

Proof Alliance condemns gun violence and recognizes the overwhelming grief of the families and community impacted by the senseless act of gun violence that took the lives of 17 people at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida in February 2018.

Throughout the trial, the defense has offered as a mitigating factor that the then 19-year-old perpetrator had a neurodevelopmental disorder associated with prenatal alcohol exposure.

While it isn't Proof Alliance's role to comment on the criminal offender's diagnosis or the case, it is our role to educate the community about fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD), how it is prevented, and how to help people access the appropriate resources and supports.

What is FASD? FASD is a range of disabilities caused when a fetus is exposed to alcohol. FASD can include physical, mental, behavioral and/or learning disabilities with possible lifelong implications. FASD is common; it is estimated that as many as 1 in 20 children in the United States has an FASD.

Facts:

- Prenatal alcohol exposure is the leading preventable cause of birth defects in the United States.
- In the United States, at least 1 in 7 pregnancies is exposed to alcohol.
- There is no known safe amount of alcohol to consume during pregnancy.
- Studies have shown that early screening, diagnosis and treatment can help people living with an FASD reach their full potential.

[Get more facts here.](#)

Since 1998, our organization has demonstrated a proven methodology and track record for improving outcomes for people impacted by an FASD. Proof Alliance is committed to research-based practices and accurate representation of individuals with an FASD. Mental health challenges and learning differences are common for people with an FASD. These factors put youth at risk for performing poorly in school. School failure, in turn, is one risk factor consistently associated with delinquency, violence and other illegal behaviors. That said, these factors do not specifically equate to violent behavior and there is no scientific evidence connecting FASD with mass shootings. Therefore, Proof Alliance strongly advises against making a generalized link between violent acts and prenatal exposure to alcohol.

Youth programming is vital for people with an FASD. Marissa Lang, Proof Alliance Senior Program Manager, says, *"We provide programs that improve social connectedness for individuals with an FASD, which helps them develop healthy, lifelong peer relationships and life skills. According to a recent poll, 77% of our youth program participants report feeling less isolated and alone after attending Proof Alliance support groups."* These are proven protective factors for preventing the conditions that could lead to involvement in the justice system.

Research consistently shows that early screening, diagnosis and treatment can improve a child's development. *"Because development is an additive process, the early identification of neurodevelopmental risks including prenatal alcohol exposure and the early identification of developmental delays are essential steps in optimal intervention,"* says Dr. Jeffrey Wozniak, Ph.D., LP. Dr. Wozniak is a pediatric neuropsychologist and child and adolescent psychologist who treats patients with FASD.

With the right interventions and support, people living with an FASD can reach their full potential.

About Pr%f Alliance

Our mission is to eliminate disability caused by alcohol consumption during pregnancy and to improve the quality of life for those living with an FASD throughout Minnesota and beyond. We envision a world in which individuals do not drink alcohol during pregnancy and people living with an FASD are identified, supported and valued.

At Proof Alliance, we:

- Promote the message that there is no safe amount of alcohol during pregnancy, and provide wraparound services to pregnant people who need additional support to abstain from alcohol during their pregnancy
- Work to create a better understanding of the challenges young people impacted by prenatal alcohol exposure face. We work with youth ambassadors who share their personal experiences living with this disorder.
- Develop and deliver comprehensive and culturally-relevant training, community education and support
- Engage health systems to provide professional training and build screening and diagnosis into their practice
- Advocate for public policies that support our mission of healthy children and families

Proof Alliance has the proof - that prenatal alcohol exposure is the leading cause of developmental disabilities. We have the proof that, with the right information, intervention and support, FASD is 100% preventable and people living with this disorder can reach their full potential. Proof Alliance partners with those with an FASD, their families, school systems, health care providers, legislators, experts in the field and community partners to prevent prenatal alcohol exposure and improve developmental outcomes for people impacted by an FASD.

To access resources and support on FASD, or to get involved, contact Proof Alliance 612-247-0715 or visit proofalliance.org.

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