



Alcohol and Pregnancy & FASD Research Team



PREVENTION



DIAGNOSIS



THERAPY & MANAGEMENT

RESEARCH SUMMARY

The Alert Program® Study

Funded by a National Health and Medical Research Council Project Grant & 100 Women

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is characterised by brain damage from prenatal alcohol exposure, the effects are lifelong and may not be seen at birth.

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While lots of children going to school in the Fitzroy Valley do well, some kids find school hard.

They may have problems:

- following instructions,
- paying attention,
- solving problems, or
- remembering things

This can impact self-regulation which can affect children's behaviour and learning.

To help all primary school students do their best at school, we are finding out if teaching the Alert Program® in class helps children from years one to six regulate their behaviour, emotions and thinking more effectively. We are also interested to find out if the program works well for children with FASD.

What is the Alert Program®?

The Alert Program® is based on the analogy of the body being like a car engine to teach self-regulation. The body can run at different levels of alertness such as high, low or just right. Children are taught five ways to change their level of alertness through:

- listening
- moving
- touching
- looking
- putting something in their mouth



Developed in the United States of America by occupational therapists, the program has been adapted to honour the cultural and contextual uniqueness of Fitzroy Valley, so the concepts can be effectively taught. It is also vital that the model of program training and delivery is sustainable after the research project is completed.



What are we doing?

We are working in partnership with:

- Schools in the Fitzroy Valley
- Nindilingarri Cultural Health Service
- Kimberly Population Health Unit
- Kimberley Education Regional Office

The goal of this research project is to develop, implement and evaluate a teacher delivered Alert Program® curriculum aimed at improving the executive functioning and self-regulation of primary school children in nine Fitzroy Valley community schools.

Our journey

The Alert Program® has been implemented in nine Fitzroy Valley primary schools. The Fitzroy Valley is a geographically isolated region of north Western Australia located approximately 2600km from the capital city of Perth.



Relationships with the communities and schools have been strengthened with the assistance of eighteen community researchers who have been involved with the project in varying capacities since 2015. Community researchers work in two-way teams with non-Aboriginal researchers to provide cultural guidance and knowledge across the project. They assist with data collection and provide language support where needed. A grant from *100 Women* supported six community researchers to undertake a Certificate II in Community Services through North Regional TAFE.

Data is currently being analysed and preliminary results are expected towards the end of 2018.

How will this research help?

Primary outcome

- Children who participate in the Alert Program® within their classroom will improve their performance on measures of self-regulation and executive functioning.



Alcohol and Pregnancy & FASD Research Team at Telethon Kids Institute

We have a comprehensive program of research in partnership with community & stakeholders to achieve our goals of developing prevention strategies; building the capacity of health, justice and other professionals to recognise and diagnose FASD; and implementing and evaluating programs for children and young people with FASD and their families.

For information on alcohol & pregnancy, FASD, our research projects, resources and publications visit our website: www.alcoholpregnancy.telethonkids.org.au

There is no safe time or amount of alcohol to drink while planning a pregnancy, when pregnant and when breastfeeding which is why the Australian Guidelines state 'not drinking alcohol is the safest choice'.

Secondary outcomes

- Students will develop the building blocks required to be involved in schoolwork which will subsequently lead to better education and health outcomes.
- Adaptation of the program to meet the cultural and contextual needs of the Fitzroy Valley Aboriginal community and translation of findings to community stakeholders such as schools and allied health teams across Australia where similar problems exist.
- Utilisation of information and communication technologies, such as the Telehealth service delivery model, will enable ongoing training and support to remote schools implementing the Alert Program® to ensure its sustainability and support knowledge transfer between rural and remote researchers and clinicians with their metropolitan counterparts.

Publications

[The development of a culturally appropriate school based intervention for Australian Aboriginal children living in remote Communities: A formative evaluation of the Alert Program® intervention](#)

[Study protocol for a self-controlled cluster randomised trial of the Alert Program® to improve self-regulation and executive function in Australian Aboriginal children with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder](#)

Project team

- Dr James Fitzpatrick - Principal Chief Investigator
- Ms Bree Wagner - Study Coordinator & PhD Candidate
- Ms Sue Cherel - Lead Community Researcher
- Ms Samantha Ahfat, Ms Rebecca Smith, Ms Irene Passenger, Ms Marissa Williams - Community Researchers
- Ms Emma Adams - Research Officer
- Ms Gayle Segar - Research Assistant

