

**Yellowknife, NT
March 2020**

FASD and housing in Yellowknife

Version: 2

Foster Family Coalition of the Northwest Territories / 4Y Program

More about this project

The point of this project is to determine the current perception of housing expectations and needs for people who have Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) in Yellowknife. Through interviews with various community members, the project gauges: 1) the understanding of FASD in Yellowknife, 2) the perception of housing needs in Yellowknife, and 3) the current standards in place in the community to ensure safe and adequate housing for people in Yellowknife who have FASD. We hope for this project to be just the first step in a larger plan to do further research, and eventually implement adequate supportive living for those with FASD in Yellowknife.

How our data was obtained

An online survey, expected to take people 10-15 minutes to complete, was sent out to various people living in Yellowknife in February 2020.

The main demographic of people who we reached out to with the survey includes:

- People with FASD in Yellowknife
- People with lived experience of housing insecurity in Yellowknife
- People who work in the housing, education, justice, and social support field
- People who support those with FASD in Yellowknife

We asked the following questions on the survey.

What is the best way to describe your role in Yellowknife?

How are you connected to the issue of housing in Yellowknife?

What is your age?

Can you provide some information on what you know about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder? ex. strengths, challenges, abilities

In 2020, what do you think are the biggest barriers for people with FASD to obtain and retain housing in Yellowknife?

What specific to Yellowknife (and the North) adds barriers to people and housing?

How do you think housing can be done better in Yellowknife?

26 completed online surveys were received, and a live interview with a group of six youth was conducted as well.

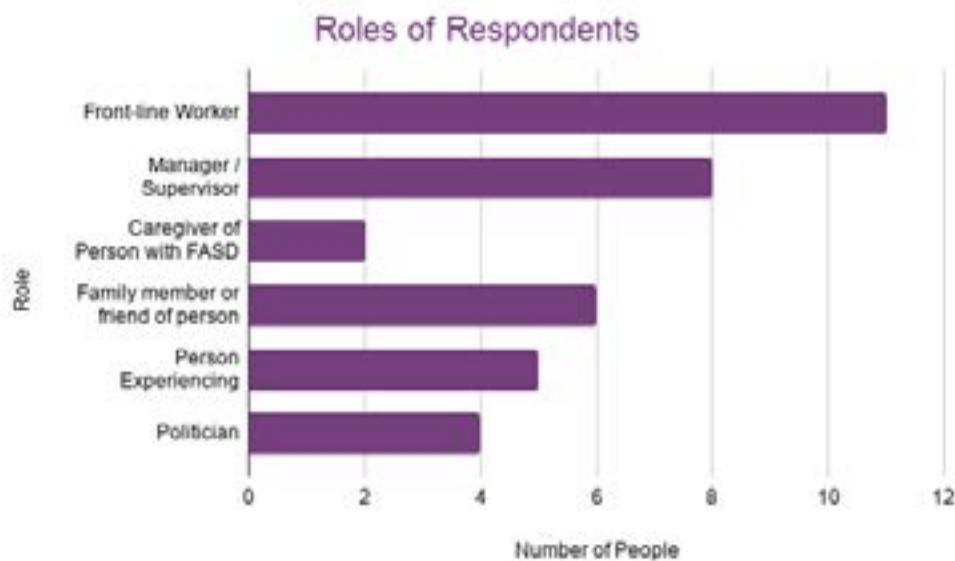
Age:

Out of our 32 respondents, 26 were 22+, and 6 were below 22.



Role:

Out of our 32 respondents, 11 were front-line workers, 8 were managers / supervisors, 2 were caregivers of a person with FASD, 6 were a family or friends of a person with FASD, 5 were people currently experiencing housing instability, and 4 were politicians. In addition, each of the following roles had one respondent: justice worker, political staff, researcher, administration worker, addictions worker, housing worker, cultural / traditional healing worker, social service worker, and medical worker.



Q1: HOW ARE YOU CONNECTED TO THE ISSUE OF HOUSING IN YELLOWKNIFE?

The respondents to this survey are connected to the issue of housing in Yellowknife in the following ways:

- staff who work with youth experiencing homelessness
- staff who work with clients involved in the Justice system who experience instability in their lives, which includes housing instability
- adult and youth community members experiencing housing instability
- staff working directly with individuals with FASD to find them housing
- staff working to provide supported living to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities
- staff who work in the mental health and addictions field, who note that housing is a major issues for their clients
- staff at hospitals who work with patients who discuss their experiences with homelessness, couch surfing, wait lists, staying at a shelter, arrears, eviction, etc.
- individual looking for supportive housing for adults with FASD that they support
- staff at a place of work in which individuals experiencing homelessness regularly frequent
- caregiver of a young adult who requires supportive living that provides him respect and independence
- Members of the Legislative Assembly, who provide input on policy, funding, and legislation regarding housing

“Everyone in Yellowknife is connected to the housing issue whether that’s availability or affordability.”

Q2: CAN YOU PROVIDE SOME INFORMATION ON WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER? EX. STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES, ABILITIES

FASD adds barriers (cognitive, behavioral, etc.) which means that necessary supports are required for finding and maintaining employment.

FASD can include physical and cognitive symptoms, can affect memory, lead to impulsiveness, the way they learn, etc. They tend to be more visual? Need a lot of prompts/cues to complete tasks.

Among other challenges, FASD affects a person's memory and decision making capacity, which make it more difficult for a person with FASD to manage independent living.

FASD disrupts cognitive abilities to differing degrees. There is a difficulty to diagnose, which means difficult access to critical services that other disabilities have easier access to.

It affects everyone differently, required supports will vary from one person to the next, all individuals with FASD have strengths, most struggles with memory and executive functioning. Almost all adults with FASD struggle with 'affect regulation'. Almost all require some sort of support to be successful.

Some of the challenges that individuals face include inability to learn due to being easily distracted by environmental stimuli, learning challenges in school and life in general, having trouble remembering due to inconsistent memory, trouble with sleep and food, being easily exhausted and usually lack cause/effect perception so will not remember the result of what happened previous should they do the same thing again.

People with FASD are appreciative of structured environments where they can have habitual tasks which help with routines that they can stick to. They also understand simplified language spoken without too many words. These individuals thrive with praise, rest, as well as being given transitional time between tasks. They also do well with tasks given in small chunks that are not overwhelming.

Each person with FASD has strengths that allow us to help them come up with tools and strategies that work for them.

Q2 CONTINUED: CAN YOU PROVIDE SOME INFORMATION ON WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER? EX. STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES, ABILITIES

Challenges: impulse control, emotional dysregulation (which may evolve into mental health issues and addictions), confabulation, short term memory, challenges dealing with money, challenges planning & carrying through plans - and understanding the consequences if not carried through. Saving money (fits in with budgeting and planning challenges).

Strengths: May have loving and loyal personality, specific strong skills such as athletics, arts, can often “start fresh” and not get bogged down in a negative interaction or experience, good at working with children and animals.

I don't consider myself particularly well-informed about this disorder, but do understand that it has a wide range of severity, from virtually undetectable to severe. I know that it can impact the ability to understand the consequences of one's actions, which has resulted in a high representation of people on the spectrum in the NWT's prisons. I know it can impact mental cognition and learning.

- People with FASD are not all the same.

- Common strengths and abilities: friendly, like-able, verbal strengths, hard workers, hard workers if they are doing what they like to do, really want to do a good job, strong desire to be helpful, determined, every day is a new day.

- Common challenges: like to be asked and not told what to do, learning challenges if the person with FASD does not have an understanding/help understanding how their brain works best, mental health, anxiety, social, and emotional challenges that can contribute to involvement in substance abuse, every day is a new day.

Individuals with FASD can have strong verbal communication skills but have difficulty with comprehension. One of the main areas of challenge is with executive functioning (organizing, planning, memory, impulse control) Individuals with FASD often have co-occurring health issues including mental health challenges such as ADHD, anxiety, and depression.

**Q3: IN 2020, WHAT DO YOU THINK
ARE THE BIGGEST PROBLEMS FOR
PEOPLE WITH FASD TO OBTAIN AND
RETAIN HOUSING IN YELLOWKNIFE?**

Due to the challenges that come with FASD, individuals with this disability are, by nature, in a vulnerable position. Without an advocate or informed supportive living staff who understand their abilities, these individuals are at risk of being taken advantage of by a landlord, or being evicted due to their actions because they did not foresee the consequences of their actions.

“There is a shortage of supportive housing in our community, such as the Bailey House.”

The Bailey house is a transitional home for men trying to get off the streets in Yellowknife.

“I am not sure the issue is specific to people with FASD, but we are in a housing crisis in Yellowknife and the waitlists are often longer than available units. Housing is inherently linked to employment, and with this in mind, the biggest issue is the continued degradation of labour positions that people with FASD could occupy. As we increasingly require high skilled labour and university degrees, we will find that employing our most vulnerable becomes harder and harder.”

**Q3 CONTINUED: IN 2020, WHAT
DO YOU THINK ARE THE BIGGEST
PROBLEMS FOR PEOPLE WITH FASD
TO OBTAIN AND RETAIN HOUSING IN
YELLOWKNIFE?**

One respondent stated that there are currently no supports in place for people with FASD to find and retain housing in Yellowknife. Another respondent said one of the biggest barriers is the administrative burden. Another stated that funding is a barrier (lack of). It is difficult for those with FASD to have a consistent, steady income, especially if their boss is uneducated or unwilling to accommodate for their disability. Therefore, income is a barrier.

“Not having access to an active facilitator/navigator to help accommodate the daily challenges one may face from completing applications, to reminders of deadlines and appointments, to financial management, to lack of confidence, to seek assistance and daily problem solving needs.”

- To know how to obtain housing
- Finding housing that is suitable in terms of size, location (walking or bus routes) and cost
- To be able to afford housing; save money for a damage deposit, and ensure enough money is set aside each month for rent. (if on Income Assistance, this is not an issue, but figuring out the process may be)
- Understanding and remembering monthly responsibilities: paying bills, any monthly upkeep, ensuring housing is maintained in an adequate hygienic manner
- Not losing keys
- Budgeting, shopping, meal prep: adequate clean up to be healthy. Other “check ins” with the individual to ensure they are living safely. Do they need assistance with anything else in their life?

Q4: WHAT SPECIFIC TO YELLOWKNIFE (AND THE NORTH) ADDS BARRIERS
TO PEOPLE AND HOUSING?

shortage of available housing

unregulated rent

‘cumbersome systemic policies’

lack of knowledge or advertising
of existing assistance programs
besides Income Assistance and the
Yellowknife Housing Corporation

Below, please see some common themes addressed for this question:

1 Social Issues

- high rates of substance abuse
- harmful / unhelpful attitudes that general public has towards substance abuse
- lack of awareness / education about FASD
- Homelessness, family violence, historical and present traumas

2 Systemic Issues

- past arrears with organizations affect ones ability to rent again
- monopolies (there are few landlords in the city)
- Difficult to get involved with supporting organizations, lots of paperwork
- high cost of building in the North

“In my experience, if a program or service, no matter the size, is not effective, it is in large part due to the people who are leading those services that present the biggest barriers.”

“That there is no supports once again, you can’t place an individual in a unit without the help. There are organizations that claim they help, but they don’t at all.”

“Availability and affordability are issues almost everywhere. However, I have discovered a bias with indigenous persons seeking housing, particularly young people.”

“Not aware of anything that is only happening here.” (meaning that the issues experienced in Yellowknife are not unique to Yellowknife)

Q5: HOW DO YOU THINK HOUSING CAN BE DONE BETTER IN YELLOWKNIFE?

Many of the respondents provided insightful recommendations on how to improve housing in Yellowknife in general. All of the recommendations are important for anyone who is looking for safe, affordable housing, including those with FASD.

- 1) Provide subsidies that are adequate enough to supplement rental costs or implementing sliding rental scales (based on income).
- 2) Housing is not just four walls and a roof where people reside. Housing include access to a healthy environment including affordable cost of food and utilities. Government and some industry personnel get northern allowances as part of their contracts, but not all residents are privy to these benefits. Yet all are expected to pay the same amounts for rent, food, and utilities. Policies need to be reformed and there needs to be a shift in the allocation of equitable benefits for all Northern residents.
- 3) Government entities tied to housing access need to ensure more streamlined and client-friendly processes without creating gridlocks in service provision. More simplified approaches would be a welcome change for all applicants, but in this case for those who particularly have primary disabilities with learning, judgement, and memory as is the case with those individuals with FASD.
- 4) Provide consistent assistance to dealing with finances. For people with FASD, budgeting and money management is very difficult. It may be common to be alternating between receiving Income Assistance and earning enough at a job to pay bills. This is because people with FASD are capable of working adequate paying job, but are sometimes terminated from employment due to executive functioning challenges, and lack of education (or ability to support) from their employment.
- 5) Better and more accessible information about how to be good tenants and roommates. Landlords are in a tough spot because construction and maintenance is extremely expensive and 'problem' tenants cost them a lot of unrecoverable money. While it would be great to have more housing stock, particularly for those with more limited income, it is very difficult for landlords to cover costs associated with rental units.
- 6) Develop non-market housing solutions (co-operatives, etc.) for people who have difficulty affording housing here.
- 7) (Specific to people who live with FASD), offer supported living arrangements similar to some senior homes where people can have their own bachelor apartment but still have meals provided if they choose, security, and supports 24/7 available within the building.
- 8) Yellowknife needs to be rezoned.
- 9) Offer income assistance on 1 year timelines instead of monthly reporting, so that people can find market housing.
- 10) Develop treatment centers for addiction and anger-management.
- 11) Create tiny homes.
- 12) Create multi-generational housing communities.

So... how can we use all of this information to create change?

A lot of valuable information was shared by respondents in this survey. This is what we plan to do next:

-Share this information publicly in Yellowknife, in an accessible way (ex. easy to read social media posts, colourful posters).

-Maintain the conversation with the survey respondents, people experiencing housing instability, people with FASD, people who provide services to those with FASD, and all others interested in being involved.

-Create a list of priorities.

-Create a plan to address priorities, with the expectation that we can initiate important and essential change!

If you have any ideas, information, insight, criticisms, etc. regarding this report and the information that it contains, please reach out to Korrey Garvey at info@4yprogram.com or 867-446-3820.