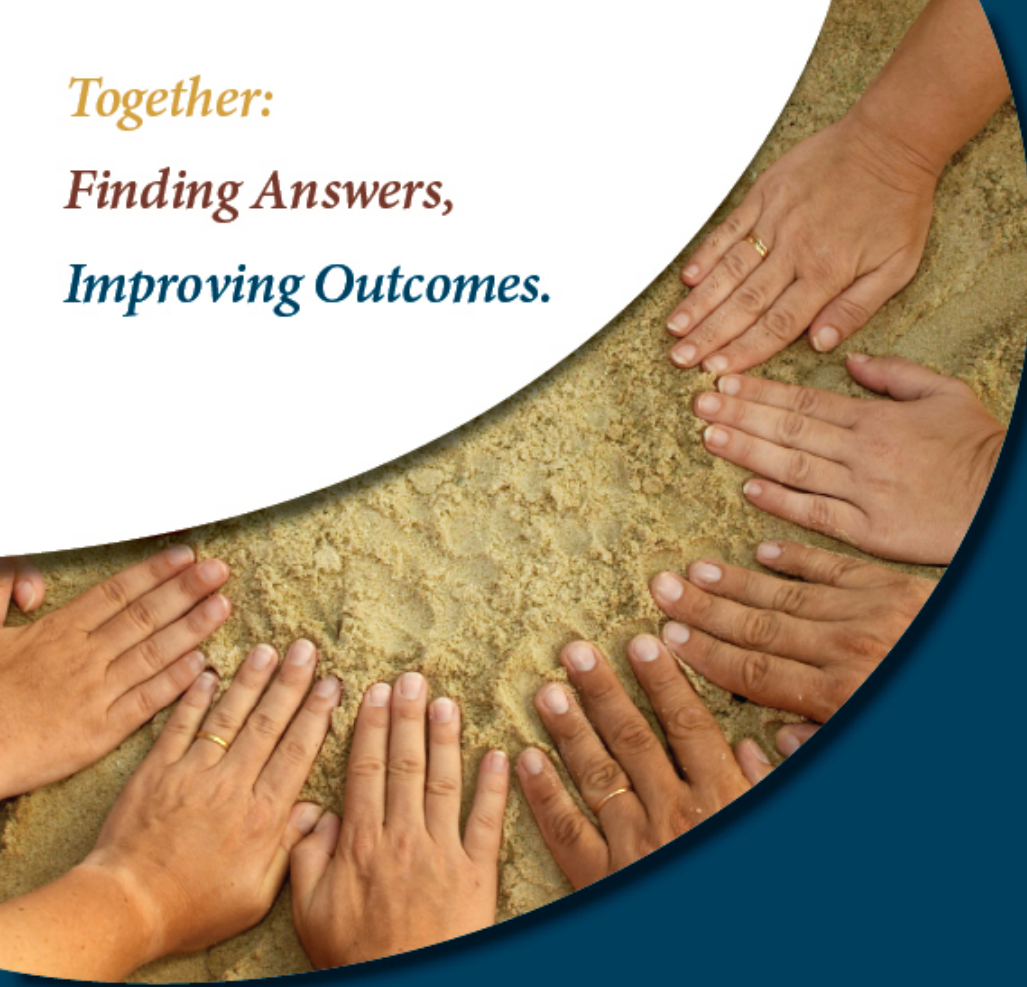


*Together:  
Finding Answers,  
Improving Outcomes.*



# The Experiences of Women in Mentoring Programs

September 2013

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# Canada FASD Research Network

- The CanFASD Research Network is a collaboration of formally and informally connected professionals from a range of research sciences, who are located across western and northern Canada.
- The aim is to create, nurture, and sustain a collaborative environment which produces relevant research leading to:
  - Prevention of FASD and,
  - Significant improvement in the lives of affected individuals, their families, and communities.

# Why Mentoring?

- Women who use alcohol in risky ways often have complex histories, involving trauma, child abuse, mental health issues, violence, and poverty.
- Relational approaches are based on harm reduction and the importance of incremental lifestyle changes.
- The Parent-Child Assistance Program (PCAP) is a relational model that has demonstrated effectiveness in engaging high-risk women and preventing births of children with FASD.

# What is Mentoring?

*You meet with this lady once a week and she gives you rides that you need or takes you to appointments if you need.*

*She's there whenever you need to talk and gives you information on stuff like parenting and FASD and stuff like that and whatever. It's an awesome program and they don't judge you and it's all confidential and it's awesome. I love it.*

# Qualitative Study Methodology

- Interviewed 10 women (6 in MB and 4 in AB) who had completed a three-year mentoring program.
- 7 women were from an urban area, 3 were from a rural area.
- Ranged in age from 21 – 42 years of age.
- 7 were pregnant at time of referral to mentor program, with 5 using substances through their pregnancies.
- 5 recently had their children apprehended.

# Four Phases of Mentoring

- Phase 1 – Entry to the Program
  - *I think I hit rock bottom*
- Phase 2 – Process of Discoveries
  - *I wasn't as broken as I always thought I was*
- Phase 3 – Process of Transformation
  - *It literally changed my whole life*
- Phase 4 – Life After Mentoring
  - *I take care of myself now*

# Phase 1: “Rock Bottom”

- Women were at the lowest point in their lives – alone, pregnant, abusing substances, experiencing loss.
- Decided to enroll because of immediate responsiveness of program, the approach of mentors (reassuring, caring) and the practical support offered (transportation, getting to appointments, etc).

# Phase 2: “Not as Broken...”

- Women were receptive to mentoring because of the mentors' qualities (non-judgmental), their provision of emotional support, and their provision of practical support (access to resources, transportation, advocacy, etc.).

*It got more personal and she was more of a sister almost, but on a professional level... I would tell her things that I would never tell anybody.*



## Phase 2: “Not as Broken...”

- Over time, mentors were able to challenge the women around their decisions and their behaviour, which was difficult, but did not compromise the mentoring relationship.

*Usually she was quite direct in her words.*

*Even though on occasion they could be hurtful, she would tell me before that, “This is going to hurt, but I’m going to say it”.*

# Phase 2: “Not as Broken”

- All 10 women had relapses during the program, but found they could talk to their mentors about them, learning about their triggers and how to cope with and prevent relapses.
- They began to connect their substance use to other issues in their lives, such as parental substance abuse.

*I would phone her, and she would come pick me up and take me for coffee, because it takes 15 minutes to get off craving of whatever you had.*

# Phase 3: “It Changed My Life”

- The mentoring program helped women to get involved in programs (literacy, addictions) and school, develop skills, gain insight, access birth control, and access practical supports (food banks, bus tickets, etc.).
- They also described changes in their self esteem, self confidence, and maturity, which they attributed to their mentors.
- Many changed their circle of friends to remove themselves from unhealthy influences and protect their sobriety.

# Phase 3: “It Changed My Life”

- Many women described their experience through mentoring as leading to total life transformation: empowerment, faith in oneself, and recognizing her right to a good life.

*It literally changed my whole life. They gave me hope again. They gave me a faith in myself that had kind of left, and, if up to the rest of the people in the world, I still wouldn't have any of that.*

# Phase 4: “I Take Care of Myself”

- All but 1 had regained custody of her children, and the woman who had not was in the process of working toward that goal.
- Goals they identified for themselves included going back to school, working, and supporting their families.
- They also had goals for their children, emphasizing education, sports, family values, and stability in life.
- They were determined to stop the cycle.

# Advice for Women

*If you really want to make it and you really want to succeed, anything is pretty much possible when you become part of the program. They really don't leave much room for failure and when you do, you just start again.*

# Summary

- Mentoring relationships are powerful interventions.
- Significant changes were noted in substance use, parenting skills, regaining custody of children from CFS, maintaining better boundaries with others, and finding relationships with partners who were not abusive.