



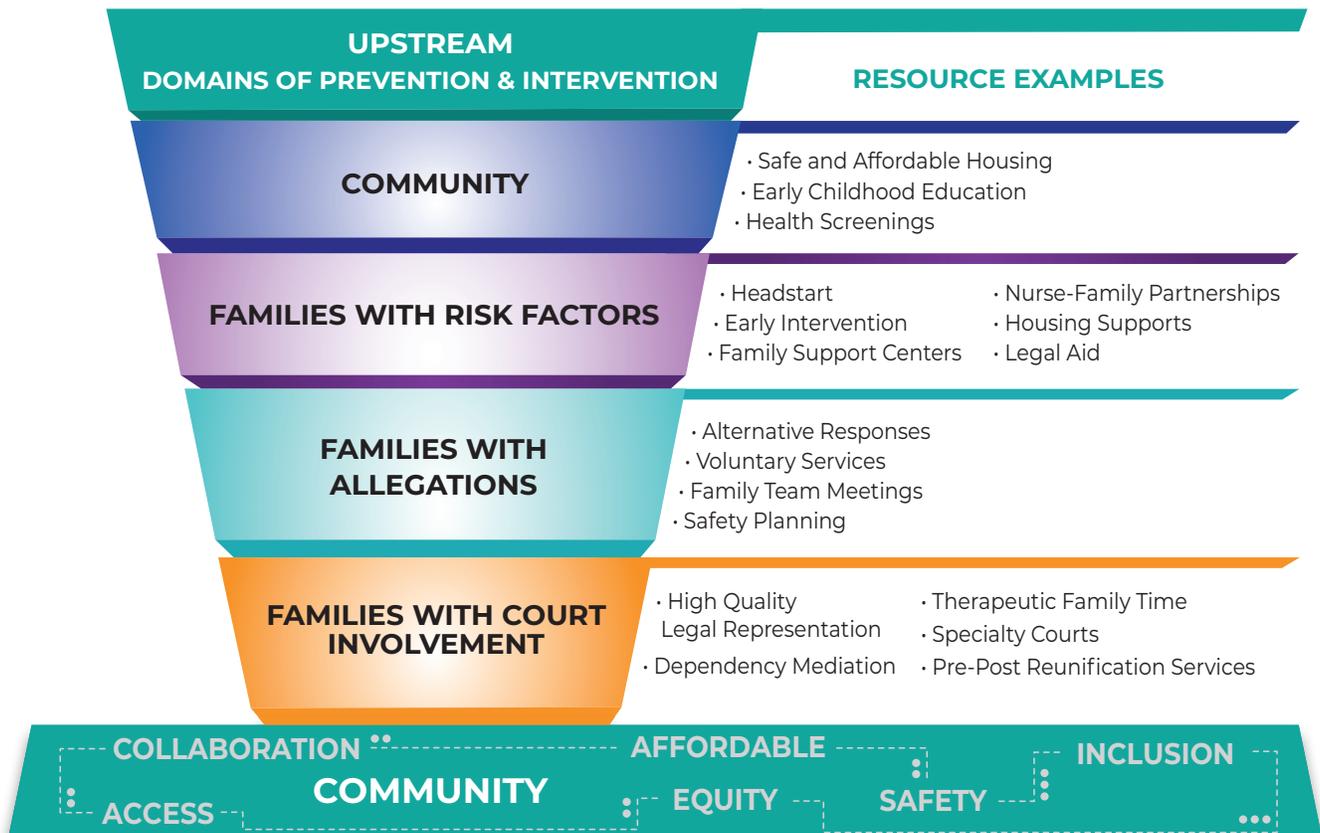
# THE BENEFITS OF UPSTREAM FOR COURTS

Every community has a range of agencies, organizations, and systems tasked with providing the resources and supports families need to thrive. Too often, the effectiveness of these entities is limited by inequitable service availability and accessibility, lack of coordination and collaboration, and inadequate community engagement. This results in missed opportunities to identify and address risk factors before child welfare or court involvement.

Courts see the consequences of these missed opportunities every day and are in a unique position to convene community stakeholders with a focus on seizing those opportunities early on to improve outcomes for children and families.

## A Framework for Community Collaboration

Upstream is a community-based approach that leverages judicial leadership, child welfare agency partnership, and state, local, and community stakeholder engagement to collaboratively develop a plan of action that aims to strengthen communities, prevent child maltreatment and out-of-home placement, reduce court involvement, and support safe and healthy families.



## The Benefits of Upstream

### Upstream aims to improve outcomes for all children, families, and communities.

Upstream encourages communities to attend to the research-based Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)<sup>1</sup> and risk and protective factors for maltreatment through a structured mapping process and action planning.

Through the Upstream process, stakeholders come together to identify who lives in the community, the conditions they face, and how each person can contribute their knowledge, skills, influence, and power to create healthy community conditions.

### Upstream strengthens the capacity of the courts and the child welfare agency to expand upon cross-system collaboration.

The framework provides a structure for court leadership to identify and convene diverse stakeholders to build the effective cross-system collaboration necessary to create a shared vision for healthy children, families, and communities.

Effective cross-system collaboration facilitates communication, breaks down silos and barriers, builds upon and leverages existing partnerships and initiatives, and identifies new areas for integration.

### Upstream targets community-specific needs and empowers community-driven solutions

No one knows more about a community and its needs than the individuals who live there. Upstream provides a structure to empower community members to identify community strengths, assets, resources, and needs. The process culminates in a co-created action plan where community members and system stakeholders document shared goals and shared responsibility.

Because Upstream values meaningful engagement of community members, their real-life experience with challenges and inequities accessing services and resources is amplified. Their understanding of the culture, history, and assets of their community can inform solutions to address these gaps.

### Upstream benefits judicial economy

When courts and judicial leaders understand the populations and conditions of the communities they serve, and community members understand the role of the courts, it can help build trust and improve the public's confidence in the judiciary. Together, they can apply strategies to strengthen the community's ability to effectively address problems without the need for court involvement.

Further, when courts and communities work together and successfully address risk factors that increase the likelihood of abuse and neglect, fewer families require intervention from the child welfare system. This means fewer children are removed from their homes, and fewer families come to the attention of the court. Valuable and limited court resources can be preserved for the most cases of greatest need.

## Conclusion

Courts have a role in building safe and healthy communities, but they cannot do it alone. Upstream provides a framework for courts to bring the community and multi-sector stakeholders together toward a shared vision. By centering community voice and empowering community-driven solutions, there can be improved outcomes for all children and families.



<sup>1</sup> SDOH are the conditions in the environment where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health functioning and quality of life outcomes and risks. Centers for Disease Control. About Social Determinants of Health, <https://www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants/about.html>



**UPSTREAM**  
Strengthening Children and Families through  
Prevention and Intervention Strategies:  
A COURT AND COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH