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STEPS TO ENHANCE ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR PEOPLE WITH FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER

The Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Society for BC, governing body of The Asante Centre, has received a major grant to better identify and support individuals with FASD and other complex neurodevelopmental needs in the justice system.

The 3-year project begins immediately and serves legal professionals across the province of BC. It is a collaboration with Canada FASD Research Network (CanFASD) and researchers across the country, including Dr. Kaitlyn McLachlan from the University of Guelph, Dr. Jacqueline Pei from the University of Alberta, and Dr. Mansfield Mela from the University of Saskatchewan.

The ultimate goal of the project is to improve the services and supports available to individuals with FASD and other neurodevelopmental conditions in the legal system. Research suggests that as many as 30 to 60% of people with FASD seen in clinical contexts reported experiencing contact with the criminal justice system. Estimates of FASD prevalence in correctional and forensic settings range as high as 10-23%.

However, FASD often goes unrecognized or undiagnosed in the legal system. The project's partners aim to address this by updating The Asante Centre's existing screening tool that helps professionals in the legal system identify people at risk for FASD or other neurodevelopmental conditions. They also seek to build a workforce of legal and justice professionals who are FASD-informed and who can identify individuals who may have FASD and make accommodations to their practice to better support these individuals.

The impacts of this disability on social, behavioral, and physical functioning often result in people with FASD constantly cycling through the justice system. Traditional sentences and conditions that people with FASD are asked to meet often aren't achievable. Instead, improved supports will ultimately lead to improved trajectories and outcomes.

Commenting on the award, Asante Centre Executive Director, Sharon DeLalla, says: "We are thrilled to have received this support from The Law Foundation of British Columbia and to have the opportunity to work with such expert research partners. We are confident the project will profoundly enhance systems and serve people with FASD and other neurodevelopmental conditions to experience improvements in fair access to justice."

Audrey McFarlane, Executive Director of the CanFASD Research Network is also very excited about the project, stating “It is encouraging to see professional associations stepping up and showing that they need and value the research being done on this often-overlooked disability. We are fortunate to work with such strong researchers and partners who are paving the way towards improved screening and support for FASD, particularly in higher risk environments like the justice system.”

Learn more about The Law Foundation of British Columbia and grant opportunities, www.lawfoundationbc.org/.

Engage with The Asante Centre online, www.asantecentre.org, on [Facebook](#), or [Twitter](#).

Engage with CanFASD Research Network online, www.canfasd.ca, on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#)

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