



# THROUGH AN ABORIGINAL LENS

For our Children...For our Future

**Through an Aboriginal Lens (TAL)** is a partnership between the Native Courtworker and Counselling Association of BC and The Asante Centre, Maple Ridge. The intent of this first-of-its-kind project in BC is to provide holistic outreach support to Indigenous youth referred to the Youth Justice FASD Program. The approach to the work is through an Indigenous cultural lens and rooted in an Indigenous worldview, values and teachings.

**Assessment Support:** Going through a fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) assessment can be challenging. Many feel shame, guilt and fear often due to not fully understanding what FASD is or the benefits to an assessment. Through an Aboriginal Lens (TAL) staff provides support to the youth and their families before, during and after an assessment. We assist youth and their families in understanding what FASD is, we walk through each step of the assessment with them and then continue our support after the assessment in anyway the youth and their families deem necessary.

**Justice Support Services:** We provide youth information about the youth, adult and family justice systems and court processes. We work to ensure youths' rights are protected against the various systemic challenges encountered in the justice system when living with concurrent socio-economic, health and cultural barriers. We advocate for Indigenous youth and families to successfully access services provided by Legal Aid, Ministry of Social Development & Social Innovation, Ministry of Children and Family Development, First Nation's Health Authority and other grass roots community based services such as food banks, shelters and friendship centres.

**Service Provider Support:** FASD is acknowledged by service providers, but for many, it is still a challenge to fully understand the difficulties or inabilities youth have with basic day-to-day tasks and direction. When possible, well before diagnoses, TAL liaises with community support workers (probation offices, social workers, school staff and others) to share our understanding of the youth's strengths and challenges. We assist service providers in creating culturally appropriate strategies that will support the youth. TAL also supports the Asante Centre staff in understanding an Indigenous worldview to provide a more culturally sensitive approach during an assessment.



**Community Capacity Building:** Change or making allowances in programming is hard, but for youth and families affected by FASD, constantly failing in standardized mainstream programming and counselling is even harder. As part of the youth's Integrated Case Management Team, TAL support workers provide recommendations to the team that are founded on an Indigenous worldview. We utilize current community supports/programs and aid them in making service delivery changes that are more meaningful and culturally appropriate for the youth.

**Building a Positive Sense of Identity:** The majority of youth have been in Ministry care and do not know their birth family or birth community. Many have not had exposure to traditional culture and teachings and do not have a positive sense of who they are as an Indigenous person. Many feel FASD is another negative factor about being Aboriginal. TAL staff support youth and their families in understanding FASD is not exclusive to Indigenous people or a part of Indigenous identity. We discuss the rich culture and history of Indigenous people across our sacred land. We support the youth and their families in receiving cultural teachings that are connected to their birth culture. We enlist the support of Elders and knowledgeable people to provide teachings and experience with spiritual cleansing ceremonies, canoe journeys, traditional foods and medicines, nature and traditional arts.

**Understand Your Diagnoses:** Understanding an FASD diagnoses is complicated. TAL support workers assist youth and families in understanding the assessment and how they can build upon their strengths and ensure their challenges are not every day struggles. Understanding the diagnoses is vital to begin the healing process that will address the shame, guilt, fear and conflicts many of our families experience. Guided by Indigenous values of patience, love, care and respect TAL supports youth and families living with the challenges and complexities of FASD.

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