EPOSTER

From Behaviour to Brain: A Translational Science Need in Child Welfare

Reframing Child Welfare Responses to PAE and FASD
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Dr. William (Liam) Curran, LCSW,

Adjunct Prof, Simmons University, School of Social work
Boston, MA , Licensed Independent Clinical Practitioner
Contact: neurocognify@gmail.com



Bridging the Gap: Neurodevelopmental Impairment and Child Welfare System Response

- **Children and Youth in child welfare face multiple adversities, including impairments linked to prenatal alcohol exposure (PAE) and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Curran 2020, 2023a 2023b)**

- **Popova et al. (2019), which found that the prevalence of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) in certain high-risk populations was 10–40 times higher than in the general population.**

- **Evidence continue to emerge of significant failures (child fatalities) happening in child welfare population (Curran, 2020, (Badry & Choate, 2015)**

- **Child Welfare – "Time to Move on From FASD Diagnosis" (**Eliason, 2024) and adopt a **Social Model of Disability** with a systems focus.

- **Systemic pathways for identification, FASD-informed assessment, and intervention remain inconsistent or nonexistent. Lack of systems action has implications as shown in Badry (2009), Badry & Chote (2015).**

- **Impairments are read as behavioral, relational, or psychiatric difficulties, leading to inappropriate interventions, placement instability, and poorer long-term outcomes. Children with or suspected FASD graduate into child and adolescent psych care, Juvenile justice systems.**

- **To understand prevalence of FASD, we need acknowledge the total child welfare population. In Ontario 11,632 children and Youth in care 2023-24. Ireland 5.983 (84.8% Foster care) (Second, Q 2026)**

- **Culturally Specific work of epidemiologist on alcohol rates in pregnancy needs to be firmly incorporate in FASD narratives of prevalence in any given cultural setting.**

PROPOSED ASSESSMENT PATHWAY For Child Welfare Services

The framework guides child welfare social workers through a structured, five-step assessment process. It aids the capture of Invisibility where up to 90% of fetal alcohol harm remains Invisible



01	02	03	04	05
Genetic Screen	Behavioural Screen	Adaptive Behaviour Screen	Executive Function Screen	Plan of Safe Care built on evidence

Pathway requires Policy, Procedure and Protocols (PPP) to support Social Work and aid improved service outcomes

The Call for PPP in Child Welfare. Screening Practices for fetal alcohol harm to be standard practice.

- **Identifies** functional vulnerabilities and informs disability-responsive interventions.
- Embedded in routine **FASD-informed** assessment, it can **improve** intervention planning and interprofessional collaboration.
- **Screening turns identification into action.** Its value lies not only in facilitating diagnosis, but in translating a child's functional profile into **informed interventions**, appropriate accommodations and measurable support outcomes.

- **Neurodevelopmental literacy** is both a practice and organizational imperative.
- **Strengthens agencies**' capacity to fulfill their responsibilities as corporate parents.
- Strengthens caregiver understanding
- Promotes **interdisciplinary collaboration**
- Policy, Procedure and Protocols (PPP) driven screening supports social work practice.
- We have the **research evidence** – we need **Translational Science** to bring evidence to life.



FROM

"What is wrong with this child?"

to

"What does this child need to succeed?"

- **Earlier recognition and appropriate environmental adaptations.**
- **Every child will present with a uniquely different presentation. Interventions/Care Plans need to be tailored to the unique individual profile.**
- **Applying the 5-step neurodevelopmental screening tool can reduce escalation into crisis services, youth justice involvement, homelessness, substance misuse, and adverse lifelong outcomes**

Curran, W, & Danbrook, M. C. (2023a). Capturing invisibility: Child welfare social worker's interventions and assessment planning in presentations of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder(s). *Advances in Dual Diagnosis*, *16*(2), 135–148. https://doi.org/10.1108/ADD-01-2023-0004

