

## Circle of Hope

Jurisdiction: Prince Edward Island

Contact: Eileen Conway-Martin (AWA)

Level: ECE and K-12

Theme: Community Based Practices

### Description of Practice:

The Prince Edward Island Department of Education is beginning to partner with the Aboriginal Women's Association of PEI's "Circle of Hope" initiatives. The Aboriginal Women's Association of Prince Edward Island has developed the "Circle of Hope" program that offers an efficient and effective multidisciplinary approach to deal with developmental issues and learning disabilities resulting from Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). The program is currently based in First Nation communities and uses a family strengthening approach. The family is the center of the process and therefore the main decision maker. The core team is composed of: Community Health Nurse (Team Facilitator), Family, Family Advocate, Physician, Psychologist, Occupational Therapist, and Speech Language Pathologist with other service providers as required from Addictions, Mental Health, Education, Social Workers, etc.

Families seeking support may choose the path most suitable to them. Support and assistance in a gradual learning path about FASD is one option, but paths may also include the involvement of a number of service providers or an immediate referral to a physician or diagnostic team.

### Background:

In 2003 the Aboriginal Women's Association of PEI began an initiative to focus on FASD and the needs of individuals and families involved. The project began by looking at policy but has now moved into the implementation of a FASD model based on the new 2005 Physician Guidelines regarding practice. Activities are guided in essence by the Provincial FASD Advisory Group and two Regional Groups based in each of the two First Nations Communities on Prince Edward Island.

### Development:

In late 2005 the Aboriginal and Diversity Education Specialist at the Department of Education joined the FASD Advisory Group coordinated by the Aboriginal Women's Association. In March 2006, the Special Education Standing Committee of the Department of Education learned about many of the facts and challenges associated with FASD during a two-hour presentation by AWA organizers. FASD awareness training will continue with the province's Resource teachers and School Counselors to improve educators' understanding of the effects and behaviors associated with various degrees of FASD. It is recognized FASD is not just an Aboriginal issue and information needs to spread to all schools across the province.

Ongoing training will be provided by AWA organizers for all service providers re: FASD and Circles of Hope. This is a Community Development Initiative spurred on by the Aboriginal Women's Association of PEI.

### Evidence:

Due to recent FASD prevention activities, Aboriginal women and local service providers have already noted a real difference regarding women abstaining from alcohol while pregnant. In addition, Aboriginal women have indicated during interviews that they now know who it is they should speak to when they have a concern and what should happen when they share their concern. This is the direct opposite to what Aboriginal women were stating two years ago when the project began. AWA's goal is to continue to educate the community about the FASD model so it will be available to families with FASD individuals of all ages.

Adaptability:

Although the AWA "Circle of Hope" project was piloted specifically for the early childhood years, this model will be adaptable to all ages of individuals with FASD. The potential benefits of expanding this project to all learning issues that cause concern to parents and educators is where the Department of Education hopes to contribute significantly. The Circle of Hope is currently available to the Aboriginal families of Prince Edward Island upon expressing their concern regarding FASD, with or without a formal medical diagnosis. The "Circle of Hope" program helps the family through the assessment process and family supports are put in place at the community level right away.

Further information:

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