006), youth homelessness can be understood across three interrelated levels. At the personal level, young people may experience trauma, stigma and emotional distress. At a cultural level, societal stereotypes and misconceptions about homelessness can lead to exclusion and discrimination. Finally,

at the structural level, systemic issues such as welfare reform, housing shortages, and fragmented service provision perpetuate cycles of homelessness. This multi-layered analysis reinforces the need for holistic, youth-centred approaches that address not only immediate housing needs but also the broader social and emotional dimensions of homelessness.

Through a critical examination of the literature, this research study evaluates the extent to which youth work is positioned to act as an effective preventative strategy for youth homelessness. Youth work, as conceptualised in this study, draws on both its personal/relational functions and its structural role, which includes advocacy and participation across systems.

### Early intervention and prevention

A consistent theme emerging from both the literature review and the research study was the effectiveness of early intervention and prevention, particularly identifying the point at which these measures are most impactful. Evaluating Youth Homeless Coordinators' perceptions of what works in early intervention, was a fundamental part of this study.

Family conflict and relational disruption remain one of the most frequently cited triggers of youth homelessness in the UK, with studies concluding that between 59% and 80% of young people leave home due to relationship breakdown (Centrepoin, 2016). Mackie (2023) also identifying 'relationship breakdown' as a key cause, one that could potentially be relieved through earlier, more robust, youth-led preventative approaches. Further evidence also demonstrates that youth work-based early intervention can prevent relationship breakdown from escalating into homelessness (Rock Trust & YouthLink Scotland, 2026). Mackie along with other prominent scholars including Fitzpatrick et al. (2021) and O'Regan, Gould Ellen and House (2021), strongly advocate for '*moving upstream*' in homelessness prevention. However, the authors also emphasise that this approach frequently falls short when the wider structural drivers of homelessness remain unaddressed. Particularly with regards to welfare reform, rising living costs and persistent shortages in affordable housing. Their

work highlights that without tackling these underlying socio-economic conditions, upstream prevention alone cannot meaningfully reduce homelessness.

The Upstream approach refers to early-stage prevention that identifies young people at risk of homelessness before crisis point. It focuses on universal screening in schools, early identification risk factors such as relationship conflict, and coordinated youth-centred support to prevent homelessness from occurring. The model, adapted from The Geelong Project in Australia, and now used in Wales and other countries, has shown reductions in homelessness service presentations by intervening earlier and more holistically (Gaetz et al., 2021; Mackenzie, 2018, cited in Mackie, 2023). However, despite these reported outcomes, the practical value of such approaches remains contested, particularly when questions persist about how their impact is evidenced in the Welsh context.

Ongoing efforts by Welsh Government and leading homelessness charities place increasing emphasis on evidencing the reduction of youth homelessness through quantitative data, as reflected in the Welsh Government's Ending Homelessness Outcomes Framework, which establishes detailed metrics and data indicators to measure progress (The Wallich, 2023). However, such metrics risk overlooking broader socio-economic contributors, which continue to place significant pressure on family cohesion, resulting in severe overcrowding which can contribute to youth homelessness (American Psychological Association, 2022). Without parallel measures to address the structural drivers of homelessness, early interventions risk becoming tokenistic, a notion supported by the Local Government Association (2020), which argues that preventing homelessness upstream, requires cross-service structural action, rather than relying solely on reactive early-stage interventions.

While there is a substantial body of literature examining early intervention approaches to homelessness, several systematic reviews highlight that the evidence base evaluating youth-work-led preventative interventions, remains very limited (Chapin Hall, 2019; Morton et al. 2020; Rambaldini-Gooding et al., 2024). Much of the existing research focuses on the impact of early childhood trauma and the resulting reliance on statutory services into adulthood. Coram (2020) concludes that young people who depend on statutory services and the welfare system go onto experience stigma,

which can lead to further isolation and segregation from social interaction into adulthood. The fear of stigma and segregation can present as a barrier to seeking support. Pavlakis et al. (2023) emphasise that students experiencing homelessness do not self-refer, largely due to perceived societal stereotypes and stigma associated with homelessness. This is precisely where youth work can play a critical preventative role, as its relational and youth-centred ethos can help reduce stigma and create safe, voluntary spaces for engagement. Although youth work is frequently positioned within early intervention and prevention agendas, the extent to which youth work contributes depends heavily on the model of youth work adopted, whether relational, informal educative, rights-based or structural/advocacy orientated, each shaping its preventative potential in different ways.

### Youth Work Values & Principles

A key component of this research is to explore how a youth work approach can work towards preventing youth homelessness in Wales with the aim of informing future policy and practice. This focus is particularly relevant in light of a recent report by LandAid (2023), which highlights how the responsibility for preventing youth homelessness has historically fallen upon statutory service providers, such as housing officers, teachers and Social Workers, often with limited impact. This is reinforced by the FEANTSA report (Perez, 2024), which not only argues for integrating youth work principles into homelessness services, but clarifies that young people experiencing homelessness require a youth-orientated approach. In this context, a youth-oriented approach involves designing support specifically around the developmental needs, lived experiences and pathways of young people, recognising that their trajectories into and out of homelessness, differ significantly from those of adults. FEANTSA described this shift as moving from being '*a homeless service working with young people*' to '*a youth service whose clients happen to be experiencing homelessness*'. This thought-provoking stance emphasises the need to centre young people's voices, developmental stage and transition to adulthood within service design and delivery (Perez, 2024).

This is a contrasting approach to that of LandAid which frames youth homelessness primarily, as a statutory responsibility. Gillon (2020) substantiates the findings

presented in both reports by highlighting the challenges statutory services face in delivering effective preventative interventions. Another key finding of their research identified that '*relationship-based practice was seen as key to inclusion and early intervention*' (Gillon, 2020, p.1). This is where quality youth work has the potential to contribute to youth homelessness prevention, through trusted relationships, and a deep and sustained approach. By examining these relationships, together with the most effective prevention methods for young people, this research study reinforces this approach.

The centrality of relationships has long been recognised as a defining feature of youth work practice. Youth work operates through both informal and non-formal educational processes, where learning emerges from dialogue, voluntary participation and the co-construction of meaning. Smith (2001) argues that informal education is rooted in conversation, association and relationship-building, positioning the youth worker as an educator who engages with young people through everyday interactions rather than an imposed curriculum. Similarly, Batsleer (2008) highlights that informal learning in youth work depends upon trusting, egalitarian relationships that enable young people to explore identity, develop agency and reflect critically on their lived experiences. These perspectives align closely with the Youth Work in Wales: Principles and Purposes document (CWVYS, 2022) which emphasises empathy, mutual respect and partnership-based practice as fundamental to youth work. Within this context, relationship-based practice is not simply a method, but the medium through which youth work achieves its educative and developmental aims, making it particularly relevant to homelessness prevention, where sustained, trusting relationships are essential.

These principles form the foundation of youth work practice and remain central to any recommendations for future practice. Youth work values and principles also emerged as a key theme throughout the research interviews, aligning closely with the study's objective to explore existing research on youth work approaches to tackling youth homelessness. This convergence highlights the importance of relational, rights-based, and youth-centred practice in shaping effective responses to youth homelessness in Wales. Mackie (2023, p;15) also presents evidence which concludes that homeless prevention strategies must go beyond reactive responses at a time of

crisis, to universal proactive early intervention strategies. Mackie concurs that the success of such strategies relies on youth work's distinctive ethos and professional values. These values facilitate relationships built on trust, empowerment and mutual respect, all of which remain at the core of the Youth Work approach.

This positionality is reinforced by Bessant and Watts (2024), who argue that youth work should be driven by meaningful trusted relationships and a shared understanding, rather than rigid outcome measures. However, evidence on its effectiveness in preventing youth homelessness remains limited, a sentiment echoed in a systematic review by Rambaldini-Gooding et al (2024). The review concluded that while these relational and youth-focussed approaches are promising, evidence of their effectiveness in preventing youth homelessness remains limited. This substantiates the fact that further research is needed to understand how these practices are enacted, highlighting a gap this study seeks to explore.

The ethical framework proposed by Bessant and Watts (2024) provides a valuable lens through which to examine the role of youth work in preventing youth homelessness. They reaffirm that empathy, consistency and humanity form the foundations of these sincere, trusting relationships. Young people, particularly within the housing context, can often experience fractured trust with statutory services. The focus on relational practice, a caring non-judgmental approach, aligns with the aims and objectives of this study, particularly in evaluating early intervention and prevention methods. By describing youth work as '*phronetic practice*,' grounded in practical wisdom and ethical based professional judgement. Bessant and Watts emphasise that effective youth work cannot follow a fixed rule book but instead requires practitioners to draw on contextual understanding and respond to the unique needs, circumstances and lived experiences of each young person. Bessant and Watts' conceptually complex article, however, is entirely theoretical and difficult to translate into practice as it lacks empirical evidence. This is largely because relational, ethical and phronetic practices are complex, context-dependent and difficult to evidence through traditional, outcomes-based evaluation tools, making empirical testing challenging.

## Challenges and Limitations

This literature review explores the function of Youth Work in Wales within preventative frameworks and considers how this can inform future policy and practice. In attempting to strengthen the methodological basis of this study, a critical perspective informed by Morciano & Merico (2017) is incorporated. Their work outlines a tool for evaluating early intervention methods and highlights how young people can address social inequalities through empowerment and participation in youth work. However, their model also illustrates a key limitation within the preventative agenda. While youth work has the potential to challenge inequalities, evaluating these processes are complex, context-dependent and often difficult to evidence. Taken together, these studies provide a complementary theoretical foundation of critical practice and ethical reflection, but they also reveal the challenges involved in demonstrating how youth work contributes to homeless prevention, a gap this study seeks to explore. Alongside these conceptual challenges, the literature highlights several structural limitations that constrain the preventative potential of youth work in Wales.

A recurring theme throughout both the literature review and participant interviews was the precarious nature of youth work funding in Wales. The Welsh Government's Youth Work Funding Review (2024-2025) identified significant disparities in funding allocation across local authorities, with many youth services reliant on short-term, project-based grants. This instability undermines long-term planning and contributes to high staff turnover, making it difficult to maintain the continuity of relationships which are central to youth work practice. The review also highlighted the lack of a cohesive national funding strategy, resulting in fragmented service delivery and limited career progression for youth workers. These challenges are particularly acute in the voluntary sector, where funding insecurity can lead to service closures and the erosion of professional standards. Despite evidence of youth works social and economic value (Welton et al., 2025) there remains a gap in longitudinal research examining how instability affects outcomes for young people, especially in homelessness prevention. The report by Marshall et al. (2021), commissioned by Welsh Government to inform the development of the Youth Work Strategy, concluded that addressing this gap is essential to ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of youth work in Wales. While the report offers valuable insights into the challenges facing youth work in

Wales, particularly around funding instability, its rigour must be critically assessed. Commissioned by the Welsh Government to inform its own Youth Work Strategy, the report may be subject to policy alignment and bias, where findings reinforce research existing agendas rather than challenge them. Tracy (2010) emphasises the need for sincerity, transparency and credibility in qualitative research. In this context, the reports positionality and purpose raise questions about its capacity to produce policy-challenging recommendations. Although it draws on stakeholder perspectives and sector-wide consultation, the absence of longitudinal data and independent peer review, limits its confirmability and transferability. Therefore, while the report is useful for understanding sector-wide concerns, further independent research is needed to validate its findings and explore the long-term impact of funding instability on youth work outcomes.

Another key structural barrier to preventing youth homelessness in Wales is the fragmented nature of service provision based on age thresholds. While youth work offers a consistent and relational approach for young people aged 11 to 25, statutory services such as Children's Services typically support those under 18. Housing services offer support from the earlier age of 16 but offer different legal procedural frameworks for those aged 16 and 17. This disjointed landscape can result in confusion around entitlements, inconsistency across services and gaps in support, particularly for young adults transitioning between services. The Children's Rights Impact Assessment, carried out as part of the development of the Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Bill (2025), highlighted these age-specific barriers and informed revisions to ensure the Bill responded to the rights and needs of children and young people. These challenges sit in contrast to the intentions of the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014, which sought to ensure a smooth and coordinated transition between children's and adults' services. However, in practice, significant inconsistencies remain. Youth work is one of the few sectors that spans the entire 11-25 age range, offering continuity of relationship and support at the very point where statutory systems often fracture. Addressing these challenges requires the provision of consistent, developmentally appropriate support that spans the transition from childhood through adolescence and into adulthood. Often referred to as transition support or preparation for adulthood (PfA). This approach is particularly vital for vulnerable young people as they move from children's to adult services and is

defined by NICE (2022) as involving *'the coordinated planning and delivery of services that help young people move from children's to adults' services, ensuring continuity of care and support tailored to their evolving needs.'* Failure to facilitate this collaborative approach may result in young people falling through the gaps between fragmented services.

Transition support aligns closely with relational practice and youth work theory (Cooper, 2012) as both emphasise sustained, trusting relationships with key adults and services. When implemented effectively, such approaches ensure that young people are not only supported at crisis points but are also equipped with the skills, networks, and confidence to navigate adulthood. Garfat (2008) describes relational practice as *'being in a relationship'* rather than simply *'having a relationship'*. Highlighting how trust, safety and mutual understanding can level power dynamics and encouraging empowerment and agency. Within Wales, youth work is fundamentally grounded in principles of equality, inclusion and a rights-based practice, as outlined in *Youth Work in Wales: Principles and Purposes*. These values shape youth workers' commitment to building respectful, voluntary relationships that help young people to challenge barriers during key transitions. This emphasis on relational and rights-based practice is echoed by NYAS Cymru, whose advocacy work empowers care-experienced and vulnerable young people by creating voice and choice. Through relational practice, youth workers can protect young people's rights and actively promote agency and self-determination at the very stages of transition where statutory systems are most fragmented.

A recurring critique within both the literature review and participant responses is the limited scope of school-based early intervention models. As previously outlined in the discussion of the Upstream approach, these models aim to identify risk before crisis but are frequently constrained by the use of fixed identification markers. Peter Mackie's (2023) work on early intervention highlights the slow pace of systemic change and the tendency for 'upstream' models to miss opportunities to intervene when they rely on indicators such as attendance, behaviour and academic performance rather than young peoples lived experience. Such markers cannot capture the nuanced realities of youth affected by socioeconomic hardships and therefore risk overlooking those whose challenges are less visible.

Many statutory services and housing support providers continue to operate within a deficit-based model of support, an approach which positions individuals primarily in terms of their problems, needs or limitations rather than their strengths or potential. Deficit-based models typically assume that the difficulties young people face are located within the individual, often framing them as lacking the skills, attributes or capabilities to cope. This in turn reinforces stigma and overlooks wider social, structural or contextual factors influencing their circumstances. This model can reduce opportunities for empowerment, as it fails to create environments in which young people can recognise and build upon their existing abilities. In contrast, an asset-based model such as the locally developed Conwy Co-operative Housing Model, focusses on cultivating young peoples' capabilities, fostering autonomy and enabling them to overcome challenges through the development of personal agency, a distinction which was raised by several interview participants in this study. Stuart and Perris (2017) support a shift from deficit-based discourse to asset-based practices in youth services, concluding that a transformation of service design is required to create a support provision which empowers young people, promotes autonomy, and leads to more sustainable and effective outcomes. This aligns with the researchers learning experience in Finland, where they studied asset-based community development as part of their masters degree (THWS International 2022). The Finnish approach reinforced the value of recognising and mobilising community strengths and highlighted how culturally embedded asset-based practices can foster resilience and long-term wellbeing among young people.

### Collaborative working

Collaborative working emerged as a key theme throughout the literature, yet it is frequently undermined by a range of systemic barriers. Systemic barriers in this context refer to structural, organisational and legislative factors that inhibit joint working between services. Research highlights that differing statutory duties and professional frameworks often create conflicting priorities between agencies, particularly between services operating under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and those governed by the Housing (Wales) Act, leading to misaligned expectations and fragmented service delivery (Welsh Government, 2014a;

Welsh Government, 2014b). Data sharing remains a persistent challenge. Concerns surrounding GDPR, combined with inconsistent interpretations of safeguarding and confidentiality, can result in overly cautious information-sharing practices that put professionals at risk of misconduct allegations and simultaneously hinder effective support (Lovett & Omri, 2020; Wiles et al. 2005). Dowling (2020) further critiques the marginalisation of youth work within multi-agency settings, noting that youth work is often viewed as less authoritative or less essential than statutory services. This perception limits youth workers' influence in collaborative spaces, despite their unique capacity to build trusting relationships with young people and to identify early risk.

Welsh Government are however, taking steps to strengthen and formalise the existing legislative basis for youth work in Wales. While a statutory framework already exists, recent policy developments indicate a move toward enhancing its clarity, accountability and national consistency (Welsh Government, 2025; CWVYS, 2026). The strengthened framework will require each local authority to produce a strategic plan, setting out objectives based on young people's needs and aligning with the seven well-being goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The proposals also introduce a new youth work entitlement that is responsive, inclusive and youth led. These reforms aim to raise the profile of youth work within statutory systems and ensure greater consistency in delivery across Wales.

Concerns around the formalisation of youth work in Wales were consistently raised during participant interviews, particularly in relation to the proposed statutory framework. While participants acknowledged the benefits of a clearer legislative basis, many feared that formalisation may draw youth work further into structured, institutional environments, such as schools and colleges. This risks diluting the principles of voluntary participation, informal learning, and relational practice that define youth work's distinctiveness (Sapin 2013). Dowling's (2020) critique is helpful here, they argue that when youth work becomes absorbed into statutory systems, it is often repositioned as a secondary or supportive function, rather than an educative and critical practice. This means youth work is welcomed for its flexibility, but its professional identity is weakened by dominant structures that privilege compliance, risk management and procedural accountability. Concerns expressed by participants, particularly their experiences of being overlooked in multi-agency settings, mirror

Dowling's argument that youth work's distinctiveness can be eroded unless actively protected.

Cooper (2012) extends this argument by suggesting that youth work must resist pressures to conform to externally imposed models of performativity that prioritise measurable outcomes over meaningful engagement. The pressure to evidence impact through quantifiable metrics, highlighted by several participants in this study, reflects exactly the kind of performative culture Cooper warns against. When youth work becomes tied to statutory indicators or outcome frameworks, its relational, dialogic and reflective processes risk being sidelined in favour of measurable 'products'. In the context of homelessness prevention, this tension becomes especially acute. Participants emphasised that relational trust and long-term engagement, not short-term outcomes, are what support young people effectively.

Taken together, these issues reveal a broader structural tension between the ethos of youth work and the demands of statutory integration. They raise critical questions about how youth work in Wales can expand its legitimacy and sustainability whilst safeguarding its identity as a voluntary, rights-based, relational practice. This tension is central to understanding practitioners' resistance to full formalisation and helps explain their apprehension about how youth work will be positioned with emerging homelessness legislation and frameworks.

### Measuring impact

Measuring the impact of youth work presents a persistent challenge, particularly when traditional metrics rely heavily on quantitative data such as housing status, referral numbers or service uptake. This is particularly relevant in youth work-led interventions, where relational outcomes are difficult to quantify (De St Croix 2018). These indicators, while useful, often miss the relational and preventative dimensions that define youth work practice. As one research participant observed, '*housing is very quantitative, X number in temporary accommodation, X number presenting, but it's the softer outcomes we measure*'. Drawing on insights from participants, this study explores the potential of mixed-methods evaluation tools, such as the MIYO toolkit (2024), which foregrounds the quality of relationships, resilience and self-efficacy as

core indicators impact. Wood et al, (2024) argue that resilience and grit are essential for youth to thrive, and that youth development professionals should intentionally foster these traits through relational and educational practices. By integrating these elements, such tools would reflect the transformative potential of youth work more holistically and authentically.

Despite the availability of tools such as the Wellbeing Star, many youth workers find these frameworks ill-suited to the dynamic relational nature of youth work. As one research participant notes, '*it depends on their mood on the day....you can never really measure progress*'. Such tools often fail to account for the fluidity and complexity of young peoples lived experiences and can often feel forced or artificial when young people are asked to quantify complex emotional states or relational dynamics. Moreover, young people are becoming increasingly adept to masking their true feelings, rendering self-assessment tools unreliable. The rigidity of these frameworks risks undermining the voluntary, trust-based engagement that youth work thrives on. A more responsive and youth-centred approach to impact measurement is required. One that encapsulates the journey, relationships and emotional shifts that underpin meaningful change.

However, the growing emphasis on evidencing prevention within Welsh Government policy introduces a deeper tension that warrants critical analysis. Outcome frameworks such as the Ending Homelessness Outcomes Framework increasingly prioritises quantifiable indicators, reinforcing a culture of performativity that sits in direct contrast to youth work's relational ethos. De St Croix (2018) warns that's such performance driven cultures risk reshaping youth work practice to fit externally imposed expectations, privileging what can be counted, over what is meaningful. In the context of homelessness prevention this risks undervaluing the very mechanisms, trust, safety and personal agency, that practitioners identify as central to effective early intervention. Even innovative mixed-methods tools require sufficient resources, practitioner confidence and organisational commitment to relational indicators. Without systemic alignment, attempts to reform impact measurement may inadvertently reproduce the same performativity pressures they seek to challenge. This highlights a broader contradiction, in that youth work is increasingly expected to demonstrate preventative impact, yet dominant measurement cultures remain

structurally misaligned with the relational and developmental processes that produce such outcomes.

These tensions reflect broader systemic limitations, including policy gaps and inconsistent funding, which hinder the sustainability of preventative approaches in youth work. Despite these challenges, the literature strongly supports youth work's potential to bridge service gaps and offer developmentally appropriate, consistent support, particularly through transition periods. These patterns and contradictions underscore the need for further Wales-specific research to evaluate youth work's role in homelessness prevention and inform future practice.

### Outline of Literature Review Themes

The literature is structured around six key themes that emerged from both existing research and participant response.

1. Early Intervention and Prevention

This theme explored the timing and nature of support, highlighting the limitations of predictive frameworks and the importance of relational engagement before crisis points.

2. Youth Work Values and Principles

Central to this study is the ethos of youth work, voluntary participation, empowerment, relational practice and a rights-based approach. These principles are examined in relation to their preventative potential.

3. Challenges and Limitations

This section critically analyses systemic barriers such as funding instability, fragmented services and statutory tensions that constrain youth works impact.

4. Collaborative Working

The literature and findings reveal the importance of multi-agency collaboration and the barriers posed by data silos, professional hierarchies and legislative misalignment.

## 5. Measuring Impact

Traditional metrics often fail to capture the relational and developmental outcomes of youth work. This theme explores alternative evaluation tools and youth-led approaches to impact measurement.

## 6. Future Practice and Policy Development

Drawing on practitioner insights, this theme presents recommendations for embedding youth work into homelessness strategies, including statutory recognition, integrated models and sustainable funding.

## Conclusion

While there is a growing body of literature advocating for youth work in homelessness prevention, its applicability to the Welsh context remains limited. The FEANTSA report (Perez, 2024) for example, *Youth Work and Homelessness: An Introduction*; offers a valuable pan-European insight but does not engage with devolved frameworks such as the *Youth Engagement and Progression Framework* (Welsh Government, 2024) or the *Ending Homelessness in Wales: High Level Action Plan 2021–2026* (Welsh Government, 2021). These frameworks prioritise early intervention and prevention, together with multi-agency collaboration. However, FEANTSA's recommendations cannot be directly embedded into Welsh systems of housing, education and social care. This is primarily because FEANTSA's framework is designed for the pan-European context and assumes universal welfare and housing structures. Whereas Wales operates within a devolved policy environment with its own statutory duties, legal definitions and prevention pathways. Welsh Homelessness legislation, particularly the Housing (Wales) Act (2014) and the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework, places specific duties on local authorities that do not align with FEANTSA's broader recommendations on youth participation, outreach models and cross-border service coordination. As a result, the FEANTSA guidance does not map neatly onto Welsh statutory systems, which require strategies tailored to local governance, devolved responsibilities and youth work practice in Wales.

Existing evaluations, such as the Welsh Government's Evaluation of Homelessness Interventions (2024), identify promising practices but lack the longitudinal evidence required to understand sustained outcomes for young people over time. Moreover, policy evaluations commissioned by government bodies often reinforce existing agendas rather than critically interrogate systemic shortcomings, a limitation noted within wider research on policy aligned evaluation (Marshall et al., 2021; Tracy, 2010). The newly proposed Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Bill (2025) marks a significant shift by introducing an 'Ask and Act' duty requiring specified services to identify and refer young people at risk. However, the Bill misses a critical opportunity to embed homelessness prevention within education services, despite evidence highlighting that schools are often best placed to identify early indicators of housing instability (Senedd Research, 2018; End Youth Homelessness Cymru, 2020). This gap may be partially addressed through the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (Welsh Government, 2024), which places explicit responsibility on education providers to identify and support young people at risk of homelessness.

Despite this intent, implementation of the YEPF remains inconsistent across local authorities (Welsh Government, 2024), a concern also reflected in the participant interviews. Many departments continue to view the YEPF as an education led initiative rather than a shared, cross service responsibility, a pattern consistent with wider research on fragmented service ownership and siloed professional roles (End Youth Homelessness Cymru, 2020; Gillon, 2020). Data sharing between services is also frequently restricted or misunderstood, with safeguarding, GDPR concerns and risk averse interpretations of professional guidance creating additional barriers to coherent multi agency working (Lovett & Omri, 2020; Wiles et al., 2005). These inconsistencies not only dilute the visibility and influence of youth work within multi agency settings but also hinder the development of a cohesive, preventative response.

For the YEPF to fulfil its potential, a cultural shift is required, one that embeds youth work as a central partner and promotes shared accountability across housing, education and social care. Youth workers, with their emphasis on relational practice, empowerment and sustained engagement, are uniquely positioned to bridge gaps between fragmented systems and support young people to access help. Further independent Wales specific research is needed to explore how youth work can be

better integrated into national homelessness strategies and local delivery models. Youth work already offers consistent, developmentally appropriate support that strengthens the preventative safety net for young people, particularly during critical transition periods and in response to ongoing systemic fragmentation (End Youth Homelessness Cymru, 2020).

To understand how youth work can be embedded more effectively into homelessness prevention, it is necessary to examine the specific areas where its preventative potential is most evident and where current gaps remain.

This study highlights four critical areas where youth work can strengthen homelessness prevention. These are relational practice, asset-based approaches, impact measurement and transition support. Relational practice is widely recognised as a cornerstone of youth work, yet there remains a gap in empirical research exploring how these relationships directly influence housing outcomes. Similarly, whilst asset-based models are showing promise in fostering resilience and autonomy, particularly in international contexts such as Finland, there is limited evidence of their systematic application within Welsh youth homeless services. Rigid systems that have been unchallenged for decades make it difficult to implement change. The challenge of measuring impact persists, with existing tools failing to capture the emotional and relational dimensions of youth work, further research is needed to develop and validate mixed-methods tools tailored for this context. Finally, transition support is essential for continuity across fragmented services, yet few studies examine how youth workers can facilitate these transitions in practice. Addressing these gaps through Wales-specific research will be vital to embedding youth work more effectively into national homeless strategies and ensuring that preventative approaches are both meaningful and sustainable.

## Chapter 2 - Methodology

### Introduction

The rationale for this research study was to explore how a youth work approach can contribute to the prevention of youth homelessness in Wales. This was achieved by exploring the perspective of professional youth workers, currently appointed as youth homeless coordinators, across the twenty-two Local Authorities in Wales. The methodological perspective of this study is grounded in the researcher's aim to investigate the role of youth work within the emerging field of housing and homelessness. This phenomenological study employed dual methodologies; an initial anonymised survey, followed by an optional in-depth interview, which is discussed further later in this chapter.

### Theoretical Approach

To situate the methodology of the research, it is first important to outline the research paradigm that underpins the study. This requires discussion of the ontological and epistemological assumptions that shape the research. According to Gray (2004), identifying these assumptions is essential for selecting an appropriate methodological approach, as they influence how the research is designed and how methods are chosen.

Ontology can be considered as “*a philosophical discipline, a branch of philosophy that deals with the nature and the organization of being*” (Maedche, 2002; p. 11). In the context of research, ontology refers to the assumptions researchers make about what constitutes reality. Different ontological perspectives, such as realism, relativism, or constructivism, define what is real and what is out there to know. Gray (2004) emphasises that these assumptions shape the entire research process, influencing how phenomena are conceptualised and investigated. Crotty (1998) further explains that ontology is the foundation upon which epistemology is built, and together these assumptions inform the theoretical perspective and methodological choices of a study.

Throughout this study, the researcher adopted the research paradigm of critical realism, a philosophical approach that bridges the gap between positivism and constructivism. Critical realism asserts that an objective reality exists independently of human perception, but our understanding of that reality is inevitably shaped by social cultural and historical contexts (Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2004). Maedche (2002, p.11) notes, ontology is concerned with the nature and organisation of being. Critical realism adopts a realist ontological position, recognising that structures and mechanisms exist whether or not they are observed, and that social, cultural and economic systems shape human experiences and phenomena. This provides an alternative to the ontology of positivism that sees reality as objective, and the ontology of social constructivism that regards reality as being talked into being (Cupchik, 2001). '*Critical realism seeks to transcend that sterile impasse by articulating a coherent, third-way alternative*' (Zhang 2022; 15). Thus, the ontology of critical realism provides a framework for studying the properties of both the physical and social world. In the case of this research therefore, the phenomenon of homelessness is regarded as real, but that experience of homelessness is subjective.

Crotty (1998, p.3) defines epistemology as '*the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology*'. This definition emphasises that our understanding of knowledge is shaped by the theoretical lens we adopt. This research adopts an interpretivist epistemology which is grounded in the belief that knowledge is constructed through human experience, relationships and social interaction rather than discovered objectively (Nickerson, 2024). From this perspective, knowledge is gained through dialogue, interaction and lived experiences, and the role of the researcher is to interpret these meanings. This epistemological stance aligns closely with the principles and purposes of youth work, which emphasise experiential learning, dialogue and relational practice (CWVYS, 2022). It also reflects the nature of youth homelessness, which is shaped by structural inequalities but experienced in deeply personal, relational and context-specific ways. By adopting an interpretivist epistemology, the study is able to explore both the systemic drivers of youth homelessness and the ways in which youth work relationships influence young people's ability to navigate these challenges.

Based on the above, the study adopts a critical realist and interpretivist paradigm, enabling a nuanced exploration of both structural realities and lived experiences within youth homelessness. Whilst post-positivism acknowledges that researcher bias is inevitable and therefore reinforces the need for reflexivity and methodological rigour (Pessu, 2019), it is not the primary paradigm guiding this study. Instead, these insights simply highlight the importance of critical reflection within qualitative research. This approach allows the researcher to examine how human perception influences understandings of objective reality while actively addressing potential biases and limitations.

This philosophical position aligns closely with the principles of youth work, which emphasise relational practice, inclusion, participation, experiential learning and a rights-based approach (CWVYS, 2022). It also contrasts with positivist paradigms that prioritise objective measurement and standardised indicators, approaches that can be reductionist when applied to complex and deeply relational issues such as youth homelessness. Attempts to quantify interpersonal, developmental or preventative outcomes often fail to capture the lived realities of young people who experience housing instability and the nuanced relational work that supports them. De St Croix (2018) highlights the increased policy pressure on youth work to demonstrate '*performativity*', reflecting a wider neoliberal emphasis on measurable outputs. While this provides helpful context for understanding the environment in which youth workers operate, the present study adopts an interpretivist and critical realist stance. This position is better suited to examining both the structural drivers of youth homelessness and the subjective meanings youth workers construct through their practice with young people navigating these systems.

The researcher adopted a phenomenological approach, which is concerned with exploring how individuals interpret and make sense of their lived experiences. This approach is well suited to the aims of this study, as it enables an in-depth examination of Youth Homeless Coordinators' subjective experiences, and the meanings they attribute to their practice. Human experience is inherently complex and, as Alhazmi and Kaufmann (2022) note, constitutes a '*multidimensional phenomenon*'. Phenomenology supports the process of distinguishing between participants' experiences and the researcher's pre-existing assumptions. This requires the practice

of epoché, the deliberate suspension of judgement which Husserl (as cited in Hill 2008) describes as essential for attending closely to lived experience without imposing prior interpretations.

The influence of the researcher's own values and professional background must also be carefully considered, as qualitative inquiry is shaped by the researcher's relationship to the topic. To minimise potential bias, the researcher engaged in bracketing, an ongoing process of self-reflection used to examine personal assumptions and emotional responses throughout the research process Husserl (1931). Bracketing supports the credibility of phenomenological research by ensuring that participants' perspectives remain central to the analysis, rather than overshadowed by the researcher's interpretations. As Tracy (2010) argues, these reflective practices contribute to the transparency and rigour required for high-quality qualitative research.

#### Research Method/Data Collection

In order to collect information to inform the research study, a qualitative survey was utilised, which is a systematic method of data collection. '*Survey research means collecting information about a group of people by asking them questions and analysing the results*' (McCombes, 2025). By utilising a survey, the researcher was able to extract and analyse opinions, behaviours, experiences and characteristics of a population sample.

The survey involved participants responding to predetermined, open-ended questions in order to encourage meaningful qualitative input that closed questions might overlook. This data collection method enables respondents to express their thoughts freely. Fraser (2024, pp. 547) notes that '*when used thoughtfully, open-ended survey questions have potential to collect rich data from large samples and allow for exciting new directions in qualitative and survey research*', Carefully constructed questions can stimulate deeper cognitive engagement, concepts which may have previously been unexplored by both researcher and participants. This process enables the researcher to identify patterns whilst recognising subjectivity. Facilitating the exploration of perspectives held by professional youth workers, currently appointed as youth

homeless coordinators. The participants in this study were Local Authority employees, a professional context in which hierarchical structures and role-based dynamics may influence openness in research settings. The anonymous nature of the survey was therefore essential in encouraging candid and authentic responses. This process aligns with Fraser's (2024) observation that anonymous surveys create a safe space for reflection and disclosure. In this case, anonymity supported the mitigation of social desirability bias (Crowne and Marlow, 1960), and supports the collection of honest, nuanced feedback from individuals operating within the public sector. Questionnaires and surveys can present notable challenges, as they are time consuming to analyse and often require manual coding. Response quality can vary significantly, reflecting the participants interest in the subject or personal connection with the researcher. During times of increased workloads within reduced timeframes, professionals may find it a challenge to complete surveys comprehensively, leading to lower response rates.

To combat this ambiguity, participants were invited anonymously to opt into a semi-structured interview, a method chosen for its ability to foster deeper reflection whilst minimising distractions and protecting time. This approach ensured that only those with a genuine interest in the study participated, allowing the researcher to probe meaningfully whilst maintaining a clear focus (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). Saunders et al. (2016) state that delivering a survey through a '*structured interview yields a higher response rate*', compared to those '*self-completed*' and submitted online.

As the semi-structured interviews formed the secondary method of data collection, they enabled the researcher to explore and deepen themes emerging from the initial survey. By combining these complementary methods, this study employed methodological triangulation, strengthening the credibility and rigour of the findings. Creswell and Poth (2017) describe triangulation as the use of multiple methods, or data sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. However, for triangulation to be effective, the researcher was required to exhibit specific attributes. Chenery (2024) explains how active listening and respondent engagement are key to establishing trust and encouraging honesty. Qualitative interviews therefore provided a bridge between the survey findings and the literature review, enabling richer and more nuanced thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021).

Conducting semi-structured interviews online offered both advantages and limitations. One clear benefit was the flexibility it afforded participants, allowing them to specify interview times that suited them, which likely led to higher participant uptake. The previous survey responses provided a valuable foundation for planning the interviews, helping to identify key themes and areas of interest for the participants. By reviewing the responses and identifying these themes, the researcher was able to tailor each interview to reflect their individual experiences and perspectives. Sharing these key themes with participants by email, prior to the interview evidenced that their contributions were extremely valued, as participants entered the conversation knowing their voices formed an integral part of this research. However, providing these themes in advance also carried the potential to lead participant responses, as individuals may have felt encouraged to focus on the pre-identified topics rather than introducing issues spontaneously. It also gave them time to further reflect on the issues raised, leading to deeper, more meaningful dialogue during the interviews.

### Recruitment and sampling

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the role of youth work within the youth homelessness arena, the researcher employed a purposive sampling strategy. Campbell et al. (2020, p.653) describe purposive sampling strategy method as '*a non-probability method that selects participants based on specific research objectives*'. This approach was selected in order to identify a clearly defined cohort whose expertise aligned with the aims of this study. The participants were Youth Homeless Coordinators employed within Local Authorities across Wales, all of whom were specialist youth work practitioners responsible for leading early identification and multi-agency support for young people at risk of homelessness. As Local Authority employees, these individuals were working within hierarchical structures and role-based organisational dynamics, which may influence openness in research settings. Their professional experience and role-specific knowledge made them uniquely positioned to contribute meaningfully to the research.

By virtue of their appointment, these individuals were either registered with the Education Workforce Council (EWC) as qualified youth work practitioners or were

actively working toward an approved qualification. According to EWC regulations, any paid youth worker or youth support worker must hold a recognised qualification, or be working towards one, to be eligible for registration and employment within a relevant body in Wales. This ensured that the research participants possessed a robust understanding of youth development principles and upheld high professional standards. Furthermore, the Welsh Government's Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (Welsh Government, 2022) reinforces the critical role of qualified youth workers in identifying and supporting young people at risk of homelessness. This dual emphasis on qualification and knowledge of structured support underscores the depth of expertise required for high-quality, informed interviews.

The survey (appendix 3) was distributed by email to the twenty of the twenty-two youth homeless coordinators positions across Wales, excluding the researcher and one vacant post. Of those invited ten participants completed the survey, with six subsequently consenting to a follow-up interview. A response rate of 50% was achieved which exceeds typical benchmarks for email-based surveys and is considered the threshold for publications within academic and research contexts (Holtom et al 2022). This level of engagement not only enhances the reliability of the data collected but also reflects the passion and commitment of youth work professionals to the youth homeless agenda.

As a fellow youth homeless coordinator, the researcher maintained regular contact with their counterparts. However, to preserve professional boundaries and mitigate potential bias, the researcher used their university email account for all research-related communications. This deliberate separation of roles aligns with Thomas (2024) principles of researcher reflexivity and positionality, ensuring clarity between the practitioner and the role of researcher.

### Data analysis

The data collected was analysed using a thematic analysis approach, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. This method was chosen for its flexibility and suitability in identifying patterns across qualitative data, it also enabled the

researcher to align participant responses, with six key themes which reflect the aims and objectives of this study.

### **1. Familiarisation with the data**

This involved reading and re-reading the survey responses to compile a detailed analysis of the six survey questions. By engaging fully with the material, the researcher was able to extract repeated themes and nuanced reflections for example *'youth work can influence structured systems, but only when it's welcomed in and resourced to stay'*.

### **2. Generating initial codes**

During this process the researcher was able to start to identify interesting and meaningful words. Williams and Mosser (2025 p. 1) defines coding as *'processes that enable collected data to be assembled, categorized, and thematically sorted, providing an organized platform for the construction of meaning'*. The data was then coded systematically against the six thematic headings as follows,

- Early intervention
- Youth Work Values and Principles
- Challenges and Limitation
- Collaborative working
- Future Practice
- Measuring Impact

These initial codes were applied consistently across participant responses.

### **3. Searching for themes**

This phase involved collating codes into potential themes and gathering all relevant data for each theme. The researcher was then able to align each question with specific objectives and grouping responses under thematic categories, for example,

- Question 2 explores the distinctive aspects of youth work, and responses are ground under values like *voluntary engagement, trusting relationships and empowerment*.

#### **4. Reviewing themes**

By reviewing the identified themes, the researcher was able to ensure that they accurately reflected the data and were coherent internally and distinct from each other.

The themes emerging were well differentiated, for example,

- Challenges and limitations, which included structural barriers and sector fragility.
- Future practice focussed on recommendations like youth-led person-centred approaches.

Before defining and naming the themes, it is important to justify the choice of thematic analysis for this study. Thematic analysis was selected due to its flexibility and suitability for exploring patterns within qualitative data, particularly where the aim is to understand how participants interpret their experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This makes it well aligned to the study's interpretivist epistemology, which values meaning-making through lived experience, and its critical realist ontology, which recognises both the existence of real structures and the subjective ways individuals understand them. A key strength of thematic analysis is that it allows rich, detailed accounts to be generated across a dataset while remaining grounded in participants' own words. It is also a method that complements phenomenological approaches, as it supports the identification of commonalities in lived experience without imposing predetermined categories. However, thematic analysis also presents limitations. Its flexibility can risk inconsistency if not applied systematically, and the researcher plays an active role in theme development, meaning that reflexivity is essential to minimise bias (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Despite these limitations, thematic analysis was well suited to this study, as it enabled the integration of survey and interview data, to support the development of coherent themes linked to the research objectives, which aligned with the study's overall methodological stance.

## 5. Defining and naming themes

This phase involved clearly defining the content of each theme and labelling it accordingly, for example,

- Early intervention: Strategies and systems that identify and support young people before homelessness occurs.
- Youth Work Values and Principles: Core philosophies guiding youth work practice, such as empowerment, relational engagement, and fostering a non-judgmental approach.

## 6. Producing the report

The final phase involves weaving together the themes into a coherent narrative that answers the research question. The researcher was able to integrate participant quotes into the analysis and link them back to the research aims and objectives. This process of interpretation and representation naturally led to careful consideration of the ethical responsibilities involved in conducting and presenting the research.

### Research Ethics

*'The application of positive, participative and anti-oppressive values has a range of implications for youth work practice'* (Sapin 2013;4). The values and principles underpinning youth work, also informed each stage of this research. The Five Pillars of Youth Work in Wales (Youth Work in Wales; Principles and Purposes 2018), guided the ethical foundation of this study, ensuring that its design and delivery reflected the sector's core commitments. The participation of youth workers in this study further embodied these pillars, demonstrating a shared commitment to practice that is;

- Educative – continuously developing knowledge in order to improve practice.
- Expressive – encouraging self-expression and reflection to better support young people.
- Empowering – using existing knowledge to influence policy that is grounded in reality, ensuring practice recommendations are practical for young people.
- Inclusive – the study encouraged participatory approaches and encouraged collaboration rather than imposing fixed viewpoints.

- Participative – involvement in this research enabled participants to highlight inequalities and identify gaps in services, whilst developing solutions.

Ethical consideration is central to any piece of qualitative research particularly in social sciences. Ensuring a solid ethical foundation prioritises participant's safety, rights and well-being (Mestre 2024). Furthermore, it enhances credibility, provides rich-rigour, ultimately protecting the integrity of the study (Tracy, 2010).

Informed consent is a fundamental research principle (Wiles et al, 2005) particularly '*where the dynamics of human interaction pervade*' (Reid 2018: p69). Tracy (2010) reaffirms that informed consent '*aligns with ethics criterion, which emphasises transparency, respect for participants, and adherence to ethical guidelines*'. In order to obtain true consent, the researcher furnished potential research participants with an information sheet (appendix 3) and consent form (appendix 2) prior to circulating the survey link. The information sheet provided clear and comprehensive information about the study enabling potential participants to make an informed decision to take part in the study. The participation information sheet clarified crucial information such as purpose, procedure, potential risk and data management. This process was fundamental to maintain ethical standards.

Throughout this research study, careful attention was given to the ethical implications of peer-to-peer research, particularly with regards to the potential for reputational harm associated with discussing employers or funding bodies. The researcher recognised that role-related inquiry could surface sensitive information and conflicting approaches, potentially leading to negative perceptions. Given the possibility of contentious disclosures, participants were reminded of their rights under the General Data Protection Regulations (European Union, 2016) and confidentiality guidelines to ensure ethical data collection and handling.

Confidentiality was upheld through secure data storage, restricted access to raw data, and the removal of identifiable organisational references during analysis. Ethical safeguards were implemented to mitigate potential risks to both employer and employee reputations. Participants were informed of the boundaries of confidentiality,

particularly in relation to safeguarding disclosures, and were given the opportunity to withdraw at any stage without consequence.

To ensure anonymity, the study employed an anonymous survey (appendix 4) as the initial point of engagement. This allowed participants time to reflect on the subject matter before consenting to further involvement. All responses were anonymised during transcription and analysis, with no identifiable information retained. This approach supported open and honest dialogue, whilst protecting individual identities. Although all participants were professional adults, the researcher remained mindful of the potential for psychological harm, particularly when discussing sensitive or emotionally charged topics such as youth homelessness and systemic challenges. A reflexive practice was adopted throughout, enabling participants to reflect on their own positionality and ensuring they felt comfortable with the process. The continuous consent model allowed participants to control their level of engagement, and the researcher monitored for signs of discomfort or distress during interviews. Klykken (2021 p. 5) challenges the notion that consent as a one-time contractual agreement and instead promotes ongoing ethical engagement, reflexivity and participant agency within the research relationship.

Gatekeeper consent was an institutional requirement for research papers. However, McAreavey & Das (2013) highlight that gatekeeper involvement can pose substantial barriers to research. Whilst, Kay (2019) argues that it may restrict access to diverse perspectives and introduce bias. In this study, the researcher navigated complex hierarchical structures to facilitate open and honest dialogue and obtained ethical approval (appendix 1) without gatekeeper consent.

### Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

In reflecting on the methodological process, it was important to consider the researchers positionality as both a Youth Homelessness Coordinator and a professional youth worker with a background in housing and homelessness. The researchers insider position offered valuable contextual understanding of the systems, relationships and challenges faced by both practitioners and young people. However,

this dual role also created the potential for bias, as their professional experience and personal values could shape their interpretations of the data.

Awareness of these influences was essential, as qualitative inquiry is inherently shaped by the researcher's relationship to the topic and to participants. The researchers existing professional relationships with the participant group, along with the hierarchical dynamics of working within Local Authority structures, had the potential to affect openness during the interviews and shape the direction of the conversations. To address these risks, the researcher took deliberate steps to separate their practitioner role from their researcher role, using their university email account for all communication and making clear that participation was voluntary and unrelated to professional expectations.

Reflexivity formed a continuous part of the research process. The researcher engaged in bracketing, an ongoing reflective practice used to examine personal assumptions, emotional responses and potential influences throughout data collection and analysis (Husserl, 1931). This aligned closely with the phenomenological approach adopted in the study, which recognises the importance of suspending preconceptions, in order to attend more closely to participants lived experiences. Reflexive practice also supported the interpretivist epistemology underpinning this research, as meaning-making is co-constructed and requires attentiveness to the researcher's position within that process.

These reflexive practices contributed to the transparency and rigour of the research, ensuring that participants' voices remained central to the analysis rather than overshadowed by the researchers' own interpretations. As Tracy (2010) argues, high-quality qualitative research requires sincerity, reflexivity and openness about the researcher's influence. By engaging critically with their own positionality and adopting structured reflexive strategies, the researcher sought to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

## Dissemination of Findings

The rationale for this research study was to explore how a youth work approach can contribute to the prevention of youth homelessness in Wales. In order for the contribution to be visible, the findings of this study will be disseminated throughout multiple channels to ensure accessibility and impact. Keen and Todres (2007) discuss how the majority of research studies traditionally serve academic communities only. Therefore, findings of this study will be presented in a report shared with all participants, peers, local government, and made available to other interested parties. This approach aims to facilitate the translation of research into practice, ensuring that key stakeholders can engage with the results and support evidence-based decision-making. McMahon et al (2024) explored how sharing of academic research can achieve participatory parity in youth work practice. In order to advance in this area, the sector must integrate the practical, lived experience of youth workers with theoretical framework and methodological approaches.

## Chapter 3 - Analysis of the Findings and Critical Discussion

### Introduction

In alignment with the study's interpretivist epistemology and phenomenological design, the findings are presented using a narrative citation approach. This method places emphasis on the lived experiences and professional insights of Youth Homeless Coordinators across Wales, allowing for a rich, thematic exploration of the data. Whilst basic descriptive statistics are included to contextualise recurring patterns, the emphasis remains on the depth and nuance of participant responses. This approach reflects the study's commitment to relational practice and rights-based youth work, ensuring that the voices of practitioners are central to understanding the preventative potential of youth work in addressing youth homelessness.

Building on this narrative approach, the purpose of this study was to explore how a youth work approach can contribute to the prevention of youth homelessness in Wales, with the aim of informing future policy and practice. The research was guided by a phenomenological lens, allowing for a deep exploration of youth workers lived experiences within the homelessness sector. Welsh Government funding in this area is relatively new, and as a result, there is limited existing research that evaluates youth works preventative role in this context. Through thematic analysis (Appendix 5), several key themes emerged, each mapping directly onto the study's research objectives and corresponding to distinct aspects of how youth work contributes to the prevention of youth homelessness.

- The critical role of early intervention, addressing the objective of exploring what works in practice for preventing youth homelessness
- The values and principles underpinning youth work, relating to the objective of examining how youth work approaches shape prevention
- The systemic challenges that limit youth work's preventative potential, responding to the objective of evaluating barriers and limitations
- The importance of collaborative, youth-centred approaches, aligning with the objective of assessing how multi-agency partnerships support prevention

Participants highlighted the significance of proactive, relationship-based models of support in building trust, resilience and empowerment among young people. These

findings suggest that youth work is uniquely positioned to respond to the complexities of youth homelessness, particularly through its emphasis on voluntary engagement, rights-based support, and holistic practice. The study also revealed tensions between youth works ethos and the demands of statutory integration, particularly around impact measurement and service fragmentation. These insights provide a foundation for rethinking how youth work can be embedded more effectively within national homelessness strategies.

The themes identified through the analysis map directly onto the study's stated objectives. Early intervention, youth work values and collaborative practice correspond to the objective of evaluating Youth Homeless Coordinators' perceptions of what works in practice. Themes relating to systemic challenges, including fragmented services, funding instability and statutory tensions, address the objective of examining the limitations of youth work-led prevention. Finally, the identification of effective relational and asset-based methods supports the objective of understanding which interventions work best for young people at risk of homelessness.

These findings not only reinforce the relevance of youth work in homelessness prevention but also highlight the need for further Wales-specific research, particularly given the relatively recent injection of funding and focus on this area. Collectively, the themes provide a strong foundation for making informed recommendations for future practice and policy development, fulfilling the overarching aim of this study. Basic descriptive statistics helped contextualise the qualitative findings. Of the twenty Youth Homelessness Coordinators invited to participate, ten completed the survey, representing 50% of all local authorities in Wales. Six of these respondents also took part in follow-up interviews. Across both data sources, early intervention, youth work values and collaborative practice appeared most frequently, with over two-thirds of participants referencing the importance of engaging young people prior to crisis. These descriptive patterns informed and strengthened the thematic analysis that follows.

## Youth Work in Homelessness Prevention: Existing Approaches and Perceptions

The FEANTSA report (Perez, 2024) underscores the importance of youth-orientated approaches in homelessness prevention, highlighting that young people experience homelessness in fundamentally different ways to adults. Young people are still undergoing social, cognitive and emotional development. Their trajectories often involve temporary arrangements such as sofa surfing or staying with friends rather than rough sleeping. Sofa-surfing is described by Green et al. (2024) as ‘a growing and global aspect of youth homelessness’. The report identifies additional key risk factors such as family breakdown, discrimination and transition from care, and goes onto stress the importance of developmentally appropriate responses.

These findings resonate strongly with participants’ perspectives, particularly their emphasis on the invisibility and complexity of young people’s housing journeys. In accordance with this, youth work is increasingly recognised as a vital component in the prevention of youth homelessness, particularly in Wales where recent Government funding initiatives have sought to integrate youth work principles into housing support services. Practitioners interviewed describe a range of approaches currently in use across local authorities such as integrated youth work and housing models, school-based prevention work, restorative or relationship-based family mediation, and targeted early-identification systems. These reflected both innovation and inconsistency in practice. Whilst some areas have developed integrated models that combine youth work with statutory housing duties, others continue to operate within more traditional frameworks, where youth work is positioned as a supplementary or outreach function. Youth work offers a distinct advantage in engaging young people who may be reluctant to access statutory services. Its emphasis on informal, relational practice enables trust building and early support, particularly in non-statutory settings.

Despite these strengths, youth work remains poorly understood by some professionals and services. Participants expressed concern that youth work is often undervalued or misrepresented, with one noting

*‘We’re not very good at selling ourselves’.*

This lack of visibility was seen as a barrier to wider integration of youth work into homelessness prevention. Another participant stated

*'it is vital to get buy in from other professional stakeholders, Youth Services have no statutory mandate like formal education and social care. Without the proactive participation of these stakeholders, the youth work sector is very limited in terms of the level of impact it can have'.*

At the outset of this work, participants stated that they were uncertain about the scope of their roles and how youth work could meaningfully contribute to homeless prevention. This ambiguity not only shaped their initial practice but likely contributed to the barriers encountered when attempting to integrate with other services. Without a shared understanding of youth works preventative potential, collaboration was often fragmented, and contributions were undervalued and misunderstood. The variability in current approaches underscores the importance of developing a coherent national strategy which recognises youth work not as an adjunct, but as a core component of homeless prevention. Overall, the perceptions shared by research participants affirms that youth work holds significant potential in preventing homelessness, achievable only when embedded within multi-agency systems and supported by sustainable funding. However, realising this potential requires more than recognition, it demands strategic early intervention. The following section explores how youth workers navigate the complexities of timing, targeting and engagement in their preventative practice.

#### Early Intervention:

##### Timing, Strategies and Youth Worker Insights

Early intervention emerged as a central theme in both the survey and interview data, with participants consistently emphasising its importance in preventing youth homelessness. In this study, early intervention refers to proactive, relational engagement with young people before they reach crisis point. Enabling concerns such as family conflict, housing instability or disengagement to be addressed at an earlier stage. Early intervention in the context of youth homelessness, is commonly

understood as identifying risk and offering support before crisis occurs (Mackie, 2023; Centrepoin, 2016).

Multiple participants highlighted that early intervention was essential, noting that young people often require support long before they meet statutory thresholds. One participant explained:

*'Family connections are key in preventing youth homelessness, so early identification and support can prevent family breakdown.'*

Participants also highlighted the role of trust-based relational work:

*'Early trust-based relationships, prevention over crisis response, and family engagement are key, it creates holistic benefits beyond housing.'*

Others described early intervention as both strategic and structural:

*'Targeted screening for overlapping indicators is important, but family involvement and targeted intervention matter just as much.'*

Finally, participants raised concerns about hidden homelessness that requires targeted whole-school strategies:

*'We rely on early identification systems to pick up hidden homelessness, but targeted whole-school interventions help reach higher-risk groups.'*

Practitioners also highlighted the limitations of relying solely on predictive frameworks to identify risk. This reinforces the need to supplement these identification methods with relational, youth-centred engagement to avoid those who fall outside of traditional risk categories. This reflects Pavlakis et al. (2023), who argue that fixed indicators can obscure the lived realities of young people, particularly those who maintain school attendance despite experiencing housing instability. One participant described these predictive frameworks as;

*'both a strategic necessity and a funding requirement'.*

The participant noted that whilst the development of an early identification system is an intrinsic part of the Youth Homeless Coordinator role, the implementation of such systems has been inconsistent and lacking coherence. A key barrier to this coherence is the fragmentation of data systems across local authority departments. Housing, children's services, youth justice, schools and youth services often operate on separate data management platforms, limiting the flow of information and obstructing timely, preventative interventions. This siloed approach not only delays support but also risks overlooking young people who do not meet traditional thresholds. Lovrenčić (2023) identifies data fragmentation as a significant threat to evidence-based policymaking, arguing that disconnected data assets hinder the creation of strategic, integrated responses to social issues. In the context of youth homelessness, this fragmentation undermines the potential of early identification systems to function effectively.

The research participants also highlighted tension between voluntary engagement, which is the cornerstone of youth work, and the referral driven nature of statutory support. One participant acknowledged a shift away from 'purist' youth work values due to funding pressures, noting that whilst youth work traditionally relies on voluntary participation, the life-long implications of homelessness require proactive engagement and a redefined approach. This echoes De St Croix (2018), who critiques increasing performance pressures placed on youth workers, often at the expense of its relational ethos.

#### Youth Work as a Preventative Strategy: Reframing Early Intervention

The timing of support emerged as a critical factor in effective early intervention. Participants consistently emphasised the importance of identifying risk early, noting the challenges of recognising housing instability before it escalates. One participant explained that early identification systems provide:

*‘.....a broad picture of who may be at risk.... a point of awareness to identify factors in young people’s lives which can be hidden behind good attainment or attendance’.*

This highlights the difficulty of detecting hidden forms of homelessness and aligns with concerns in the literature about over-reliance on fixed indicators (Pavlakis et al 2023). Another participant stressed that timing is inseparable from continuity, describing how:

*‘Stakeholders also value that, continuity is key to supporting young people’.*

This reinforces the need for early, relational engagement that can be sustained as young people’s needs evolve.

This is reinforced by Gaetz et al. (2024) who highlights that the current system is overly reactive, as crisis response is where funding is usually directed to. Gaetz adds shifting to proactive early support is essential to avoid institutionalising homelessness. This is echoed by the research participants, with several noting that traditional indicators are unreliable. These include those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), free school meals or school disengagement. Many young people experience housing insecurity but maintain outward signs of stability. This reinforces the need for a combined approach, interlinking data led frameworks such as the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (2024) (YEPF), with practitioner insight and relational engagement. One participant described the importance of *‘keeping the door open’*, enabling young people to access support over a sustained period as their circumstances evolve. This long-term, flexible engagement is a hallmark of youth work and contrasts with the time-bound, fixed criteria nature of statutory services.

Strategically, youth workers described a range of approaches that support early intervention. These included multi-agency collaboration, school-based presence such as Trac and Community Focussed Schools, and family mediation. All underpinned by relational practice. Schools were cited as key partners in identifying young people at risk, this was highlighted by research participants and is consistent with Pavalkis et al. (2023), who argue that school staff require training to recognise signs of homelessness. Participants emphasised that youth workers can build trust within educational settings and observe early signs of distress, then support young people

outside of the school setting, within their home and communities. Also highlighted was the value of restorative approaches and informal learning, allowing young people to explore challenges in a safe environment.

These insights into timing, strategy and relational practice highlight the need to reframe early intervention not just as a reactive response, but a proactive and relational process rooted in youth-centred practice. As one participant explained:

*'Early family support, mediation and restorative approaches are essential, it has to be person-centred and holistic.'*

Across the interviews, the importance of trusting, consistent relationships emerged as a recurrent theme, with multiple participants describing early intervention as fundamentally relational and grounded in sustained engagement.

*'Voluntary engagement, trusting relationships and a person-centred approach are essential when working with young people at risk of homelessness.'*

As referred to throughout this research paper, traditional early intervention models rely on identifying risk through fixed early identification markers. Whilst this approach can be useful, it risks overlooking the nuanced realities of youth homelessness. As discussed at length through the literature, Depaul UK's school-based workshops focus on relational educational and emotional literacy and help students recognise unhealthy relationships and seek support before crisis point. In contrast, Upstream Cymru, developed by Llamau and Cardiff University, utilises a structured survey tool to identify young people at risk of homelessness and intervene through targeted support (Mackie, Doherty and Thomas, n.d.). Both models aim to prevent, yet they reflect different philosophies. One relational and dialogic, the other data driven and systemic. Here is where youth work offers an alternative approach, by reframing early intervention not just as spotting risk, but as building trust, resilience and agency before risk becomes visible. A notion which is reinforced through survey responses, with one participant citing.

*‘Early intervention enables young people and youth workers to build a consistent trusting relationship before a crisis intervention is needed. It allows for work to be carried out with young people and families to ‘turn the curve’ away from homelessness at an early stage...’*

Unlike statutory systems that often respond at the point of crisis, youth work engages young people long before formal thresholds are met. This shift in philosophy invites a deeper exploration of youth work’s preventative lens. One that centres not on threshold and triggers, but on relationships, empowerment and the realities of young people navigating complex life challenges. Rather than waiting for risk to become measurable, youth work practitioners build trust through voluntary, informal engagement, which enables them to position themselves within the confines of the young person’s world. This allows them to notice subtle shifts, such as emotional withdrawal, family tension, or changes in peer relationships. All of which may precede a downward spiral without affecting school attendance. One participant explained;

*‘support from a youth worker is voluntary and person centred... it provides a consistent trusted adult that can follow a young person through a range of settings and across key transition points.’*

This continuity of support is especially valuable in navigating fragmented systems, where young people are denied access to services due to age thresholds or procedural barriers. By focussing on empowerment, advocacy and relational trust, youth work creates the conditions for young people to build resilience and agency before crisis emerges.

### Challenges and Limitations of Youth Work in Preventative Practice

A clear theme emerging from the data was the structural and systemic limitations that constrain youth work’s preventative potential. Participants highlighted that, although youth work has long contributed to the prevention of youth homelessness, its role is often marginalised or misunderstood. As one participant reflected:

*‘Youth Work has always been involved in preventing youth homelessness but until recently seen as periphery activity both within the field and externally. It was seen as a housing or social work need rather than a young person need’.*

Other participants echoed this sense of marginalisation, identifying barriers such as limited resources, organisational cultures and inconsistent recognition. One youth worker explained:

*‘Youth work can influence structured systems, but only when it’s welcomed in and resourced to stay’*

Another highlighted the impact of funding structures, noting:

*‘Funding grants can lead to targeted interventions... but insecurity of job role due to grant funding’.*

Difficulties in partnership working also emerged, with one participant describing a *‘lack of understanding of youth work by other services’* and limited buy-in from key partners such as schools.

These practitioner experiences reflect wider concerns in the literature. Morciano and Mercio (2017) argue that youth work’s ability to address social inequalities is often undermined by fragmented service delivery and inconsistent recognition across sectors. This fragmentation is evident within Welsh statutory systems, where age thresholds and procedural silos create gaps in support. For example, a 15-year-old at risk of homelessness may be supported by Children’s Services yet cannot access Housing Support Grant (HSG) services or statutory housing services until the age of 16. This creates a gap in provision where service access is determined by age rather than need, highlighting how fragmented systems can leave younger adolescents without appropriate housing support.

Within these mis-aligned structures, youth work can provide continuity and advocacy, but only when recognised, properly resourced, and fully integrated into multi-agency systems. Participants emphasised that this level of integration remains inconsistent,

highlighting the systemic limitations that continue to restrict the preventative potential of youth work in Wales.

Participants also highlighted that many young people are unable to access bank accounts or verify their identity, due to the transient nature of temporary accommodation. Adisaputri, Grant and Ungar (2025) reiterate that practical barriers such as the complexity of the welfare benefits system, the requirement for formal identification, and the closure of bank branches also continue to limit young people's ability to access support services. This in turn restricts their access to housing, employment and financial support. These systemic access issues must also be addressed in tandem with broader policy reform. Implementing the recommendations highlighted in the report, would not only strengthen the preventative safety net for young people but would strengthen the basis under which youth services operate.

#### Evaluating What Works: Practitioner Insights and Youth-Centred Models

Despite these systemic barriers, practitioners continue to identify innovative, youth-centred approaches that demonstrate impact beyond statutory thresholds. The following section explores how youth workers evaluate what works in practice, including the use of relational outcomes and tools such as the MIYO toolkit reviewed in the literature. The aim of such models is to capture the nuanced, preventative value of youth work-led interventions. One participant noted.

*'To effectively measure the impact of youth work on youth homelessness, we need a holistic approach that goes beyond housing outcomes. Key indicators should include interaction and retention, skills development, engagement in education, employment and social services'.*

This emphasis on a holistic approach was echoed across participants responses, several of whom described youth work as inherently multi-dimensional and responsive to the whole young person. As one participant explained:

*‘Youth work approach will not just focus on one aspect, it will take a more holistic approach, taking into consideration wider aspects of a young person’s life’.*

Despite the focus on the part housing services play in the preventative agenda, youth workers recognised a wider systemic challenge often summarised in the phrase ‘housing is everyone’s problem, yet no one’s responsibility’. This sentiment, used as the theme of a North Wales multi-agency conference on homelessness, reflects the fragmented nature of service provision and the lack of clear accountability in addressing homelessness.

Both research participants and conference delegates acknowledged that steps are being taken in the right direction. The emergence of youth homeless coordinator roles and initiatives such as the aforementioned conference, alongside increased sector dialogue and targeted funding streams, suggest growing recognition of the need for integrated responses. Yet, without a coherent national strategy that embeds youth work as a central pillar, these efforts risk remaining isolated and inconsistent.

Participants consistently emphasised that meaningful impact cannot be captured through housing outcomes alone. Instead, they advocated for a more flexible, youth-led approach to evaluation, one that reflects the relational, developmental and preventative nature of youth work. As one research participant noted,

*‘Youth work centric case studies, feedback and evaluation methods can add to the human impact of interventions’.*

This sentiment was echoed across multiple responses, with practitioners highlighting the importance of combining quantitative data with qualitative insights, such as young people’s own reflections on their growth, confidence and ability to navigate systems.

Another research participant stated,

*‘we need to ask individuals we have supported, if they feel we have made an impact and also ask if they feel more confident to advocate for themselves and seek support’.*

These reflections underscore the need for evaluation methods that are not only youth-centred but also responsive to the relational and developmental nature of youth work. By prioritising young people's voices, tracking progress across multiple domains, and valuing qualitative feedback, practitioners are redefining what meaningful impact looks like in homelessness prevention.

These principles reflect a shift from viewing young people as passive recipients of support to recognising them as active agents in their own developmental journey. This emphasis on young people as active contributors to evaluation aligns with wider conceptual frameworks in the sector. The FEANTSA (2024) framework advocates for integrating youth work into homelessness services in this way, through a transformative approach grounded in six core principles, enabling, empowering, emancipating, engaging, enjoying and educating. These principles align closely with the Five Pillars of Youth Work in Wales, educative, expressive, empowering, inclusive and participative (Wales Principle Youth Officers Group 2018). Whilst Wales pillars provide a foundation for youth work practice across sectors, FEANTSA's principles offer a lens to adapt services. Together, they reinforce the idea that youth work is not just a method, but a mindset, one that sees young people as active agents in their own lives.

#### [Embedding Youth Work into National Homelessness Strategies.](#)

This shared ethos of youth-centred practice provides a compelling rationale for embedding youth work approaches within national homelessness strategies, ensuring that responses to youth homelessness are not only preventative and rights-based, but also relational, developmental and empowering.

Whilst youth workers are redefining how impact is understood and measured in practice, these efforts must be matched by structural change at a policy level. Without formal recognition in national homeless strategies, the preventative potential of youth work remains underutilised and inconsistently applied across Wales. Practitioners repeatedly emphasised that youth work's relational, rights-based approach is most effective when embedded in a whole-authority approach, rather than operating on the

periphery. Yet, the absence of a statutory mandate continues to limit its influence. Statutory services often engage with youth services only when it is politically or strategically expedient, a practice that mirrors the tokenistic inclusion of young people in participation processes. As Smith-Carrier and Van-Tuyl (2024) argue, tokenism can serve as a structural mechanism that obscures broader exclusion, offering the appearance of inclusion whilst maintaining systemic inequalities. Embedding youth work into national frameworks would not only validate its contribution but also ensure that preventative interventions are adequately resourced, coordinated, and sustained across local authorities.

The findings of this study highlighted youth work's unique capacity to prevent homelessness, particularly through its relational, rights-based practice and sustained engagement. Participants described how this approach enables prevention long before statutory services intervene. One participant explained;

*'Youth work's distinctive approach around building strong relationships on a young person's voluntary engagement is key..... that the trusting relationship can be the bedrock to supporting young people to develop the skills and resources that help navigate to prevent homelessness'.*

Practitioners also emphasised that youth work's preventative capacity cannot be fully realised without national recognition and integration. As one participant observed:

*'Understanding and recognition of the benefits of youth work from key statutory services can be a barrier that needs to be challenged on an all-Wales approach'*

This reflects a broader concern across the dataset that youth work's contribution remains inconsistently recognised within statutory systems, limiting its capacity to influence early identification, relational engagement and preventative practice at scale. Participants emphasised that *'youth work is most effective when integrated into a whole-authority approach'*, yet its influence is often limited by the absence of a statutory mandate, reinforcing the need for national structures that sustain, rather than marginalise, relational and preventative practice.

Recent policy developments were viewed as encouraging but incomplete. Participants welcomed moves toward earlier identification and multi-agency accountability but stressed that prevention cannot be achieved without embedding youth work within the systems that young people interact with most, particularly education and housing. They argued that national frameworks must mandate youth work representation within homelessness prevention structures, integrate youth workers into educational settings to strengthen early identification, and align funding with statutory responsibilities to ensure sustainability. Such measures would transition youth work from a discretionary, add-on role to a structurally recognised component of Wales's homelessness prevention strategy. The following chapter builds on these insights to offer targeted recommendations for future policy and practice.

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored how a youth work approach contributes to the prevention of youth homelessness in Wales, drawing on the experiences of youth homelessness coordinators. Key findings include the importance of early intervention, the value of relational and rights-based practice, and the challenges posed by fragmented systems and inconsistent recognition. Whilst youth work demonstrates clear preventative potential, its impact is often constrained by structural limitations. These insights provide a foundation for the next chapter, which will present recommendations for future policy and practice aimed at embedding youth work more effectively within national and local homelessness strategies.

These findings also reflect the theoretical frameworks underpinning this study. Thompson's PCS model (2006) is evident throughout the research and across the themes. At the personal level, coordinators emphasised trusted relationships, emotional safety and individual advocacy. At the cultural level, participants described pervasive misunderstandings of youth homelessness and youth work's role. Finally, at the structural level, they highlighted systemic barriers such as funding instability, data silos and fragmented statutory responsibilities. Taken together, the findings demonstrate how youth homelessness is shaped by intersecting forces across all three PCS dimensions, reinforcing the need for holistic and developmentally appropriate interventions.

Similarly, the prominence of relational, ethical and context-sensitive practice within participants' accounts reflects Bessant and Watts' (2024) concept of phronetic youth work. Coordinators consistently described drawing on practical wisdom, moral judgement and empathetic engagement to support young people before crisis, often within constrained, inconsistent systems. The emphasis on voluntary participation, trust-building, advocacy and responsiveness, illustrates how phronetic practice operates as a preventative force, one that cannot be captured through rigid metrics alone.

By situating the findings within these theoretical lenses, the chapter demonstrates that youth work's preventative contribution extends beyond discrete interventions. It operates across personal, cultural and structural domains and is grounded in ethical, relational and context-driven practice. These insights directly inform the recommendations that follow.

## Chapter 4 - Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Practice and Policy Development

### Conclusion

Drawing on the lived experiences of youth homelessness coordinators across Wales, the findings demonstrate that youth work offers a distinctive and transformative preventative lens, grounded in relational practice, voluntary engagement and rights-based support. Several key issues emerged from this study each directly linked to its aims and objectives and forming the basis for the recommendations that follow.

### Key issues emerging from the study

Early intervention emerged as essential, yet its application remains inconsistent due to fragmented systems and siloed data across local authority departments. Youth work's principles and purposes offer a unique preventative approach, but it is often undervalued and poorly understood by statutory services. Systemic barriers such as funding instability, the absence of a statutory mandate and age-based service thresholds, continue to limit the reach and impact of youth work. Additionally, existing evaluation frameworks frequently fail to capture the relational and development outcomes that are central to youth work practice. Collectively, these challenges highlight the urgent need for structural reform and strategic integration of youth work into national homelessness strategies.

### Impact on service users and practice

The issues identified in this study have significant implications for both service users and practitioners, particularly in relation to access to support, continuity of care and effective early intervention. Young people at risk of homelessness are often missed by current systems due to the rigid thresholds and poor inter-agency communication, which limits opportunities for early intervention. Fragmented services and inconsistent funding undermine continuity of care, particularly during critical transitions between childhood and adulthood. Without formal recognition and integration, youth workers face challenges in advocating effectively within multi-agency settings, reducing their ability to build trust and intervene proactively. As a result, service users are frequently left to navigate complex systems alone, without relational support that youth work can

provide. Embedding youth work firmly into homelessness prevention strategies would enhance early identification, improve continuity of care, and ensure that young people receive developmentally appropriate, rights-based support tailored to their evolving needs.

## Recommendations

### Develop Wales-Specific Early Intervention Models

To move beyond reactive responses, Wales must invest in early intervention models that are relational, youth-led and co-created between practitioners and young people. These models should integrate relational indicators alongside data-driven tools such as the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (2024) (YEPF) and offer flexible engagement pathways that allow young people to access support before formal thresholds are met.

### Embed Youth Work into Education Settings

Youth workers should be embedded within schools and colleges to support early identification and relational engagement. Educators must be trained to recognise signs of housing instability and refer to youth work-led support. Joint working between education, housing and youth services, should be mandated to ensure accountability and shared responsibility.

### Establish Integrated Multi-Agency Support Models

Youth work must be formally represented on local homelessness prevention panels. Multi-agency protocols should be standardised to facilitate data sharing, joint assessment and coordinated support plans. Youth work's relational and advocacy role should be recognised as central to effective multi-agency collaboration.

### Secure Sustainable and Equitable Funding

Youth work funding should be aligned with statutory homelessness prevention duties. Long-term, core funding must be prioritised over short-term project grants, and

national funding strategies should ensure equitable distribution across local authorities and sectors to support continuity and professional development.

### Reframe Impact Measurement

Evaluation frameworks must reflect the relational and developmental nature of youth work. Mixed-methods tools should include qualitative feedback, youth-led indicators and case studies that capture the lived experiences of young people. Investment in longitudinal research is essential to assess sustained outcomes and inform continuous improvement.

### Support transition and continuity of care

Youth workers should be positioned to provide continuity across transitions between services, particularly during adolescence and into adulthood. Transition support must be embedded in homelessness strategies, with youth work recognised as a key delivery partner in ensuring developmentally appropriate care.

These recommendations reflect the lived realities of youth homelessness practitioners and respond directly to the gaps identified in both policy and practice. The proposed Statutory Framework for Youth Work in Wales, alongside the Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Bill (2025), presents a timely opportunity to embed youth work more firmly within national systems. If implemented through a whole-stakeholder approach, these changes could strengthen the preventative safety net for young people and ensure that youth work is recognised, resourced and sustained as a central pillar in the youth homelessness agenda in Wales.

### Limitations of the Study

While this study offers valuable insights into the role of youth work in preventing youth homelessness, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. Although rich in practitioners' insight, the findings may not be generalisable to other contexts or countries. The sample size, though reflective of all twenty-two local authorities, was limited by self-selection. This may introduce bias, as those who opted in may have stronger views, more time, or greater investment in the topic than those who did not

respond. Additionally, the study focussed on professional perspectives rather than young people's lived experiences, which presents an opportunity for future research.

Another significant constraint was the inability to involve young people directly in the research. Although their perspectives would have enriched the findings, obtaining ethical consent proved challenging, even for interviews with adults. Prior to this study, the researcher had conducted a monitoring exercise tracking young people's journeys through Children's Services, Housing and Youth Justice following the delivery of a housing options resource in schools as part of the Conwy Oaktree Project. The aim had been to assess whether young people who received the resource were less likely to present as homeless than those who did not. However, because ethical consent was not secured at the time of delivery, the data could not be used within this research. This highlights the complexities of conducting youth-centred research in practice and reinforces the need for more accessible ethical frameworks that enable meaningful participation from young people in future studies.

### Personal and Professional Reflections

Conducting this research has been a transformative experience, both personally and professionally. As a youth homelessness coordinator, the process deepened my understanding of the systemic challenges facing young people and reinforced the value of relational, youth led practice. Engaging with peers across Wales highlighted the passion and resilience within the sector, and the importance of amplifying practitioner voices in shaping policy and practice. The research also strengthened skills in critical analysis, ethical reflection and methodological rigour, skills that will continue to inform the researchers practice and advocacy moving forward.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 - Application for Ethical Approval of a Research Proposal

#### Project Details

Project Title : How a youth work approach can work towards preventing youth homelessness in Wales.

- Name : Faye Willet
- Are you : Postgraduate Taught Student
- Faculty :
- Job Title :
- Programme : M. A. Youth and Community Studies
- Supervisors Name : Hayley Douglas
- Supervisors Faculty : Faculty of Social and Life Sciences

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#### WU Collaborator

Description	Role
Hayley Douglas	supervisor

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#### Other Collaborators

No data available in this section.

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#### Project Dates

- Project Start Date : 20/05/2025 12:00:00 AM
- Project End Date : 01/08/2025 12:00:00 AM

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#### Funding

- Is your research project funded : No
- Funding details :

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#### Generic Application

- Is this a generic application to cover a number of student projects? (Note: Students cannot apply for a generic application). : No

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#### External Approval

- Have you already secured ethical approval for this project from an external research ethics committee? : No

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### Application Type

- Does your research involve : Human Participants

- Please briefly describe your project. :

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### Overseas Research

- Does the study involve data collection outside the UK? : No

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### Aims & Objectives

#### Research Aims

- Please provide a summary of your research aims and objectives.(Please use lay language free from technical terms) : This paper aims to explore how a youth work approach can work towards preventing youth homelessness in Wales, so that recommendations can be made for future policy and practice. The responsibility for the prevention of youth homelessness has traditionally been attributed to statutory housing and social care services. However, as the levels of youth homelessness continue to rise, scrutiny of existing prevention methods, intensified. Along with the publication of Welsh Government's 2019 Strategy for Ending Homelessness, and subsequent investment of £3.7 million pounds, the focus on the prevention agenda shifted to the Youth Work Sector. The objectives of this research paper are to;

- Explore what research already exists in terms of utilising the youth work approach to tackle youth homelessness.
- Evaluate youth homeless coordinators' perceptions of what works, in terms of early intervention and prevention with regards to youth homelessness.
- Evaluate the challenges and limitations of engaging in early intervention and prevention, through a youth work approach.
- Examine which methods of intervention work best for young people in preventing youth homelessness, through a youth work approach.
- Make recommendations for future practice in working with young people at risk of homelessness

- Please provide details of your research design(Please use lay language free from technical terms) : This research will employ a qualitative design. I will be utilising Microsoft forms to create a questionnaire, which will stand as the main data collection tool in this project. The use of Microsoft form through my student account complies with the university data storage and GDPR policies. Surveys will be distributed, by email, to Youth Homeless Coordinators across Wales (22 in total). In order to encourage maximum participant engagement and reduce social desirability bias, the survey will be anonymous. There will however, be a final question which will ask whether the participant will consider a semi-structured interview to explore the responses further. If ticked yes contact details will be provided. In order to reduce research barriers, follow up interviews will be offered in multiple formats, depending on the preference of the participant. These formats will include Microsoft Teams or Telephone call. We will review the same questions during the follow up interview in order to expand the responses more thoroughly.

- Please describe the potential benefits and impact of your research. : This research paper will consider what distinctive aspects the youth work agenda contributes to the issue of youth homelessness. It will explore current practice and how impact of interventions are measured and make recommendations for future policy and practice. The research project aims to identify areas for future research in this area to expand youth work knowledge.

## Gatekeeper

- Are there any gatekeepers involved in this project? : No
- Please describe who the gatekeeper is and their role in the project. :

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## Risk

- Please detail the potential risks involved in this research for the participant(s) and the researcher(s) and how these will be mitigated and managed : Confidentiality and anonymity risk - professionals may be reluctant to provide open and honest answers if they feel responses could be identifiable. We will therefore offer an anonymised questionnaire, any further engagement in the study will be optional. Participants will be assured of anonymity and confidentiality in the research process. No identifiable information will be used in the final publication. Participants will not be made aware of the identities of other participants. Informed consent - Professionals might feel obligated to participate as the study as it includes their counterparts across Wales. We will fully explain the purpose of the research, how their data will be used and that participation is voluntary. Reputational risk - it is anticipated that the findings will be shared and/or published this could apply perceived pressure to provide socially desirable responses. Data management and potential loss or misuse of personal this is mitigated by only using Wrexham University 36 Software that is password protection and complies with GDPR. Data will be stored on the cloud and will not be transferred to other devices. Gatekeeper approval is not needed for this study. The researcher has sought guidance from the Welsh Government and the WLGA, together with the research ethics team at Wrexham University. It is confirmed that the researcher is permitted to approach the participants from their Wrexham Student Email account and participation is voluntary and there is no requirement to participate.

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## Method

- Please select what methods will be used in this research project: (Select all that apply) : Interviews, Survey/ Questionnaire
- Please describe your research methods :

---

## Human Participants

### Participants

- Please provide details of the participants involved in the research project, including any inclusion or exclusion criteria's. : Participants have already been identified via my own professional network. Those holding the role require a JNC (Joint Negotiating Committee) Youth Work qualification, or be working towards this qualification. Whilst I have established professional relationships with the participants I will be contacting them in my student research capacity only. The study forms part of my student research with the potential for publication, and is not on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government or other organisation. I will be utilising my student email address and am going to employ a purposive approach to recruitment and participants will need to fit the following criteria; \* Over the age of 18. \* Holding the position of Youth Homeless Coordinator in Wales. \* Registered with the Education Workforce Council.
- State the number of participants to be recruited and explain how the sample size was decided. : This is a small scale qualitative piece of research which is time limited. Therefore it is important to gather rich data. Questionnaires will be sent to all Youth Homeless Coordinators who occupy the position currently in each County in Wales. Therefore twenty

two questionnaires will be distributed. This number may be reduced by vacant posts however, the researcher is aiming for fifteen responses to the survey and five follow up interviews as a minimum. The number of follow up interviews will depend on the number of participants consenting to this additional step. The researcher confirms that follow up interviews will be conducted via Microsoft Teams, or telephone, audio will be recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions will be saved into Microsoft Office 365 account.

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#### Population

- Does your research involve any of the following participant groups? : None of the above

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#### Welsh Language

- Please describe what arrangements are in place for undertaking the research with participants whose preferred language is Welsh : The questionnaire's and participant information sheet will be available in Welsh language. All research will be made available in the medium of Welsh and participants will be encouraged to share their preferred language. The researcher has engaged with all research participants within a professional context and all are able to contribute in the English language. Participants will not be able to undertake the follow up interview in the medium of Welsh.

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#### Location

- Please provide details of the research site(s) : This research will be conducted online using Microsoft Forms, follow up interviews will be carried out on Microsoft Teams. No in person face to face interviews will be offered.

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#### Recruitment

- How will potential participants be identified, approached and recruited? : Participants in the research will be professionally qualified youth workers with experience of working in youth homelessness. An email will be circulated with the participant information sheet obtaining interest in participation. Those who wish to participate will make themselves known to the researcher. A further email will be circulated from the Researcher's University Email account, with the link to the questionnaire on Microsoft Forms.

- Will participants receive reimbursements of expenses, compensation for time or other incentives : No

- Please provide details of the reimbursement participants will receive :

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#### Consent

- Will you be seeking informed consent from all participants? : Yes

- Please justify why informed consent will not be obtained :

- Please explain the process of obtaining consent from participants : Participant information sheets and participant consent forms will be included on the first page of the online questionnaire. The participants will be required to read and click their consent before proceeding to answer the questions. Participants will be informed of their right to withdraw by closing the browser window. The final question will ask the participants to click and consent to the follow up interview. The information sheet will clarify the purpose of the research and confirm that they can withdraw at any point. Again the follow up interviews will follow the same questions as the initial survey however, they will explore the answers more thoroughly.

---

### Deception

- Will your study design involve deliberately deceiving participants in any way : No
- Please explain how and when deception will be employed and why the use of this strategy is necessary to the research :
- As your study involves methods of deception will you be providing a debrief at the end of the study? :
- Please provide justification for not providing participant with a debrief after using deceptive methods. :
- Please explain how the debrief will be conducted. :

---

### Sensitivity & Distress

- Does your research include discussion of sensitive, emotive or distressing topics : No
- How will the potential risks of sensitivity or distress be managed and minimised :
- As you study may cause distress will you provide a debrief with support and signposting information? :
- Please provide justification for not providing debrief information for a study which may cause distress :

---

### Disclosure

- Will your research raise any potentially issues of disclosure? : No

- Please provide details of the security measures and protocols in place to protect the participant and researcher if issues of disclosure arise. :

### Data Management

#### Data Type

- What data will you collect or create? : I will be collecting qualitative data on targeted youth work. Questionnaires will be collated using Microsoft Forms to ask open ended questions. Follow up interviews will be recorded and will be used to generate a transcript. The anonymised transcripts will be populated onto a spreadsheet for data analysis.

- How will the data be collected or created? : Microsoft forms, Microsoft Teams, Interviews will be transcribed by using the recording and transcription function on Microsoft Teams.

---

### Data Storage

- Will the data be stored on the Wrexham University server (Y/ Z drive) or your Wrexham Office 365 account : Yes

- Where will the data be stored and backed up during the research? :

- Please provide justification for why you are not using the recommended research storage arrangements :

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### Access

- Who will have access to the data during the research? : The Researcher (Me) and my supervisor Hayley Douglas only will have access to the data.

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### Retention & Destruction

- What is the long-term preservation plan for the dataset? : Data will be kept for the length of my studies. It will be kept until my research paper has been through the external examination and exam board process. Once I have received my university transcript, data will be destroyed.

- Please describe how the data will be destroyed at the end of the retention period : I will delete all files relating to this research from Microsoft Office 365, Microsoft Teams account and Cloud.

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### Open Access

- Will data be made available for re-use by other researchers (i.e. open access)? : No

- Please describe your plans for making your data available for re-use. :

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### Dissemination

- How will the results of the study be reported and disseminated? : The findings of this research will be reported in my dissertation. The research will be distributed to the participant group, my organisation and professionals in the field. It is my intention to publicise a summary of the recommendations and conclusions of this research on the Youth Work in Wales Website.

- Describe any ethical considerations relevant to the dissemination of findings : Potential reputational risk, the approach of the study is a positive viewpoint of the profession and each participant will be anonymised or identified by a pseudonym.

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### Storage

- Will the data collected be stored in : Fully anonymised form

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### Data Processing

- Please provide details and justification for storing identifiable data: :

- Please describe in more detail the process of anonymising the data. : Any identifiable information of participants who consent to be involved in a follow up interview will be kept confidential, is not required for and will not be feature in this research. This includes transcription of interviews.

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### Disclosure

- Are there any potential disclosure or limits to confidentiality : No

- Please provide details of the disclosure and limits to confidentiality and how this will be managed. :

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### Data Transfer

- Will you transfer personal data outside the UK : No

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### Governance

Further ethical issues

- Are there any further ethical considerations or issues you would like to address which haven't been identified in the form : No

- Please identify and detail any further ethical considerations related to your project :

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#### Experience

- Please provide details of the research ethics training you have received and your experience in the methods you will be employing in this research : The participant has undertaken the Research ethics and methods module at Wrexham Glyndwr University and is aware of all ethical considerations with regards to this research.

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#### Peer Review

- Has your research been peer reviewed : No

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#### Conflicts of interest

- Are there any real or perceived conflicts of interest that are relevant to this research study? : No

- Please declare any real or perceived conflicts of interest that are relevant to this research study and provide details of the process that has been agreed to manage these :

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#### Insurance

- Does your research involve any of the following : None

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#### Information Security

- Does your research involve any of the following : None of the above

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## Appendix 2 – Consent form

*This document is also available in Welsh*

### Consent Form

Version number & date: Version 3 – 15<sup>th</sup> May 2025

Title of the research project: How can a youth work approach contribute to the prevention of youth homelessness in Wales?

**The purpose of this research is to explore how a youth work approach can work towards preventing youth homelessness in Wales, so that recommendations can be made for future policy and practice.**

Name of researcher(s) and contact details: Faye Willet – 07341743420  
S21000721@mail.glyndwr.ac.uk

Please tick or initial the box(es) to confirm each statement

I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet date 6<sup>th</sup> April 2025 for the above study, or it has been read to me. If I have asked for clarification or for more information, I have had satisfactory responses.

I understand that taking part in the study involves completing an anonymised survey through Microsoft Forms. It will be my decision as to whether I take part in a follow up interview via Microsoft Teams and will indicate my consent to this at the end of the online questionnaire by providing my name and contact details.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to stop taking part and can withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason and without my rights being affected. In addition, I understand that I am free to decline to answer any particular question or questions.

I understand that once I have submitted the online questionnaire I cannot withdraw my data as it will be anonymised, unless I have provided my name for follow up interview. If this is the case I will need to inform the researcher within 2 weeks of the questionnaire closing to withdraw questionnaire data

I can ask for access to the information I provide in the interview if I choose to take part. I can request the destruction of that information if I wish at any time up to 2 weeks after the interview has taken place. After this date I understand that will no longer be able to request access to or withdrawal of the information I provide.

*This document is also available in Welsh*

## **Participant Information Sheet**

**Version Number and Date:** Version number 2 - 06/04/2025

### **Research Study Title:**

**How can a youth work approach contribute to the prevention of youth homelessness in Wales?**

The purpose of this research is to explore how a youth work approach can work towards preventing youth homelessness in Wales, so that recommendations can be made for future policy and practice.

### **Invitation and Brief Summary;**

My name is Faye Willet and this research forms part of a M.A. Degree in Youth and Community at Wrexham Glyndwr University. I am undertaking this study in a student research capacity, as part of a dissertation, and invite you to contribute to the research. Before you agree to do so, it is important that you understand the purpose and nature of the research, and what your participation will involve if you agree. Please carefully read the following information, and if you have any questions or concerns, don't hesitate to contact me. My contact information is provided at the end of this information sheet.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Welsh Assembly Government's, Ending Homelessness in Wales; A High-Level Action Plan 2021-2026, outlined a series of measures to prevent and address homelessness in Wales by tackling core structural issues of poverty and inequality, and ensuring effective universal and targeted prevention measures' (2019; P4)

This research paper will critically analyse these targeted prevention measures and evaluate how a youth work approach can work towards preventing youth homelessness, and how we measure such impact.

The objectives of this research are to:

- Explore what research already exists in terms of utilising the youth work approach to tackle youth homelessness.
- Evaluate youth homeless coordinators' perceptions of what works, in terms of early intervention and prevention.
- Evaluate the challenges and limitations of engaging in early intervention and prevention, through a youth work approach.
- Examine which methods of intervention work best for young people in preventing youth homelessness.
- Make recommendations for future practice in working with young people at risk of homelessness.

### **Why have I been chosen to take part?**

You have been selected because you currently hold the position of youth homeless coordinator. Part of this research will consider your perception of what works in terms of early intervention and prevention. It will also evaluate the challenges and limitations of engaging in homeless prevention, through a youth work approach. Although I currently hold the role of Youth Homeless Coordinator, please note that I am approaching you in my student research capacity only. That study forms part of an academic piece of research with potential for publication. I confirm that the study is **not** on behalf of Welsh Government or other organisation, and that participation is entirely voluntary and confidential.

### **Do I have to take part?**

There is no obligation to participate. You are free to choose whether or not to participate. A consent form will be required from you if you decide to participate. In the first instance you will be asked to complete an online survey, with the choice to participate in a follow-up interview by telephone or Microsoft Teams. You can choose to withdraw from the survey by closing the browser and your data will not be included in the research.

If you chose to participate in a follow up interview, you are free to leave at any moment during the process, without explanation, even if you have agreed to participate beforehand. You can withdraw your data before the information you have provided has been anonymised. This

date will be 2 weeks after the date of your interview. Should you wish to withdraw, please be advised that after your data has been anonymised, you will not be able to remove it.

The information will only be used for this research project and kept safely. Any information given will be destroyed once the research project is completed, and confirmation has been received by the researcher that the research project has successfully been passed. This is likely to be no later than 20<sup>th</sup> July 2025.

### **What will taking part involve?**

Taking part will involve completing a survey via Microsoft forms. There will be an additional question requesting permission to take part in a follow up interview. During the interview the researcher will read through the responses provided to encourage further discussion and debate, you are free to choose whichever questions you want to discuss. The interview will be conducted Microsoft Teams; and the audio recorded (only), transcribed and analysed later. Please remember that you can withdraw from the interview at any time.

### **What are the potential risks and benefits to taking part?**

**Data management**, and potential loss or misuse of personal data. This is going to be mitigated for by only using Wrexham University office 365 software that is password protected and complies with GDPR. Data will only be stored on the cloud and will not be transferred to other devices. Data will only be accessed and analysed in a private environment and not shared for any other purposes.

**Undue influence and coercion**, consent should be given free from coercion or undue pressure. You are able to refuse participation whenever and for whatever reason you wish. You will not have to give a reason for refusing to participate. Although this is a peer to peer research project, the study is undertaken in a student research capacity only. Data from this study will be presented in an anonymised form only.

**Are there any benefits from taking part?**

There is no direct or monetary benefit that will arise from your participation. However, you will have the knowledge that you made a valuable contribution to research that will contribute to youth work policy and practice and youth homelessness agenda.

**Will my participation be confidential?**

All of the data that is gathered during the study will be kept completely confidential and safely stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act. The researcher and the project tutor are the only persons who will be aware of you. In the final write up of the research you will not be identifiable.

**How will my data be used?**

*Wrexham University is the data controller under data protection legislation. This means that the University is responsible for how your personal data is used and for responding to any requests from you in relation to your personal data.*

Where will my data be stored?	The data will be stored in my university office 365 account, this is password protected and will be deleted as soon a as I have completed my assignment.
How long will my data be stored for?	The data will be kept until the end of my studies.
Will my data be anonymised?	Everyone will be anonymised, and pseudonyms will be used.
How will my data be used?	Qualitative data analysing youth homelessness coordinators perceptions of what works in terms of prevention, and also the barriers and limitations of the role will be collected. The follow up interview, should you chose to take part, will be audio recorded and will then be used to generate a transcript. The transcript will be used for data analysis. Once the transcript has been

	generated the data will be anonymised. All data for the research will be deleted once I have received confirmation on successful completion of my studies. The data will be used for my for my research report assignment.
Who will have access to my data?	Only myself, and my project supervisor Hayley Douglas will have access to the data.
Will my data be archived for use in other research projects in the future?	No, it will only be used for this project
How will my data be destroyed?	All files relating to this research piece will be deleted off office 365, Microsoft teams and the recycle bin will then be cleared.

### **What will happen if I want to stop taking part?**

You are free to stop participating at any moment without disadvantage or explanation. If you want to stop taking part in the questionnaire please close the internet browser and your data will not be included. If you take part in the interview or if you change your mind during the interview let the researcher know. You can get in touch with the researcher up to two weeks after the interview has taken place. After this date the data is completely anonymised.

### **What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?**

If you have any concerns or issues, please contact my project supervisor, Hayley Douglas, at [hayley.douglas@wrexham.ac.uk](mailto:hayley.douglas@wrexham.ac.uk), and we will do our best to assist. If you are still dissatisfied or have a grievance that you feel you are unable to bring to our attention, you should email the Research Ethics Committee at [rescadmin@glyndwr.ac.uk](mailto:rescadmin@glyndwr.ac.uk). When you contact the Research Ethics Committee please include the name or description of the study (so that it may be identified), the name or description of the researcher, and the specifics of the complaint you want to make.

### **Contact for further information**

If anything is not clear, or if you want more information, please do contact me at:

Principle Investigator/ Supervisor Hayley Douglas

Email [hayley.douglas@wrexham.ac.uk](mailto:hayley.douglas@wrexham.ac.uk)

Telephone number 01978 2934496

Student Investigator Faye Willet

Email [s21000721@mail.glyndwr.ac.uk](mailto:s21000721@mail.glyndwr.ac.uk)

Telephone Number 07341 743420

## Appendix 4 – Survey

**The purpose of this study is to explore how a youth work approach can work towards preventing youth homelessness in Wales, so that recommendations can be made for future policy and practice.**

1. Based on your experience what do you think works in terms of early intervention and prevention with regards to youth homelessness? Please explain your answer.
2. In your opinion what are the distinctive aspects of a youth work approach, when working with young people at risk of homelessness? Please explain your answer below.
3. Based on your experience what do you think are the challenges and limitations of engaging in early intervention and prevention, through a youth work approach? Please explain your answer.
4. Can you explain more about the ways that you have worked with other organisations and services to prevent youth homelessness?
5. What recommendations do you have for future practice for working with young people at risk of homelessness?
6. In your opinion, how can we effectively measure the impact on youth work on youth homelessness?
7. If you consent to a follow up interview, to explore your responses further, please provide your email address below. If you do not wish to be contacted please leave blank.
8. Do you have any additional thoughts, suggestions, or points you feel are important to mention that haven't been covered?



## Appendix 5 – Data Collection Tool

### Thematic Analysis

coding key:

Early Intervention

YW Values & Principles

Challenges & Limitations

Collaborative working

Future Practice

Measuring Impact

Question	Column1	Objective	Description	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6	Column2		
1	Based on your experience what do you think works in terms of <b>early intervention and prevention</b> with regards to youth homelessness?	1 & 2	Existing research & YHC' <b>perceptions</b> of what works	Early identification rooted in relational practice - Data driven identification - Professional Input -	Workforce development & Training - Early identification & referral - Positive relationships and Social networks - Data sharing & Local Intelligence	<i>"Family connections are key in preventing youth homelessness, so early identification and support can prevent family breakdown".</i>	Early Family Support - mediation and restorative approach - person centred & holistic	Early, trust-based relationships, prevention over crisis response, Family engagement, Holistic benefits beyond housing, whole-system approach.	Valued of targeted screening for overlapping indicators, emphasis on familial involvement, targeted intervention,	Reliability of EI systems identifying hidden homeless, Targetted interventions to whole school with higher vulnerability, funding-directed delivery of EI, no scope for regional variations in national data returns.		
2	In your opinion what are the distinctive aspects of a <b>youth work approach</b> , when working with young people at risk of homelessness?	2 & 4	Examine which methods work best	Uniquely positioned - human centred recognition - core values of youth work - trusting relationship - non judgemental - advocating - young peoples voice	Voluntary engagement - trusting relationships, holistic, person centred approach, youth participation, Adaptability & personalisation, recognition of need.		Consistency, Transitional support, empower voice and choice, trusting relationships, adaptable workforce	Voluntary and person-centred engagement, empowerment and voice, consistent, trusted adult relationships, holistic and flexible support, continuity, connectors	Youth work as a learning process, treating homelessness as learning. Rejects pathologising YP, asset based approaches, participation and advocacy, balanced approach to power.	Voluntary engagement in a statutory environment, frames youth work as a learning journey not a crisis response. Advocates for youth agency in decision making process.	<i>"I don't like to start with a deficit... What we need to look at is the reasons for that rather than just go, 'This person is somehow broken'"</i>	
3	Based on your experience what do you think are the <b>challenges and limitations</b> of engaging in early intervention and prevention, through a youth work approach?	3	Evaluate the challenges and limitations of engaging in EIP, through a youth work approach.	Inconsistent or siloed collaborative working - lack of understanding of purpose (YEPF) - scepticism - gaps in data sharing - funding precarity - service fragility	<i>"Youth work can influence structured systems—but only when it's welcomed in and resourced to stay."</i>	Funding priorities & instability, perception of youth work - data sharing barriers - Lack of recognition by partners - Difficulty evidencing prevention	Poverty & welfare - Housing crisis - Gaps in mental health services, relational discontinuity	Early identification of the 'right' people, insufficient data informed tools, balancing depth of support with capacity constraints, fragility of sector, Structural tensions.	Universality of homelessness, over reliance on EI markers, Limitations of predictive frameworks (YEPF), misunderstanding of homelessness, time pressure for case rotation.	Societal misinterpretation of the issue complicates intervention, bureaucratic systems that prioritise compliance, negative LA culture which disempowers young people.		
4	Can you explain more about the ways that you have worked with <b>other organisations</b> and services to prevent youth homelessness?	2 & 4	Which methods work	Established relationships, evidence based proposals - common goals and "structured, process driven" practice	Multi-agency triage & review meetings, Training for education professionals, Group work & casework pathways, Targeted school-based collaboration.		Partnership with NEET team, Collaboration with YMCA, joint efforts for YP to remain to home, school based prevention work.	Schools as primary prevention partners, embedded youth work practice in schools, collaborative, integrated, multi-agency approach	Educate partners, publicising services, promoting referral pathways, collaboration with housing providers and RSLs to provide move-on and practical support	Resource sharing initiatives, mutual benefit as a Principle, Challenging one way relationships by two-way communication, data sharing and a shared responsibility. Cross-development advocacy.		
5	What recommendations do you have for <b>future practice</b> for working with young people at risk of homelessness?	5	Make recommendations	Embedd youth work in multi-dis teams - fund relational long-term work - improve data systems - create space for reflective practice - Cross-sector CPD	Parity between prevention and crisis intervention, housing first for young people, Stronger links with education, workforce training across sectors, Early data sharing & targeting		Trauma-informed & restorative approaches, Holistic strength-based approaches, Access to flexible prevention funds, financial support for extended family	<i>"simple things can go a long way and prevent larger costs down the line"</i>	Strong emphasis on joined-up working, data sharing as a critical enabler, youth voice and valuing lived experience, co-production and participatory approaches, cross-learning between LA's, upskilling youth workers, importance of referral pathways and partnerships.	Preventative financial support measures, promotion of multi-agency events, amplification of youth voice, assumption of CP concerns	<i>"It is my avoided assertion that homelessness should be considered a distinct and discrete safeguarding concern as it would be for a younger child."</i>	Rejects deficit based approach, advocates for understanding causes rather than blame culture, promotes strength based approach aligned with you work values, supports relational, non-judgemental engagement to build trust and agency.
6	In your opinion, how can we effectively <b>measure the impact</b> on youth work on youth homelessness?	2	Evaluate what works	Developing impact measurement that reflects YW true contribution - move away from numbers - collaborative outcome tracking - youth voice in evaluation	Quantitative data tracking, qualitative evaluation, collaboration programme evaluation, broader outcome indicators		Flexible definition of success, track targeted support and prevention, monitor presentations and planned moves	Embedded youth voice, qualitative feedback, local data analysis, evaluation of existing data systems, link between national data and local realities.	<i>"Listen to young People"</i>	Acknowledgement of structural influences on homelessness (Thompson PCS), realistic expectations of measuring impact, value of targeted data, self-efficacy as a key outcome.	Prioritise qualitative over quantitative, calls for action and tangible change rather than increase data collection, recognition that youth work has transformative impact.	

