

Understanding clients with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD)

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Background to consider...

- In a perfect world FASD has no place in this issue
- More a issue of support than justice
- Involvement in the legal system indicates more a hole in the person's social support network rather than deliberate criminal behaviour

And....

- Many crimes committed by people with FASD are:
 - impulsive
 - stem from not understanding consequences of actions
 - a defensive response to real or perceived threats
 - to meet basic needs
 - a result of manipulation by unsavory “friends”
- Complicated by inability to navigate the legal system
 - Eg. during investigation by police, instructing counsel, understanding court process, attempting to comply with PO orders

There's more...

- People with FASD are vulnerable and are often mistreated in jail
- Punishment does not change behaviour that results from brain injury
- Society may be safe in the short term but jail can train better criminals
- So can a healing approach be taken with offenders with FASD in Corrections?

- Unfortunately research shows a high incidence of inmates with FASD
- So it's important to:
 - learn about FASD,
 - identify those affected,
 - assess and respect the level of support needed within and outside of jail
 - work toward providing those supports

The Challenge

“The cognitively challenged are before our courts in unknown numbers. We prosecute them again and again, and again. We sentence them again and again, and again. We imprison them again and again, and again. They commit crimes again and again, and again. We wonder why they do not change. The wonder of it all is that we do not change.”

Judge Trueman, B.C. Prov Ct 2002

The Goal

Long term

- to reduce involvement of people with FASDs in the corrections system

Short term

- To reduce the stress on everyone by increasing chances of successful moments and days and weeks and months for people with FASDs and people who work with them

Why don't they change?

Think brain injury

FASD is spectrum of birth defects associated with alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

Organic brain injury most significant impact

- It is a permanent physical disability
- A condition that can't be corrected or healed
- Impacts vary depending on alcohol exposure
- Is often undiagnosed

FASDs are often invisible... and always variable



Who will have more difficulties in life?

Brain injury is most often
viewed as Behaviour...



Think NORMAL for FASD

Non-compliance

Overwhelmed

Reasoning difficulties

Memory deficits

Adaptive disorders

Language disorder

Frustration

Affective disorders

Social Skill Deficits

Disorganized

J. Lutke



Behaviours that communicate stress

- Agitation
- Increased distraction
- Flight: run, escape
- Fright: freeze, shut down
- Fight: tantrums, hitting, kicking, biting
- Fatigue

How is a person with FASD like
some hot cars?



Adverse Secondary Conditions may mask brain injury...

- Mental health issues
- Disrupted schooling
- Poor peer/ social relations
- Trouble with the law
- Inappropriate sexual behaviour
- Alcohol and/drug problems
- Homelessness
- Difficulties with employment
- Problems with parenting



and they can be prevented with appropriate supports!

Also think...strengths

- Loyal
- Trusting
- Eager to please
- Sense of fairness
- Forgiving
- Determined
- Persistent
- Acute vision, smell, touch
- Curious
- Creative
- Active
- Social
- Fun loving
- Musical, artistic, mechanical
- Good with animals
- Story tellers
- Eager to belong, fit-in



Biggest challenge for person with FASD?

Our expectations and reactions

Biggest challenge for us about FASD?

Our expectations and reactions

So if they can't change...

Then we have to change

Changing the way you see



“When you change the way you look at things. The things you look at change.”

Dr. Wayne Dyer

With FASD...

Think brain not blame



Think stage not age

Think Sensory Sensitivities



Important to identify what's going on...

A Functional Diagnosis:

- Confirms brain damage
- Can help individual understand their situation
- Provides ability to link to appropriate supports
- Helps us shift from focus on behaviour as deliberate... to seeing behaviour as reflective of brain injury
- The diagnosis is a tool not a disease

But most people don't have a
diagnosis so.....

- Observe the behaviours. If they're similar to what has been described earlier, ask the question

“Could FASD be a factor here?”

Provide a personal assistant

- Similar to a guide dog for the blind
- A human guide in each setting is critical
- Continue 'persistent protective parenting' into adulthood
- Tag-team system necessary

If the person with FASD doesn't have a safe guide, will seek direction from others



But isn't this counter-intuitive care for adults?

Destigmatize/normalize need for support

Consider others relied on for success:

- Executive assistants for political and business leaders
- Interveners in courts
- Agents for performers, athletes
- Dressers for the wealthy
- Adventure guides
- “handlers” and body guards for celebrities

How does a personal assistant help?

- Companionship
- Screen access to person
- Cue memory
- Organize schedules, keep on task/on time
- Modify environments to meet needs
- Stays cool, calm
- Interpret requests
- Explore possible responses
- Warn of potential landmines
- Rehearse appropriate responses
- Make person look good
- Cheerleader
- Protect or remove if necessary

Specific to Corrections...

- Use intervener in courts and corrections
- Transition planning is critical
- Wrap-around supports in the community post release and on-going
- Integrated case management model (Circle of Support)
 - Parties working together from a common understanding for the benefit of person
- Developing inter-ministerial and agency protocol models specific to FASD

Is it possible to provide a healing approach with a person with FASD?

YES!

If we

- Accept the disability and need for support
- Modify the environment
- Change OUR attitudes and expectations
- Respect person and recognize strengths
- Consider brain injury in all programming
- Provide Life-long supports

Then

- Lives can be improved
- Communities can be safer
- Our work can be more rewarding

The “Go Fish” Support Model

Feed a man a fish ...

you feed him for a day

Teach a man to fish...

you feed him for a lifetime

but

If the person has FASD...

you go fishing with him

Questions or comments?

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