

# THE IN REACH PROGRAM: INNOVATIVE FASD SERVICES FOR CORRECTIONS STAFF AND RESIDENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

There is a clear over-representation of people with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) in correctional settings.<sup>12</sup> Given the general lack of FASD awareness and limited FASD supports in these settings, there is a critical need for improved access to FASD diagnostic assessments and FASD education in corrections facilities.<sup>12,3</sup> In response to this need, two FASD Networks (Willow Winds Support Network and Central FASD Network) in Alberta, Canada, developed and implemented the In Reach project with aims to to: (1) Provide FASD training for corrections staff; (2) Facilitate educational sessions for corrections facility residents; (3) Administer in-facility FASD assessments for residents; and (4) Offer transitional mentorship for residents upon release. Here, we describe each of these project elements, along with emerging outcomes.

## EVALUATION METHODS

Surveys for...

- Stakeholders
- Residents after education sessions
- Corrections staff after training

Interviews with...

- Stakeholders, including corrections staff
- Facility residents

- Observations of training and education sessions
- Program statistics

## IN REACH PROGRAM

### STAFF TRAINING

Annual training is provided for corrections staff at each of the participating facilities to increase their FASD knowledge and awareness. To date, over **100 staff trainings** have been provided in **32 facilities**, with an average of 15 staff present at each training.

### FASD ASSESSMENTS

Multidisciplinary clinic teams offer FASD assessments and diagnosis for residents in corrections facilities. 150 residents have received FASD assessments, with the ultimate aim of informing lifelong strategies and supports.

### EDUCATION SESSIONS

In Reach staff facilitate regular education sessions for residents of corrections facilities. In total, education sessions have reached over **1000 residents**. Education sessions serve several purposes: to increase residents' FASD knowledge and awareness; open the door for residents to consider initiating the FASD assessment process; and connect with residents before release so that they can access transitional mentorship.

### TRANSITIONAL MENTORSHIP



In Reach offers transitional mentorship for residents to link them with supports outside of facilities, such as health and social services, and help them secure the practical resources that they need to navigate the transition back to their diverse communities.

### REFERENCES

1. McLachlan, K., McNeil, A., Pei, J., Brain, U., Andrew, G., & Oberlander, T. (2019). Prevalence and characteristics of adults with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder in corrections: A Canadian case ascertainment study. *BMC Public Health*, 19(43).
2. Mela, M., Wall, L., Buttinger, P., DesRoches, A., & Wrath, A. J. (2022). Rates and implications of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder among released offenders with mental disorder in Canada. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 40(1), 144-158.
3. Pei, J., Leung, W., Jampolsky, F., & Aisbury, B. (2016). Experiences in the Canadian criminal justice system for individuals with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders: Double jeopardy? *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 57-86.

## EMERGING OUTCOMES

### PROJECT FOUNDATIONS

Significant time has been invested in establishing the foundations for In Reach in terms of relationship building with facilities, enacting a collaborative, team-based approach to working with all stakeholders, and putting into practice flexibility and responsiveness to facilities and residents.

“The program works within the trends of the institution, sees what we’re lacking and then addresses the needs.” - Facility staff member

“They’re not going to be in jail forever, so they need the knowledge and awareness...and this is what’s going to prevent more brushes with the law when they get out.” - Facility staff member

### RESIDENT OUTCOMES

Residents experience hope as a result of being connected with supportive people and resources outside of facilities, and are increasing their knowledge and awareness of FASD, often self-referring for FASD assessments after attending education sessions.

“The staff are having the ability to recognize the traits of someone with FASD as opposed to being someone who’s just willfully noncompliant or belligerent...” - Facility Staff Member

### FACILITY OUTCOMES

Facility staff have strongly communicated that In Reach provides a necessary resource for their work, a mechanism for building staff capacity to work more effectively with people who have FASD, and a means for improved access to FASD education and assessment.

## CONCLUSIONS

There is a clear need for In Reach services based on the perspectives of project stakeholders, who include FASD experts, as well as the research literature. Moreover, the potential long-term cost savings of supporting people with FASD are substantial. Thus, the importance of this work has been established. Our ongoing evaluation demonstrates that In Reach work is being carried out in a way that is highly regarded. Thus, it is not only logical, but arguably imperative, for investment in the In Reach project to be immediate and continued over the long-term.

