

# Executive Summary: Central Alberta FASD Network In Reach Project

## Introduction

In 2019, the Central Alberta Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Network began developing and implementing the In Reach project, aiming to provide support to local correctional institutions. This document reports findings from an evaluation of In Reach, with a snapshot of the project up to August 2024.

## Methods

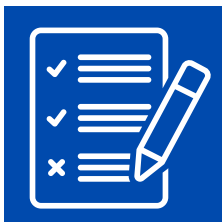
The objectives of the In Reach program evaluation are to:

1. Assess the extent to which the project is influencing change with respect to intended and unintended outcomes.
2. Identify areas in which the project can continue to be refined.
3. Synthesize learnings that can be applied to emerging opportunities for project replication and/or expansion.



### DOCUMENT AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Information regarding the day-to-day work of In Reach was compiled in a simple count. A literature review was also conducted to understand the program in light of FASD best practices.



### STAKEHOLDER SURVEYS AND INTERVIEWS

Online surveys were distributed to correctional facility representatives; 19 responded. In addition, 7 In Reach stakeholders took part in individual interviews via telephone or videoconference.



### PARTICIPANT SURVEYS AND INTERVIEWS

surveys were distributed to 73 incarcerated individuals who attended education sessions. In addition, 7 In Reach participants were interviewed in-person.



### EDUCATION SESSION OBSERVATION

To help give your audience an overview, this section can include a brief description of the goal, its relevance to your sector or industry, and the specific sub-targets your organization is addressing.

# Findings

## Document and Literature Review



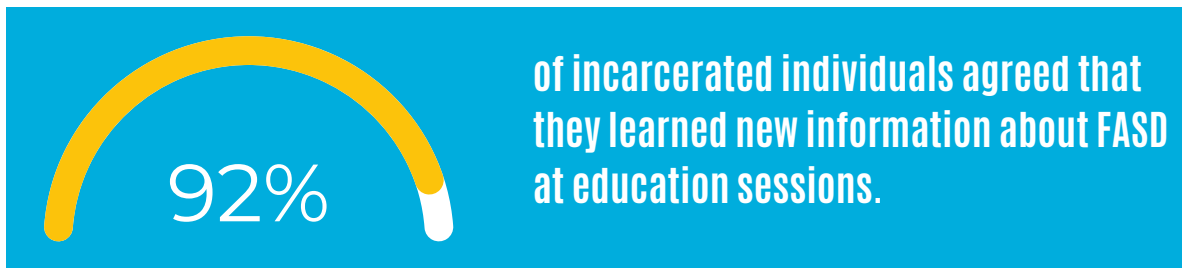
A review of the literature highlighted the disproportionate representation of individuals with FASD in the criminal-legal system. Researchers and practitioners have actively called for FASD assessment, diagnosis, and community reintegration supports to be expanded for people in the criminal-legal system to prevent recidivism and support healthy outcomes. There is limited research in these areas to guide practice, although the need for these supports and services is pronounced, and so is the need to expand FASD awareness among criminal-legal professionals. Moreover, researchers have emphasized the importance of approaches that attend to the systemic inequities and intersecting identities of people with FASD in order to promote their health and wellbeing.

## Stakeholder Surveys and Interviews

Through online surveys ( $n = 18$ ) and individual interviews ( $n = 7$ ), stakeholders voiced clear support for In Reach. A common suggestion for improvement was to expand services to support more incarcerated individuals. During interviews, participants spoke to the nature of FASD as an invisible disability; the need for corrections service providers to have an awareness of FASD; the potential for FASD awareness to have a preventive impact; the importance of providing services, including assessments, in facilities; the critical need for supports to be instigated while participants are still in facilities; and emphasized that well-organized services are being provided by staff who are highly suitable for and committed to their roles.



## Participant Surveys and Interviews



During interviews, participants shared several commonalities, including past instances of severe trauma and adverse experiences that led to incarceration. They spoke candidly and humbly about their circumstances, sharing their missteps with frank regret, and communicating their desire to change. They shared hopes for moving forward on paths away from criminal activity; assessment and diagnosis played a large role in this sense of hope by opening doors to support that they felt were key in helping them stay out of trouble. They also expressed gratitude for the practical supports offered through the program, and spoke highly of In Reach staff.

**“Now [after having an assessment and diagnosis], I have AISH so I don’t need to go out and steal. And now I can pay rent and bills. I like doing things myself but it’s a big help for me.”**

**- In Reach Participant**

## Education Session Observations

Direct observation of an education session at the Red Deer Remand Centre reinforced feedback from incarcerated individuals and program stakeholders. The education session was delivered in an interactive, non-judgemental way, where participants felt safe to ask questions and express interest in pursuing the FASD assessment process. The education session was delivered in a way that was conducive to the two goals of (1) raising FASD awareness; and (2) generating interest in beginning the FASD assessment and diagnosis process.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

The In Reach project is perceived as lightening the load for staff, meeting the needs of incarcerated individuals, and contributing to larger, longer-term goals around reduced recidivism and healthier outcomes for people with FASD.

Virtually all peer-reviewed literature reviews in the area of FASD and the criminal-legal system call for enhanced FASD awareness and education among staff, and/or more access to assessment and transitional support.

Having staff with a deep familiarity and understanding of FASD has been key for aligning with best practices

Continued collaboration with other Networks is also recommended to promote sharing of knowledge and strategies.

Evaluation approaches that measure a program's *contribution* to outcomes and impacts (rather than *attribution*) are warranted. This involves centring the perspectives of people with lived experience of FASD.

An area of growth for the In Reach project may be increased attention to cultural safety and culturally grounded supports, pending the time and resources to expand focus in this way.

Researchers and practitioners have clearly indicated a call for FASD assessment, awareness-raising, and support services in the criminal-legal system. In Reach services are a response to this call. Project stakeholders and participants, who have lived experience with FASD, value the program as a way to meet their compelling needs and support healthy outcomes. **All of these data sources converge to support a strong need for sustaining and growing the In Reach project.**