6TH ANNUAL LONDON & REGION
FASD VIRTUAL CONFERENCE 2026

BRIDGING RESEARCH, CLINICAL, AND LIVING EXPERIENCE

SUPPORTING RELATIONSHIPS IN FASD:
BUILDING BRIDGES ACROSS THE LIFESPAN



OCTOBER 20 & 21, 2026 | VIRTUAL MEETING

DAY TWO PROGRAM

ABOUT CPRI AND VOCPRI

AGENDA

LIVING EXPERIENCE SPEAKERS

PLENARY AND WORKSHOP SPEAKERS

RESEARCH LIGHTNING TALKS PRESENTERS

NEURODIVERSE ARTISTS

PLANNING COMMITTEE AND CPRI'S ELS DEPT

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ABOUT CPRI

Who we are

The Child and Parent Resource Institute (CPRI) is a tertiary service agency providing trauma-informed, highly specialized assessment, treatment, and targeted intervention provincially for children and youth with complex special needs. This includes children and youth with developmental disabilities, autism, and severe behavioural, emotional, and mental health challenges. CPRI also prioritizes research, program evaluation, and education related to serving and supporting this clinical population.

Located in London, Ontario, CPRI is directly operated by the Government of Ontario, and serves approximately 2,200 children, youth, and their families annually. Typically, these children and youth require more specialized care than can be provided through their community. Large hospitals refer children and youth with complex special needs to CPRI for highly individualized and specialized care. 30% of clients referred to CPRI have recently received hospital services. CPRI provides tertiary services including outpatient and inpatient programs. Our inpatient services are made up of 59 beds where clinical teams provide interdisciplinary assessment and short-term treatment; based on the child or youth's individualized clinical needs and identified goals.

Our Mental Health Programs serve children and youth who may struggle with internalizing symptoms, like anxiety, or externalizing symptoms, like aggressive behaviours. A comprehensive plan is made to reduce clinical severity, and transition to community services, closer to home. Our Inpatient Dual Diagnosis units serve children and youth with a Developmental Disability and multiple Mental Health Diagnoses. All our programs provide an ongoing collaborative process with the child or youth, caregivers, and community providers to create a comprehensive plan to manage their continuing needs in the community. To learn more about CPRI and our work, please visit our website: https://www.ontario.ca/page/child-and-parent-resource-institute-cpri



CPRI

CHILD & PARENT RESOURCE INSTITUTE

ABOUT VOCPRI

Who we are

The Volunteer Organization of CPRI (VOCPRI) is a not-for-profit registered charity that strives to support individual needs of the children, youth, families, and programs of CPRI by contributing funds for equipment, special projects, education, and research, and by fostering new funding resources, community partnerships, and positive relationships with our donors and CPRI volunteers.

Every child and youth deserve access to the mental health support they need—without obstacles. At VOCPRI, we work with families, service providers, and communities to break down barriers and build pathways to care. Together, we're striving towards a more connected, compassionate system where no one is left behind. Whether you're a caregiver, clinician, researcher, or advocate, we invite you to explore our resources, attend our events, and join us in building a brighter future for every child and youth. Please visit our website to learn more about VOCPRI: https://vocpri.ca/

Since VOCPRI is entirely volunteer-managed, over 90% of every dollar goes directly to supporting children and youth with complex special needs and their families. Learn about different types of meaningful donations you can make today by visiting our website: https://vocpri.ca/donate/



Volunteer Organization of CPRI

Seeing Beyond the Challenges





EVENT DAY AGENDA

8:30 – 8:50	**Sign into Conference via Zoom** - Overview of the Day – Technology, COI Readings, Agenda, & Land Acknowledgement			
8:50 – 9:50	**Plenary Speakers** ▲ Interwoven Connections: Tracy Moisan, Shannon Parsons, Tanya Eichler, and Nancy Lockwood – *Supporting Caregivers of Children and Youth with FASD who Express Aggression, Through Polyvagal-Informed and Adapted Non-Violent Resistance (NVR) Support Group Models*			
9:50 – 10:05	**Break**			
10:05 – 10:10	**Hosts** - Introduce Workshops			
10:10 – 11:10	**Workshop (Room 1)** Angela Geddes and Dr. Morgan Kleiber – *A Family Affair: The Biological and Psychosocial Role of Fathers in FASD* ▲●	**Workshop (Room 2)** Anna Webster – *The Neurowise Model – Supporting Relationships in FASD through Integrating Research, Therapeutic Coaching, and Living Experience* ■	**Workshop (Room 3)** Nancy Lockwood – *Strengthening Relationships, Building Capacity: FASD Ontario's Approach to Support* ▲	**Workshop (Room 4)** Francesca Serwaa – *From Adversity to Opportunity: Supporting Individuals with FASD Through Trauma-Informed Care and Reintegration* ■
11:10 – 12:10	**Research Lightning Talks** ●			
12:10 – 1:10	**Lunch**			
1:10 – 1:15	**Hosts** - Welcome Back			
1:15 – 2:15	**Plenary Speakers** ■ Kate Kristiansen and Reinier deSmit – *FASD & Marriage: A True Test of Love*			
2:15 – 2:30	**Break**			
2:30 – 2:35	**Hosts** - Introduce Workshops			
2:35 – 3:35	**Workshop (Room 1)** William Barber – *Inclusive Communities* ▲	**Workshop (Room 2)** Eileen Devine – *When Connection Breaks Down: A Relational Cognitive Skills Framework for FASD* ■	**Workshop (Room 3)** Dr. Nina Kaminen-Ahola – *Effects of Prenatal Alcohol Exposure on the Human Epigenome and Development* ●	

3:35 – 4:05	**Hosts** - Research Lightning Talks Winner Announcement - Closing Remarks & Online Evaluations **Traditional Elder/Healer** Joanne Jackson

* Please note that speakers, speaker topics, and speaker time slots are tentative and subject to change without notice. Check our website for the latest version of the agenda: https://vocpri.ca/fasd/. All times are posted in Eastern Standard Time (EST).

SESSION TYPE	
●	Research
■	Clinical
▲	Living Experience/Families

For RCPSC (MOC Section 1):
This event is an Accredited Group Learning Activity (Section 1) as defined by the Maintenance of Certification Program of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, and approved by Continuing Professional Development, Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry, Western University. You may claim a maximum of 4.00 hours (credits are automatically calculated). Each participant should claim only those hours of credit that they actually spent participating in the educational program.

LIVING EXPERIENCE SPEAKERS

THANK-YOU

Every year, we are grateful to those who choose to share their own personal living experiences with FASD at this conference. Not only do these speakers bring a unique perspective to our important discussions about care and support, but they also inspire conversations about hope and potential. Despite stigma and other barriers, they know how important it is for personal stories to be told and held with respect. We thank them for being vulnerable and courageous and sharing their stories with us all.

MORNING AND AFTERNOON PLENARY SPEAKER SESSIONS

INVITED PLENARY LECTURE

8:50 AM – 9:50 AM • MAIN ROOM

SUPPORTING CAREGIVERS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH FASD WHO EXPRESS AGGRESSION, THROUGH POLYVAGAL-INFORMED AND ADAPTED NON-VIOLENT RESISTANCE (NVR) SUPPORT GROUP MODELS

TRACY MOISAN, SHANNON PARSONS, RECE, TANYA EICHLER, RP, & NANCY LOCKWOOD

Caregivers of young people with FASD, including those experiencing Aggression Toward Family/Caregivers in Childhood and Adolescence (AFCCA), often face chronic stress, stigma, and isolation. This plenary highlights the AFCCA Family Supports Program, from Interwoven Connections, and its use of evidence-based, Polyvagal Theory-informed support group models, alongside adapted Non-Violent Resistance (NVR) strategies, in support of caregivers. Integrating psychoeducational learning, experiential practice, and peer mentors with lived/living expertise, the program is demonstrating positive outcomes in strengthening caregiver regulation, quality of life, and both family and community connections. Drawing on 5+ years of practice implementation and caregiver experiences, the session highlights practical tools, including the polyvagal "tree," and offers a scalable framework to support caregivers and strengthen relational care across diverse communities.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe key concepts of Polyvagal Theory and Non-Violent Resistance approaches, including their relevance to supporting caregivers and families experiencing aggression towards family and caregivers in childhood and adolescence (AFCCA).
2. Describe the tangible benefits of peer support models for caregivers in complex family situations, including AFCCA, and assess opportunities to incorporate AFCCA-informed strategies within participants' own programs or service settings.
3. Explain at least two core components of the Polyvagal Support Group model (psychoeducation, experiential practice, peer mentorship) and how they support caregiver regulation and connection.
4. Apply one practical tool, the "polyvagal tree," to map nervous system states, identify triggers and "glimmers," and support pathways to safety.

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

Tracy Moisan is a dynamic leader with 20+ years experience driving growth-focused communications, marketing, and engagement strategies across the technology and non-profit sectors. Previously as the Program Director for the National Consortium on AFCCA and in her current role as Senior Director of Operations at Interwoven Connections, she fosters partnerships, mobilizes knowledge, and amplifies awareness of critical family support programs with measurable outcomes. Beyond her professional expertise, Tracy brings lived experience as an adoptive parent to three young people. She is a dedicated advocate for trauma-informed, attachment-centred, and neurodiversity-affirming approaches, and a founding member of two

FASD parent / caregiver support networks. Her work bridges research, policy, and practice to create meaningful, lasting impact for caregivers across Canada.

Shannon Parsons seamlessly blends lived caregiving experience with complex trauma, FASD, ADHD, ASD, and AFCCA, with her professional expertise as the Programs Director, Family Support Programs for Interwoven Connections. Her compassion and steady advocacy to families connected to permanency includes supporting 2SLGBTQ+ caregivers and youth, promoting caregiver well-being, fostering cultural connections in adoptions, and improving access to mental health services. Shannon provides leadership and oversight to Interwoven Connections' AFCCA Family Support Program and associated professional AFCCA Community of Practice, building key professional partnerships and collaborations.

Tanya Eichler is an adoptee and a registered psychotherapist who works with individuals and families who are affected by early childhood trauma, attachment complexities, FASD, and neurodiversities at her Ottawa-based private practice. She is trained in DDP, Polyvagal Theory, and NVR, which also help guide her work with families as an AFCCA Clinical Lead for Interwoven Connections with the AFCCA Family Support Program. Previously, she helped to launch Ottawa's Fetal Alcohol Resource Program and worked in BC as an FASD Key Worker.

Nancy Lockwood is a specialist in FASD, AFCCA, and adoption, with over 30 years of experience supporting individuals with FASD and their families across the lifespan. She is a private consultant working in the role of FASD Programs Specialist at Partners for Planning and supporting Interwoven Connections in the development and dissemination of their AFCCA Polyvagal Support Groups project. Previous roles include Co-developer / Director of Interwoven Connections' AFCCA Family Supports Program and Co-designer / Manager of the Fetal Alcohol Resource Program at ABLE2. Recognized for her ability to bridge evidence-informed practice with lived experience, Nancy is deeply committed to strengthening supports and improving outcomes for people with FASD and their families.

INVITED PLENARY LECTURE

1:15 PM – 2:15 PM • MAIN ROOM

FASD & MARRIAGE: A TRUE TEST OF LOVE

KATE KRISTIANSEN & REINIER DESMIT

Reinier and Kate will talk about some of the highs and the lows of having FASD involved in an intimate relationship. Using real examples and, at times, a "He said / She said" approach to sharing, they hope to remind folks how challenging FASD can make life for all touched by it… and they also hope to inspire and remind folks that love really does, at the end of the day, conquer all!

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize that folks on the FASD spectrum can find love and have very rewarding relationships with a life partner.
2. Interpret that a marriage is a marriage. Whatever two people in love have to deal with in life, FASD won't make that challenge list change. HOW the challenges are dealt with WILL probably change.
3. Outline that the heart is one of the most important components in a human being to help properly deal with FASD. And most marriages, of any kind, can use MORE heart in them!

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

Kate met Reinier almost 4 years ago to the day. They often joke to friends that they've been a couple for 40 years. Both had spent a lot of their time before their relationship figuring out how life works and what makes people tick. They independently learned that ANY relationship takes work. Nobody gets to coast across the finish line without some consequences to their souls. Kate was aware of Reinier's FASD diagnosis (just a half-decade before she met him) and has spent the last 4 years realizing the difference between "theory" and "how it actually is" to live with someone on the FASD spectrum. True, Reinier is quite high functioning (not solely due to his having needed to navigate life as a supposed "neuro-normal" person for the first 56 years of his life), but his FASD causes him to solve problems and process challenges in his own unique way. Kate has been doing her best to navigate Reinier's navigation. It isn't always a smooth paddling of the kayaks down life's river together. True fact: they met kayaking -- and they know that there is always more than one way to paddle that kayak. Faith in knowing has helped support them through some rough waters, and the rough waters have always led to deeper love and respect for each other.

MORNING WORKSHOP SPEAKER SESSIONS

10:10 AM – 11:10 AM • BREAKOUT ROOM 1

A FAMILY AFFAIR: THE BIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL ROLE OF FATHERS IN FASD

ANGELA GEDDES, CYW, BA (Psych), MSW, RSW, YTT, & DR. MORGAN KLEIBER, PHD

FASD is often discussed in relation to maternal alcohol use, but growing evidence shows fathers also play an important role. Alcohol use can affect sperm health, DNA integrity, and gene expression through epigenetic changes – factors that affect gene control without affecting genetic sequence - that may influence embryo development and increase vulnerability to challenges associated with FASD. Emerging research also suggests paternal alcohol use around conception may affect neurodevelopment and later alcohol-seeking behaviours. Beyond biology, fathers shape prenatal and postnatal environments. Excessive alcohol use can affect family stability, caregiving, judgement, and child safety. At the same time, fathers have an important opportunity

to reduce risk. By understanding alcohol's impact during pre-conception, pregnancy, and breastfeeding, adopting healthier habits, and supporting their partner, fathers can help create healthier outcomes and more stable family environments. This workshop highlights the importance of including fathers in FASD prevention and intervention, emphasizing shared responsibility, risk reduction, and opportunities to better support families.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify Developmental Origins of Health and Diseases (DOHaD) and how they apply to prenatal, perinatal, and postnatal health.
2. Recognize that paternal epigenetics plays an important role in the well-being of a child.
3. Explain that fathers do not cause FASD, but there is growing evidence suggesting that paternal health, particularly prior to conception, can contribute to FASD-associated factors.
4. Describe how the psychosocial interactions of fathers before, during, and after the birth of a child plays an important role in maternal and child well-being.

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

Angela Geddes, CYW, BA (Psych), MSW, RSW, MYACT, YTT, is a registered social worker, psychotherapist, and founder of Geddes Specialized Supports & Integrative Wellness Inc. With over 30 years of experience, Angela supports individuals and families navigating complex neurodevelopmental and mental health challenges, including FASD, ADHD, trauma, and intergenerational adversity. Her work is grounded in trauma-informed, family-centred, and neurodevelopmentally sensitive practice, with a strong focus on translating research into practical, compassionate strategies. Angela is the author of *A Complicated and Beautiful Brain*, *Not Your Typical Parenting Guide*, *Not Your Typical Teaching Guide*, and her most recent *Not Your Typical Growing Up and Adulting Guide* (with corresponding workbook). She is also a certified Mindfulness, Yoga, and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) practitioner. Angela leads a small team of clinicians and collaborates with schools, child and social welfare, legal, and health systems to improve understanding and support for individuals with hidden disabilities. She is a sought-after speaker and trainer, committed to reducing both the incidence and impact of prenatal alcohol/substance exposure and strengthening coordinated, compassionate care across the lifespan.

Dr. Morgan Kleiber is an independent consultant and learning facilitator with expertise in neurogenomics and translational research. She earned her PhD from Western University, studying how prenatal alcohol exposure affects gene regulation and neurodevelopment in FASD, and completed a CIHR-funded postdoctoral fellowship at University of California, San Diego focused on genetic contributions to Autism Spectrum Disorder. With over a decade of experience in research, education, and program delivery, Morgan develops and facilitates workshops, conferences, and learning programs focused on mental health, neurodevelopment, and well-being. She is known for translating complex scientific concepts into practical, accessible insights

and for creating psychologically safe, collaborative learning environments. Based in London, she also volunteers with Canadian Mental Health and Addiction Services – Thames Valley to support inclusion, learning, and community engagement.

10:10 AM – 11:10 AM • BREAKOUT ROOM 2

THE NEUROWISE MODEL – SUPPORTING RELATIONSHIPS IN FASD THROUGH INTEGRATING RESEARCH, THERAPEUTIC COACHING, AND LIVING EXPERIENCE

ANNA WEBSTER

Research conducted into FASD caregiver wellbeing by Anna Webster found that caregivers often struggle to prioritise their own needs and frequently experience stigma, blame, and shame when attachment-based or therapeutic parenting approaches prove ineffective. Combined with Anna's living experience as mother of an adolescent with FASD, these findings led to the development of the Neurowise model: an integrative psychoeducation and therapeutic coaching approach for FASD care. This interactive workshop will introduce the Neurowise model and explore how psychological flexibility and the SPARCS "Space" element—rest, respite, safe distance, change of face, and separate spaces—can strengthen relationships in FASD.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Interpret how Neurowise adapts attachment theory and therapeutic parenting into a brain-based approach for FASD.
2. Evaluate how Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) supports psychological flexibility for caregivers, practitioners, and people with FASD.
3. Illustrate the Neurowise dual-track Structured Psychotherapy for Adolescents Responding to Chronic Stress (SPARCS) model for supporting relationships in FASD.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Anna Webster is Founder and Director of Neurowise and is a specialist on neurodiversity, particularly ADHD, autism, and FASD. She is a Coaching Psychologist, certified NHS Wellbeing Coach, qualified expert Trainer, and Psychotherapist in Training. For the past five years, Anna has worked for The University of Salford on SPECIFiC; a post-diagnostic programme on FASD and the first of its kind in the UK. She co-wrote the manual, co-delivers the programme, and leads on Public Involvement. Anna holds an MSc in Psychology with Neuroscience, with research on the wellbeing needs of FASD caregivers, and an MA in Sociology. She has further certifications in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Mindful Self Compassion, Emotion Coaching, and Dialectical Behaviour Therapy. Anna is adoptive mum to a gorgeous 13-year-old boy with FASD, ADHD, and autism. She brings the insights of lived experience to her coaching and training programmes and is passionate about improving the wellbeing of neurodivergent families.

10:10 AM – 11:10 AM • BREAKOUT ROOM 3

STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS, BUILDING CAPACITY: FASD ONTARIO'S APPROACH TO SUPPORT

NANCY LOCKWOOD

This interactive workshop explores FASD Ontario's coordinated approach to building capacity to support people with FASD across the lifespan, led by Partners for Planning. Participants will learn how four key bilingual initiatives, the FASD Ontario website; Family and Caregiver Support Group grants; service provider training; and evidence-based webinars, are building knowledge and connections across sectors and communities. The session also highlights inclusive, culturally responsive approaches, and offers practical strategies to support connection, interdependence, and wellbeing, particularly for historically underserved communities.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the four Ontario FASD initiatives delivered by Partners for Planning (website, Family and Caregiver Support Group grants, service provider training, and webinars) and their role in building capacity across sectors.
2. Summarize evidence-based bilingual resources to share with colleagues, people with FASD, and family members.
3. Describe three innovative models of support groups and how they are improving outcomes for people with FASD and their family members.
4. Recognize at least two barriers faced by historically underserved communities and identify one approach to enhance culturally responsive and inclusive supports.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Nancy Lockwood is a specialist in FASD, Aggression Toward Family/Caregivers in Childhood and Adolescence (AFCCA), and adoption, with over 30 years of experience supporting individuals with FASD and their families across the lifespan. She is a private consultant working in the role of FASD Programs Specialist at Partners for Planning and supporting Interwoven Connections in the development and dissemination of their AFCCA Polyvagal Support Groups project. Previous roles include Co-developer / Director of Interwoven Connections' AFCCA Family Supports Program and Co-designer / Manager of the Fetal Alcohol Resource Program at ABLE2. Recognized for her ability to bridge evidence-informed practice with lived experience, Nancy is deeply committed to strengthening supports and improving outcomes for people with FASD and their families.

10:10 AM – 11:10 AM • BREAKOUT ROOM 4

FROM ADVERSITY TO OPPORTUNITY: SUPPORTING INDIVIDUALS WITH FASD THROUGH TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE AND REINTEGRATION

FRANCESCA SERWAA, RSW, RP, PMP

Individuals living with FASD often experience challenges that extend beyond the diagnosis itself. Many navigate adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), trauma, educational barriers, mental health concerns, and systemic challenges that can impact outcomes across the lifespan. Without appropriate supports, these experiences may increase vulnerability to school disengagement, community exclusion, and involvement with child welfare and justice systems. This workshop explores FASD through a trauma-informed and strengths-based lens, examining the intersection of neurodevelopment, trauma, education, criminal justice involvement, and reintegration. Participants will gain a deeper understanding of how adverse experiences and environmental factors influence behaviour, relationships, and life outcomes, while also exploring practical strategies that promote resilience, belonging, and successful community participation. Emphasis will be placed on trauma-informed care principles, educational and community-based supports, and approaches that balance accountability with healing. Participants will leave with actionable tools to better support individuals with FASD in building meaningful relationships, accessing opportunities, and achieving positive outcomes across the lifespan.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe the relationship between FASD, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and trauma across one's lifespan.
2. Identify factors that may increase vulnerability to child welfare involvement, school disengagement, and contact with the criminal justice system among individuals living with FASD.
3. Apply trauma-informed care principles to support individuals with FASD across educational, community, healthcare, and justice environments.
4. Evaluate strengths-based strategies that promote resilience, relationship-building, successful reintegration, and community inclusion.
5. Develop practical approaches that foster belonging, dignity, and improved outcomes for individuals with FASD and their families.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Francesca Serwaa is a mental health professional, qualifying psychotherapist, and educator committed to advancing culturally responsive and trauma-informed care. Since 2016, she has supported individuals and communities navigating trauma, grief, depression, and life transitions, with a particular focus on addressing mental health stigma within Black and diasporic communities.

She is the Founder of Ignite Counselling Services and the visionary behind Pathways to Reintegration, a consulting initiative focused on supporting justice-involved individuals and the systems that serve them through trauma-informed, dignity-centred approaches. Her work bridges clinical practice with systems-level change, integrating mental health, reintegration, and community-based care. Her work is deeply informed by both professional expertise and lived experience. Drawing from her personal journey and clinical practice, she is passionate about helping individuals detach from shame, reclaim their identity, and recognize their emotional resilience. Francesca is dedicated to creating spaces where healing is both personal and collective and where culture is recognized not as a barrier, but as a source of strength.

AFTERNOON WORKSHOP SPEAKER SESSIONS

2:35 PM – 3:35 PM • BREAKOUT ROOM 1

INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

WILLIAM BARBER

William will share personal experiences supporting individuals with an FASD diagnosis. Drawing on his journey of learning about FASD and recognizing that every person has unique strengths, support needs, triggers, and ways of processing information, he will discuss the importance of building meaningful relationships to provide effective support. William will also share success stories from his work, along with lessons learned from challenges and situations that helped shape his approach.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the importance of building trust in individuals living with FASD.
2. Recognize emotional triggers in people living with FASD being supported.
3. Demonstrate how to remain calm in complex, stressful situations involving individuals living with FASD.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

William is the owner of Inclusive Communities, an agency that supports adults and youth with intellectual disabilities, and focuses on supporting youth with complex needs. William has over 13 years experience working with people in Developmental Services as well as a volunteer firefighter. William focuses on building positive relationships with people he supports, and developing a trust that can assist when dealing with complex situations.

2:35 PM – 3:35 PM • BREAKOUT ROOM 2

WHEN CONNECTION BREAKS DOWN: A RELATIONAL COGNITIVE SKILLS FRAMEWORK FOR FASD

EILEEN DEVINE, LCSW

Participants will explore the brain-based skills that support empathy, flexibility, emotional regulation, and connection. Through a practical, relationship-focused lens, participants will learn how to better understand challenging behaviours in individuals with FASD and respond in ways that reduce conflict, strengthen relationships, and support long-term skill development across home, school, and clinical settings.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify three core relational cognitive skill domains that commonly impact relationships in individuals with FASD.
2. Differentiate between willful behaviour and skill-based relational challenges using a brain-based framework.
3. Describe how stress and nervous system dysregulation can interfere with empathy, flexibility, and social connection.
4. Apply a relational cognitive skills lens to interpret challenging relational interactions across caregiving, educational, and clinical settings.
5. Implement practical, relationship-based strategies that support connection, reduce conflict, and strengthen relational skill development.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Eileen Devine is a licensed clinical social worker, parent coach, and founder of Brain First Parenting and the Think Brain First Training Program for professionals. With more than 20 years of clinical experience, she is internationally recognized for supporting families raising children with neurobehavioural differences, including FASD, ADHD, autism, PDA, and complex behavioural challenges. Eileen also provides trainings and workshops for educators, mental health professionals, and agency leaders worldwide. She lives in Portland, Oregon with her husband and two teenage children, one of whom lives with FASD.

2:35 PM – 3:35 PM • BREAKOUT ROOM 3

EFFECTS OF PRENATAL ALCOHOL EXPOSURE ON THE HUMAN EPIGENOME AND DEVELOPMENT

DR. NINA KAMINEN-AHOLA, PHD

This lecture introduces the fundamentals of epigenetics and progresses to the concept of developmental programming. It explores how early environmental exposures can leave lasting marks on the epigenetic memory of differentiating cells, and how these early "fingerprints" may be utilized as biomarkers for the diagnosis of developmental disorders. The lecture will cover experimental approaches used to study the effects of prenatal alcohol exposure on human development, including relevant cell models, cells, and tissues. In addition, key findings from the epiFASD study will be discussed, highlighting how alcohol exposure influences gene regulation and the phenotype of exposed six-year-old children. Finally, the lecture will examine the importance of the timing of alcohol exposure in shaping developmental outcomes.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Explain what epigenetics is and describe the focus of epigenetic research.
2. Define the concepts of developmental programming, mitotic epigenetic memory, and epigenetic biomarker.
3. Describe how the effects of prenatal alcohol exposure on gene regulation and embryonic development can be studied using human cells and tissues.
4. Summarize the key findings of the epiFASD study on the effects of prenatal alcohol exposure on gene regulation and the phenotype of six-year-old exposed children.
5. Recognize the effects of alcohol exposure in early pregnancy.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Dr. Nina Kaminen-Ahola is a Docent (Associate Professor) at the Department of Medical and Clinical Genetics, Faculty of Medicine, University of Helsinki. After completing her PhD on the genetics of developmental dyslexia in Professor Juha Kere's laboratory at the University of Helsinki, she continued her postdoctoral training in Professor Emma Whitelaw's Epigenetics Laboratory at the Queensland Institute of Medical Research in Brisbane. Using a mouse model, they showed for the first time that prenatal alcohol exposure, as an early developmental insult, can affect the adult phenotype by altering the epigenotype of the mouse embryo. During this time, her passion for understanding the fundamentals of development emerged: how phenotypes are shaped by the genome, early-life environment, and stochastic events. She now leads the Environmental Epigenetics Laboratory, where her research focuses on the effects of prenatal alcohol exposure and assisted reproductive technologies on developmental programming. Her laboratory integrates unique human cohorts, including biological samples collected at birth, with in vitro models and multi-omics approaches. By revealing the molecular mechanisms of environmentally induced epigenetic alterations, as well as their consequences for gene regulation and embryonic development, her work aims to clarify the etiology of complex phenotypes in health and disorder.

RESEARCH LIGHTNING TALKS PRESENTERS

The Planning Committee invited established and up-and-coming FASD researchers and experts to present their latest work at this year's event. The Research ePosters reflect important and interdisciplinary topics on current FASD research.

Research ePosters will be available for preview a few days before October 20th and throughout both event days. View the Research ePosters here: https://vocpri.ca/fasd/eposters

Of the 14 abstracts that were submitted, 3 Research Lightning Talks were selected based on their diversity, timeliness, and significance to the FASD community. These presentations are condensed, 15-minute overviews of the critical work being conducted by the authors. Please note that primary presenters are **bolded**, and trainee presenters are indicated (*) below.

An Award of Excellence and a $250 prize will go to the best judged Research Lightning Talk based on overall communication, research or program design, and novelty and significance.

11:10 AM – 12:10 PM • MAIN ROOM

TITLE	**Fathering FASD: Supporting Whole Families Through Better Understanding of Fathers' Perspectives**
AUTHORS	**Tanya Joseph**[1*], **Mohamed Yusuf**[1*], **Lindsay Morcom**[1]
AFFILIATION	[1]Faculty of Education, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Background and Research Objectives: This research explores the experiences of male-identifying parents of children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Research has demonstrated that the concerns and experiences of fathers of children with disabilities are different from those of mothers (Cameron & Cooper, 2020; Ogourtsova et al., 2021; Rudelli et al., 2021). However, no study to date has explored the specific experiences of fathers of children with FASD. Our work aims to address this gap.

Methods: We gathered stories from male-identifying parents, including adoptive, birth, and foster fathers (n=9) from across Canada. Our qualitative thematic analysis takes a holistic approach. We explore fathers' roles in advocating for their children's wellbeing, as well as their hopes, concerns, and visions for their children's futures. At the same time, we also look at fathers' own needs, goals, and challenges.

Results: Our work gives significant insight into the day-to-day experiences of fathers of children with FASD and allows us to better understand the services they and their families need to thrive. We heard about parental challenges both in childrearing and constant advocacy. We also heard

about the gifts that come with raising a child with FASD, and the growth men saw in their children and themselves.

Conclusions: Overall, we provide a comprehensive view that will support medical and mental health professionals, educators, and other service providers in supporting whole families of young people living with FASD.

TITLE	**Epigenetic pathways linking prenatal alcohol exposure to fetal alcohol spectrum disorder**
AUTHORS	Sara C. Pender[1†], **Maria Beryoza**[2†*], Widaad Nuhah Chut-kai Koodoruth[3], Ibrahim Makki[4], Mohamed Adil Shah Khoodoruth[4]
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Background & Research Objectives: Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a prevalent neurodevelopmental condition with substantial global health burden, yet diagnosis remains hindered by phenotypic heterogeneity and the absence of objective biomarkers. Emerging evidence indicates prenatal alcohol exposure (PAE) pathogenesis is driven by fetal programming via epigenetic modifications. This review synthesizes human and preclinical evidence to conceptualize FASD as a dynamic epigenetic trajectory and evaluates the translational potential of epigenetic biomarkers and targeted interventions.

Methods: A narrative review integrating data from human cohorts (buccal epithelial cells, peripheral blood, placenta) and advanced preclinical models, organized by biological themes spanning DNA methylation, histone modifications, non-coding RNAs, and the placenta-brain axis. Machine learning predictive models and maternal miRNA studies were also evaluated.

Results: Peripheral DNA methylation "episignatures" are detectable across tissues, with pathway-level convergence (immune, neurodevelopmental, stress-response) being more robust than individual loci replication. A methylation-based classifier achieved high training sensitivity (~0.88) and specificity (~0.94) and distinguished FASD from autism spectrum disorder. Maternal serum miRNAs demonstrated sexually dimorphic responses and intergenerational signals. Preclinical studies identified ACSS2-mediated histone acetylation and specific ncRNAs (miR-34a, miR-150-5p) as mechanistic mediators. Choline supplementation and AI-prioritized compounds showed preliminary therapeutic promise.

Conclusions: Epigenetic biomarkers offer promising avenues for diagnostic stratification and risk characterization, though correlating peripheral markers with central neuropathology remains a critical challenge. Longitudinal, single-cell multi-omic studies with attention to ethical and algorithmic biases are needed to advance FASD toward precision medicine and biologically grounded early interventions.

TITLE	**Missing the Mark? Rethinking Teacher Education for Students with FASD**
AUTHORS	Tanya Joseph[1*]
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Background & Research Objectives: FASD is one of the most prevalent exceptionalities in Canadian classrooms, and one of the most challenging for teachers to support. Children affected by FASD exhibit a range of symptoms and various degrees of impairment, requiring multi-faceted supports. In teacher education programs, preservice teachers receive training through coursework and placements. Although special education courses may be compulsory, explicit instruction on specific exceptionalities is limited. There is a lack of research completed in Ontario reflecting how teachers are prepared to support students with FASD. If teachers are not prepared, these children may not receive the support they require. The objective of this study was to examine preservice teachers' knowledge and understanding of FASD and their preparedness to teach these students.

Methods: Quantitative and qualitative data were collected through a 52-item online questionnaire to examine experiences supporting exceptionalities and FASD, knowledge of the condition, Teacher Sense of Efficacy (TSES), and preparedness. Participants (N = 80) were preservice teachers in a program accredited by the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT).

Results: Preservice teachers felt they were not adequately trained to support students with FASD, and FASD was not discussed as a topic of interest within their programs. Experiences were variable, and specific knowledge of the needs of students with FASD was limited. Correlational analyses indicated that preservice teachers had low confidence in their knowledge, attributed to a lack of awareness, experience, and discussion.

Conclusions: These findings suggest FASD should be further emphasized in preservice teacher education programs, alongside discussion of student challenges and support strategies.

NEURODIVERSE ARTISTS

VIRTUAL ART EXHIBITION AND COMPETITION FOR NEURODIVERSE ARTISTS AND THEIR FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS

The conference showcases remarkable artistic talent of individuals who identify as neurodiverse, including their families and caregivers. Artists were encouraged to create drawings, paintings, collages, sculptures, digital art, songs, poems, or any piece of art using any medium. For inspiration, artists were reminded that the theme of this year's conference is "Supporting Relationships in FASD: Building Bridges Across the Lifespan."

View the virtual art gallery here: https://vocpri.ca/art-gallery/

The competition awards one winning submission a $250 prize and two runner-up prizes of $125 each, decided by a committee comprised of volunteers and local professional artists.

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