

MAKING FASD HISTORY: A MULTI-SITE PREVENTION PROGRAM

SUMMARY: Justice sector research in Newcastle, NSW

The criminalisation of young people with complex physical and mental health needs is widespread. Data from several Australian jurisdictions demonstrate that many young people in detention present with a neurodevelopmental disorder. Data also shows that many young people in detention present with drug and alcohol use, and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Young people with FASD can face significant challenges in their lives. One of these challenges is overrepresentation in the Youth Justice system from an early age. Risky alcohol consumption in the Newcastle area is known to be highly prevalent. Hence, Newcastle stakeholders established the need for identification and support of young people with FASD in the Youth Justice system.

As part of the “Making FASD history: A Multi-Site Prevention Program”, interviews with Youth Justice stakeholders in Newcastle were undertaken. This was done to understand and map how stakeholders in the justice sector work with young people with FASD and other neurodevelopmental disorders. Interviews findings were also used to inform the development of a Model of Care (MoC) tool for use in the Youth Justice sector.

Results of the interviews revealed a workforce that wants to see improvements in outcomes for young people with FASD and other neurodevelopmental disorders who enter the youth justice system. The sector needs more support through training, ongoing funding, and assistance to develop FASD-sensitive work practices.

As a result from these interviews a MoC tool was developed. This tool outlined current pathways through the justice system and provided resources to assist staff in achieving best practice in their support for young people with FASD and other neurodevelopmental disorders. The MoC tool was designed to:

- Map the patient journey for young people with possible undiagnosed neurodevelopmental disorders (including FASD) involved with the Newcastle Youth Justice system
- Build capacity and understanding amongst justice professionals and custodial staff of the effects of prenatal alcohol exposure and how FASD may present in youth clients
- Maximize potential of local services to provide best practice support and assistance for youth clients

The Model of Care materials can be accessed online here:

[Newcastle FASD Youth Justice Model of Care Handbook](#)

[A3 Poster - FASD Model of Care Newcastle](#)

[A3 Poster Indicators of FASD](#)

This research enabled the development of a tool to assist professionals working with youth involved with Youth Justice. To understand the long-term effectiveness of the tool, future research must support comprehensive implementation in the Newcastle region. Additionally, evaluation should explore to what extent the tool: a) assists staff in each sector to provide appropriate referrals; b) assists youth, families, and carers in their therapeutic management journey; and, c) facilitates early intervention and support for individuals with FASD.

References available on request.

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