

PANEL DISCUSSION



BELVA CARDINAL

Belva is a Mentor with the Lakeland Centre for FASD, where she has supported women through the Mothers-to-Be Mentorship Program since 2018.

As a member of the Kikino Métis Settlement, Belva brings more than 25 years of experience working within Métis Settlement communities and more than 10 years working within First Nations, along with a professional background in business management, Public Legal Education, and Indigenous governance.

Belva brings cultural understanding and lived experience to her work with clients and families. As a mother and grandmother first, she draws on the patience, understanding, and love that come from these roles to support participants with compassion and without judgment. She works alongside participants to identify challenges, build on their strengths, establish meaningful goals, and access health, social, and community resources.

The most rewarding aspect of Belva's work is witnessing participants recognize their strengths, make positive choices for themselves and their families, and move toward healthier futures. Her approach is grounded in compassion, respect, cultural understanding, collaboration, and empowerment.

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TANYA L'HEUREUX

Tanya is a family caregiver, dietitian, adult educator, and advocate with a deep commitment to supporting children, families, and caregivers.

Her lived experience as a parent of a child with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) has profoundly shaped her understanding of the joys, challenges, and ongoing learning involved in parenting and navigating appropriate supports for a child with complex trauma and neurodevelopmental needs. As a caregiver, Tanya brings a perspective grounded in the everyday realities of supporting a child whose strengths, verbal abilities, and desire for connection can sometimes mask significant challenges with regulation, executive functioning, memory, social understanding, and applying skills consistently in everyday life.

She is particularly passionate about helping others (e.g. educators, coaches, community programmers) move beyond assumptions of “won’t” toward a deeper understanding of “can’t—in this moment” to apply more brain-based, relationship-centred, and trauma-informed supports.

Tanya's professional experience includes supporting and advocating across clinical and community settings to enhance person-centered and caregiver-centered care while striving to change systems not yet designed to be responsive to individuals', families', and caregivers' unique strengths and needs.

She is currently completing doctoral research focused on social justice and care. Her hope is for more people to learn alongside people with FASD, advocate for appropriate supports, and work to build environments where people with lived experiences of injustices and inequities can be understood, supported, partnered with, and valued for who they are.

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DESIREE McCARTHY

Desiree McCarthy is a Métis advocate and Project Coordinator. Supporting initiatives in Indigenous employment, leadership development, and gender-based violence prevention across Alberta.

Drawing on her lived experience with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), she is committed to creating spaces that challenge stigma and support Indigenous healing.

Outside of her work, Desiree enjoys beading, sewing, weaving, and spending time on the land, and is on a personal journey of reconnecting with her traditional culture and Indigenous teachings that continue to guide her approach to community care and wellness.

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JESSICA HOLLIS

My name is Jessica, and I'm 28 years old. I'm a full-time stay-at-home mom to my amazing 6-year-old, along with two dogs who apparently believe they are severely attention-deprived. 😊 I'm married to my best friend—we've been married for 3 years and together for 11 years.

My story hasn't always been easy. At just three years old, I was diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). I spent seven years in foster care before being adopted at the age of seven. Being adopted also gave me the opportunity to reunite with my sisters, which became an important part of my life.

Growing up, I struggled in ways that I didn't always understand. I was considered a troublesome teenager, and I faced challenges that made life difficult at times. But I was fortunate to have people who believed in me and helped me find my way.

The Lakeland Centre for FASD played a huge role in my journey. With their support, guidance, and understanding, I learned more about myself, my challenges, and—most importantly—my strengths.

I've grown from that little girl who didn't understand why life was so difficult into the strong, ambitious woman I am today. My past is a part of my story, but it doesn't define me. I'm a mom. I'm a wife. I'm a sister. I'm a fighter. And I'm proud of the woman I've worked so hard to become. My journey hasn't been perfect, but it has made me who I am—and I wouldn't change that. ❤️