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# NEAFAN OCTOBER 2023 NEWSLETTER

## Towards Healthy Outcomes for Individuals with FASD

Individuals with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) may experience a range of behavioral, cognitive, and physiological difficulties that can result from prenatal alcohol exposure. Intervention approaches for individuals with FASD are required to respond to evolving strengths and needs throughout their lifespan.

Material and methods In response to these evolving unique needs, best practices were developed by integrating current research findings with the experiences of individuals with FASD and their caregivers. The “Towards Healthy Outcomes” approach has been developed to provide an evidence-informed framework to support intervention for individuals with FASD throughout their lifespan.

This framework was developed based on core philosophies that create opportunities for individualized intervention support, including development throughout the lifespan, impact of interacting systems, and a strengths-based approach. These underlying philosophies and core beliefs are actioned throughout



the lifespan around the following 12 domains: (1) physical health; (2) attachment; (3) family cohesion; (4) social functioning; (5) mental health and regulation; (6) education; (7) identity development; (8) community engagement; (9) adaptive skills; (10) housing; (11) employment; and (12) parenting skills. To establish its potential use, each of these domains is considered broadly within the context of FASD field, including the new ideas put forward by the studies included in this issue. The “Towards Healthy Outcomes” framework is an intervention ap-

proach that facilitates proactive and evidence-informed approaches to foster the development of individuals with FASD. It provides developmental considerations that are specific to the 12 domains and reflect the whole person.

Furthermore, the [“Towards Healthy Outcomes”](#) framework allows for the integration of research with the lived experiences of caregivers and individuals with FASD that bridges existing research gaps.

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### The Strengths and Positive Influences of Children With Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

In a groundbreaking study, researchers sought to rectify the longstanding omission of people with disabilities from research that accentuates their strengths and positive attributes. The study's focus was on uncovering the strengths and positive impacts exhibited by young children affected by fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD).

To achieve this, the researchers engaged in conversations with thirty adoptive and relative caregivers of children living with FASD. These caregivers were asked to share their perspectives on the strengths and positive influences they observed in these children. Additionally, they were requested to complete surveys that delved into the functionality of their respective families.

The research design employed a multifaceted approach to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. This approach encompassed the analysis of recurring themes in the strengths and influences highlighted by caregivers, the degree of positivity expressed by these caregivers regarding their children, and how these elements correlated with both the child's and the family's overall functioning.

Caregivers participating in the study reported a diverse array of strengths and positive influences present in the children affected by FASD. These positive facets of the children's lives encompassed a wide spectrum of qualities and impacts that contributed to the happiness and positivity within their families.

Some children demonstrated remarkable adaptability and resilience when facing challenges, while others exhibited qualities such as creativity, kindness, and a delightful sense of humor. These strengths were unique to each child and showcased their individuality.

Of particular interest, the study revealed a noteworthy correlation

between the frequency of these adaptive strengths and measures of family functioning. This suggests that as children with FASD exhibit more of these strengths, they exert a positive influence on the overall functionality of their families. This observation underscores the idea that the strengths displayed by these children hold significance not only for the individual child but also for the well-being of the entire family unit.

However, it's crucial to note that when the researchers explored the recurring themes in strengths and positive influences, they did not find a strong association with measures of family functioning.



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## The Strengths and Positive Influences of Children with FASD.



This indicates that the specific qualities that make each child exceptional and delightful might not necessarily align with the overall functioning of the family as a whole.

In other words, a child's strengths and positive influences are distinct from the broader dynamics of family functionality.

This research serves as a reminder of the tendency to overlook or underestimate the strengths and positive qualities of children with disabilities in favor of a deficit-focused approach.

Traditional research often fixates on these children's limitations or challenges, inadvertently neglecting their unique attributes. However, this study demonstrates that these children possess a multitude of qualities that extend far beyond their disabilities.

In conclusion, this study illuminates the strengths and positive influences exhibited by young children grappling with FASD, providing a holistic perspective of their lives and their impact on their families.

It is imperative to acknowledge and celebrate these strengths, as they

play a significant role in enhancing the well-being of both the child and the entire family. By shifting the focus from deficits to strengths, society can better support and empower children with disabilities and their families.

[This research](#) marks a significant stride toward a more inclusive and optimistic approach to the study and understanding of disabilities.

*This study demonstrates that these children possess a multitude of qualities that extend far beyond their disabilities.*



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## Wraparound programmes for pregnant and parenting women with substance use concerns in Canada.



Wraparound programmes, wherein multiple services are offered at one location, are effective in engaging pregnant or parenting women experiencing substance use and other complex challenges while also addressing gaps in services between the health, child welfare and addictions fields.

Evaluations of these programmes have demonstrated positive outcomes; nevertheless, few studies have focused on how programmes' cross-sectoral partnerships are structured and the difference these partnerships make.

Drawing on the Co-Creating Evidence study, a three-year Canadian evaluation of eight multi-service programmes in six provinces, this article examines the partnerships that make

wraparound service delivery possible. The study used a mixed-methods design involving interviews, questionnaires, output and de-identified client data.

In terms of the programmes' partnership characteristics, overall, programmes more commonly formed partnerships with child welfare, health services (e.g. primary care, public health and perinatal care) and specialised health services such as mental health services, maternal addictions and Opioid Agonist Therapy.

The programmes had fewer partnerships with housing, income assistance, Indigenous cultural programming, infant development and legal services.

### Partnerships are essential.

Key benefits of partnerships included: clients' improved access to health and social care, addressing social determinants of health; partners' increased knowledge about the significance of trauma in relation to women's substance use; im-

proved child welfare outcomes and strengthened cultural safety and (re)connection.

Key challenges included: tensions between partners regarding differing perceptions, mandates and responsibilities; personal differences and systemic barriers.

Lastly, by means of steady dialogue and collaboration, partners increased their appreciation and use of the trauma-informed, harm reduction approaches that are central to wraparound programmes.

Wraparound programmes for pregnant and parenting women with substance use concerns in Canada: Partnerships are essential.

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