



ALBERTA FAMILY WELLNESS INITIATIVE

# BRAIN STORY CERTIFICATION COURSE Feedback Report

As of April 15, 2019



## Alberta Family Wellness Initiative

Brain Story Certification Course

Ongoing Feedback Report

As of April 15, 2019

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Palix Foundation

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>02</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>04</b>
The Brain Story Certification Course: Summary and Background	04
Purpose of the Report	06
Summary of Approaches Used to Collect Data	07
Summary Course Data	09
<b>SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK WITH A FOCUS ON IMPACT</b>	<b>11</b>
Feedback from Individuals	11
Feedback from Organizations and Groups	14
<b>CONCLUSIONS TO DATE</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>WHAT'S NEXT?</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>19</b>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Twelve years ago, the Palix Foundation created the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative (AFWI) to mobilize and promote the use and understanding of brain and child development knowledge and its links to addiction and mental health outcomes. In keeping with its strategy as outlined in [Embedding the Brain Story](#), (see Appendix 1) in December 2016 AFWI launched the first-ever free online global resource to share and scale up access to this knowledge called the [Brain Story Certification Course](#). The course makes the Brain Story science available to both professionals and the public in a consistent and accessible format. The content of the course, the “Brain Story” synthesizes and translates decades of research and reflects a body of knowledge that experts agree is useful for policy-makers and citizens alike to understand[1]. The course demonstrates how lifelong health is determined by more than just our genes: experiences at sensitive stages of development change the brain in ways that increase or decrease risk for later physical and mental illnesses, including addiction. This means that relationships and experiences are important for brain development and success throughout the life course.

While there may be a number of courses available with similar objectives, what differentiates the Brain Story Certification Course is its purpose as a change management tool potentially creating a standard of knowledge with wide reach, use and application. The knowledge itself is an intervention that can significantly inform and catalyse new ways of conceptualizing and assessing programmatic and organizational strategies and policies, as well as new approaches to practice and evaluation aimed at improving outcomes. Before new brain story knowledge informed interventions can be developed, assessed and scaled, access to the knowledge itself first needs to be scaled. The knowledge delivered through the Brain Story Certification Course is a fundamental antecedent to further action and change.

This report provides a summary of the feedback the Palix Foundation has gathered through a variety of means about the course since it was launched. Coinciding with the release of this report (April 2019), the Foundation is also pleased to announce that this feedback has now been incorporated into an updated version of the course designed to improve user experience. Thanks to the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) the course is also now available in French enhancing its value as a national and international resource. Creating and iteratively responding to feedback from stakeholders engaged in processes it develops, supports and facilitates is a fundamentally important part of the AFWI strategy. These feedback loops are critical to supporting a dynamic innovation process directed at systems change and improvement in policy and practice based on the brain story knowledge.

[1] The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child synthesized decades of research relevant to neurodevelopment processes and translated it with help from the FrameWorks Institute into the core story of brain development (i.e. the Brain Story). <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/A-Decade-of-Science-Informing-Policy.pdf>

In the past 2 years, people from 109 different countries around the world have registered in the course. Over 28,400 are now enrolled, and 4,978 have completed the course and obtained a certificate. Of these, 17,694 enrollees and 3,988 who've completed the course are from Alberta. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive and suggestions for improvements have been integrated where appropriate. We also continue to work with change agents to better understand how the course knowledge can be applied to catalyze change along with associated barriers and enablers.

From the feedback so far, we conclude that the course is filling a knowledge gap and demand is increasing. Findings are as expected at this early stage of the Foundation's major strategic move to scale up access to the knowledge through an on-line course offering. The course also appears to strike the right balance between stretching the learner as a course leading to a certification should do, while being feasible to successfully undertake for a wide variety of individuals from different educational backgrounds and disciplines. Of particular note as well, is the observation that many organizations both large and small are now making the course a mandatory component of staff professional development and/or requiring it as part of the recruitment process. Best practices relevant to how to implement the course with organizations and groups are also emerging. Moreover, the Change in Mind initiative requires the course as a first step in joining and accessing technical support from the Change in Mind Institute,[2] and CCSA also requires it for those participating in its multi-year cross-Canada Brain Builders Lab.[3] These developments highlight the importance and relevance of the course content and platform to local, national and international organizations across sectors that work with children and families.

While course related processes are catalyzing significant learning opportunities for those taking the course, we, at the Palix Foundation have also learned a great deal since it was launched. We continue to better understand and strengthen our role as a flexible, responsive, iterative foundation committed to high-quality experiences to engage with and embed the brain story knowledge. Our positive relationships with an array of change agents are critical, as is face to face engagement. Sustained effort and reinforcement are required along with a flexible approach and appreciation for community differences and degree of readiness. While discipline to the knowledge is the sine qua non, processes to develop and put knowledge competency into practice and to evaluate impact should be iterative, community-led and context specific. The AFWI strategy progress report *Delivering Value, Creating Demand, The Brain Story in Action* (see Appendix 2) outlines AFWI's priorities to continue to scale access to the knowledge and build capacity to use it to improve outcomes, as well as an emerging and more specific focus on collaborating to improve practice data collection and evaluation. As we progress forward, we are here to work with and support community leaders and change agents to promote enrollment and completion of the Brain Story Certification Course as a tool to build and apply contemporary and critical workforce knowledge for the benefit of children and families.

[2] The Change in Mind Institute operates as a hub for disseminating knowledge, provides training and technical assistance on the integration of brain science research, and engages in cross-sector innovation on the transformation of organizations, sectors, and systems as they adapt to the new applications of the science. [www.albertafamilywellness.org/what-we-do/change-in-mind](http://www.albertafamilywellness.org/what-we-do/change-in-mind) and <https://www.alliance1.org/change-in-mind>.

[3] See CCSA's Promoting and Applying the Brain Story Across Canada backgrounder at <http://www.ccdus.ca/Resource%20Library/CCSA-Brain-Story-Concept-Note-2018-en.pdf>

# INTRODUCTION

## The Brain Story Certification Course: Summary and Background

Twelve years ago, the Palix Foundation created the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative (AFWI) to mobilize and promote the use and understanding of brain and child development knowledge and its links to addiction and mental health outcomes. In keeping with its strategy outlined in [Embedding the Brain Story](#) (see Appendix 1), AFWI created the first-ever free online global resource to share and scale up access to this knowledge called the [Brain Story Certification Course](#). Launched in December 2016, and recently updated and improved based on course participant feedback, and also translated into French, the course makes the Brain Story science available to both professionals, as an important part of professional development, (in health, education, social services, justice, the community, academic, business), and the public. The “Brain Story” synthesizes and translates decades of research and reflects a body of knowledge that experts agree is useful for policy-makers and citizens alike to understand.[4] The course demonstrates how lifelong health is determined by more than just our genes: experiences at sensitive stages of development change the brain in ways that increase or decrease risk for later physical and mental illnesses, including addiction. This means that relationships are important for brain development and success later in life. This course is a platform to educate people about the scientific knowledge that underpins these processes.

While there may be a number of courses available with similar objectives, what differentiates the Brain Story Certification Course is its purpose as a change

management tool potentially creating a standard of knowledge with wide reach, use and application. The knowledge itself is an intervention that can significantly inform and catalyse new ways of conceptualizing and assessing programmatic and organizational strategies and policies, as well as new approaches to practice aimed at improving outcomes. Before new brain story knowledge informed interventions can be developed, assessed and scaled, access to the knowledge itself first needs to be scaled. The knowledge delivered through the Brain Story Certification Course is an important antecedent to further action and change.

The course is designed for those seeking a deeper understanding of brain development and its implications for lifelong health. More detail on each module and the objectives of the course are explained in the [Course Outline](#) (Appendix 3). The course is endorsed by the [Curriculum Committee](#) (Appendix 4) and includes videos of more than 30 leading experts. The course is eligible for accreditation with a number of professional governing bodies. Those who successfully complete the course are awarded a certificate of completion.

In recent years, demand for the brain story knowledge has grown significantly. This is particularly the case in Alberta, Canada (but increasingly in other jurisdictions, as well) where system leaders have recognized its importance as a foundational component of workforce development across sectors that work with children and families. The knowledge is also contributing to greater policy coherence across relevant government ministries and departments.

[4] The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child synthesized decades of research relevant to neurodevelopment processes and translated it with help from the FrameWorks Institute into the core story of brain development (i.e. the Brain Story). <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/A-Decade-of-Science-Informing-Policy.pdf>

Alberta's [Valuing Mental Health](#)[5] calls for this knowledge as a way to strengthen competency for those working in mental health and addiction related areas. [Foundations of Caregiver Support](#),[6] Alberta's guidelines for social serving agencies, requires that the workforce in organizations the government funds obtains this knowledge competency. [Alberta Education's mental health in schools strategy](#)[7] embeds the knowledge and the brain story is also integrated throughout Alberta's Children's Services new [Well-being and Resilience](#)[8] framework and evaluation approach. The brain story course is a credible and accessible way to meet knowledge demand or "pull" stemming from these developments in Alberta and fill what is now broadly and increasingly recognized as a knowledge gap.

Nationally and internationally, demand for the knowledge delivered through the course is also growing. The Change in Mind initiative requires the course as a first step in joining and accessing technical support from the Change in Mind Institute, and the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) requires it for those participating in its multi-year cross-Canada Brain Builders Lab. With CCSA's collaboration and support for translation, it is also now available in both French and English.

[5] Valuing Mental Health: Report of the Alberta Mental Health Review Committee 2015.

<https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/d8413604-15d1-4f15-a979-54a97db754d4/resource/1a5e7a16-3437-428e-b51f-4ba9201767a4/download/Alberta-Mental-Health-Review-2015.pdf>

[6] Foundations of Caregiver Support June 2015 <http://www.alignab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Foundations-of-Caregiver-Support-June-2015-Final.pdf>

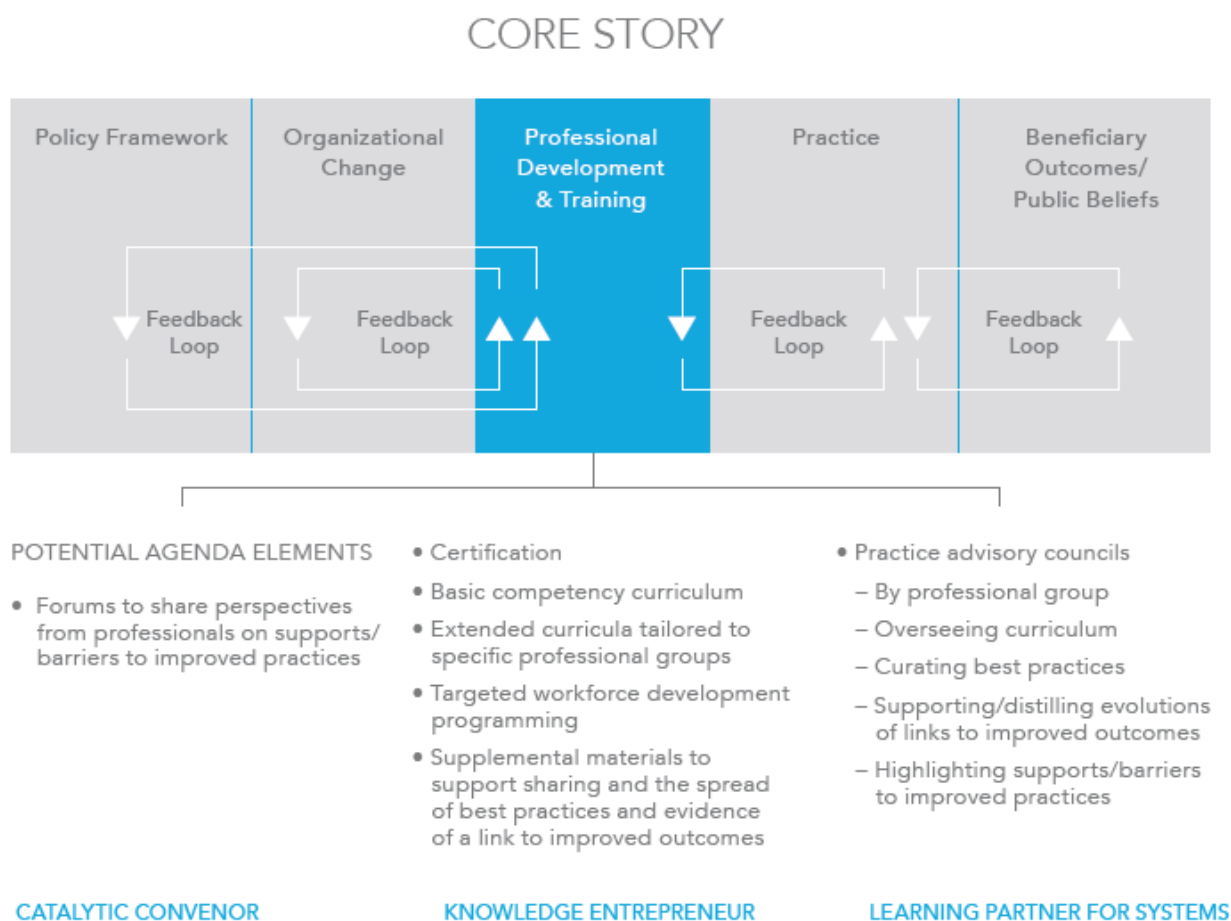
[7] Working Together to Support Mental Health in Alberta Schools at <https://arpcresources.ca/consortia/working-together-support-mental-health-alberta-schools/>

[8] Well-being and Resiliency: A Framework for Supporting Safe and Healthy Children and Families and associated documents at <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/520981c4-c499-4794-af55-bc932811cb1e/resource/7fda0ae8-8d97-49e7-b94b-7f0088cd767d/download/well-being-resiliency-framework-march2019.pdf>

# PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

This report is an important component of the AFWI strategy to create and iteratively respond to feedback from stakeholders engaged in processes it develops, supports and facilitates. These feedback loops as described in [Embedding the Brain Story](#) (Figure 1) are critically important to supporting a dynamic innovation process directed at systems change and improvement in practice and policy based on the brain story knowledge. The course feedback is providing a learning opportunity for discovering effective implementation strategies for the course.

Figure 1: Illustration from *Embedding the Brain Story*



This report summarizes feedback about the Brain Story Certification Course collected since the course was launched in December 2016 to April 15, 2019. It aims to consolidate and share this feedback with interested and relevant stakeholders to motivate course enrollment and completion. It also strives to build understanding and catalyze innovation and application of the knowledge learned to improve policy and practice related to children and families. The course feedback is providing a learning opportunity for discovering effective course implementation strategies. Because this is an iterative process, the language we are using to describe certain engagements and strategies is evolving.



# SUMMARY OF APPROACHES USED TO COLLECT DATA

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Data for this report was gathered using the following approaches. Findings are reported in the Summary of Feedback section of this report.

## I) Post Survey:

Participants are prompted to take a post-survey after completing the course. This survey is part of the on-line learning management system (LMS). Examples of questions in the survey include:

1. Please rate the difficulty of the course content (not including the course quiz questions)  
(1=too easy and 5= too difficult)
2. Please rate the difficulty of the course quiz questions (1=too easy and 5= too difficult)
3. Please rate the online learning experience of this course (1=poor and 5= excellent)
4. How likely are you to recommend this course to a colleague or friends?  
(1=not likely and 5= extremely likely)
5. Which course content was the most relevant and useful to you?  
In which section did you learn the most?
6. Now that you have learned about the connection between early experiences and lifelong health, do you think it will inform your practice as a professional, a leader, or a member of your community or family? What do you intend to do next?

During the first six months of the course, 93 out of 859 individuals completed the post survey in the initial LMS set up, with a response rate of 11%. Over 90% of the respondents indicated that the course content was “just right” and that the online learning experience was effective. About this same percentage also indicated that they would recommend the course to a colleague. After the first six months, AFWI engaged a new LMS provider to increase the proficiency of the system and analytical capabilities. Post-survey results from 3,350 participants who completed the survey since August 28, 2017 are summarized in the “Feedback from Individuals” section of this report. 3,547 out of 4,978 participants have completed the post survey for a 71% response rate in the new LMS system.

## II) Feedback sessions with groups and organizations taking the course:

Since the course was launched, the Palix Foundation observed from the course enrollee data that some organizations had a significant number of employees enrolled in the course and that certain organizations and/or groups within organizations were taking the course together through a collective process. To better understand and document these observations, Palix Foundation staff have met with 20 organizations and groups enrolled in the course to collect feedback and understand how people were taking the course and the impact of the knowledge learned. Examples of interactive questions asked during these sessions include:

1. How are you finding the course? Is it difficult?
2. Were you able to enroll easily? How easy or difficult was the process for you?
3. How long did it take you to complete the whole course? How long did it take you to get through one module?
4. Did you sit down and finish a whole module in one sitting, or did you break it up?
5. Did your place of work encourage you to take the course during work hours?
6. When are you finding time to take the course? At work, at home?
7. Is it mandatory for you to take the course through your work?
8. Technically, are there any areas that you feel need improvement?
9. Did you already know the content or was this completely new information?
10. Did it make sense to you in terms of the larger ideas?
11. Did you understand the basic ideas of the content and did the quiz questions reflect these?
12. What impact is the course having on your organization, staff and clients?

### **III) AFWI Community Facilitator Process:**

Another process for organizations whose employees were taking the course together as a group was to engage support from an external facilitator that AFWI recruited and supported for this purpose. The AFWI community facilitator led group discussions to review fundamental concepts from the modules and contemplate how the Brain Story science could apply to individual or program practices. Two organizations have engaged in this process so far with a schedule of completing two modules over a two-week period with a one hour facilitated discussion biweekly.

### **IV) Learning Circles:**

Over the months since the course was launched, the Palix Foundation observed that enrollees in Alberta were situated throughout the province in larger cities and rural and remote areas too. As part of its ongoing efforts to broker cross sector knowledge networks and communities of practice throughout the province, the Palix Foundation decided to develop a strategy to catalyze learning circles in different regions derived from the course enrollee data and in collaboration with local AFWI change agents and knowledge entrepreneurs. Since October 2017, 8 learning circles have been held. These localized luncheons and workshops aimed to: enhance the learning experience; gather feedback on the course; encourage discussions related to the application of the knowledge; better understand barriers in completing the course and/or applying the knowledge in practice; and provide encourage and motivation for those enrolled to complete the course and encourage their colleagues and friends to enroll. Participants included those already enrolled and those interested in enrolling. The locations visited were targeted because of a large number of people within these smaller centres or rural communities who were already registered in the course. The Palix Foundation focused on those locations first and has now moved to centres with fewer people registered to ensure it is reaching far and wide as part of the learning circle strategy.

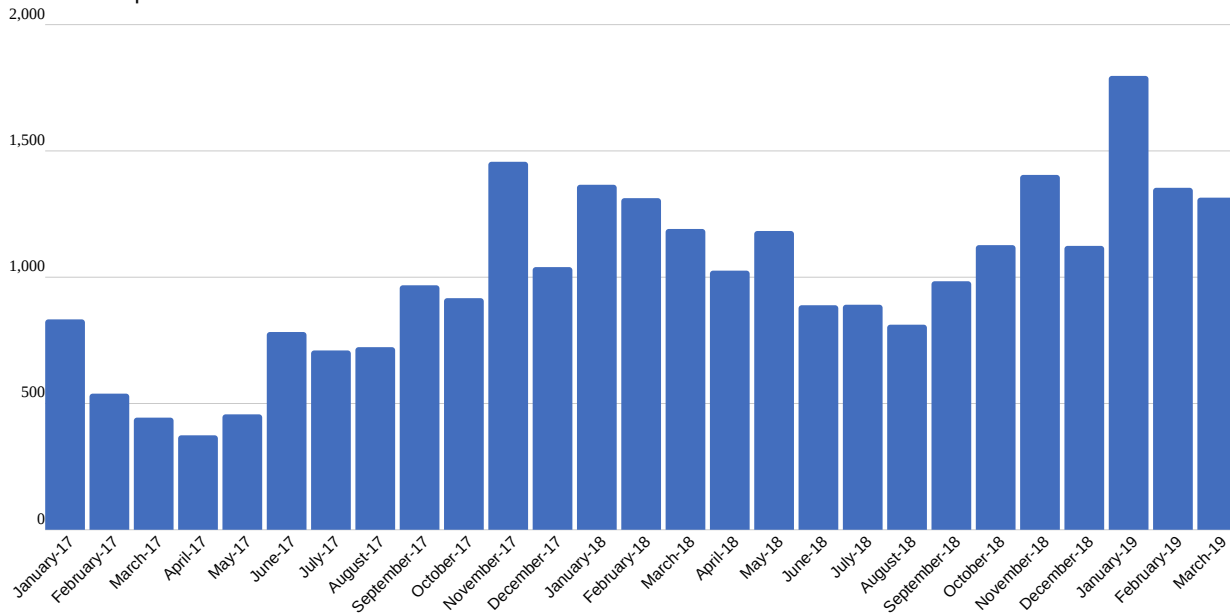
### **V) Testimonial Videos:**

Videos of change agents and organizations that have found the course particularly impactful provide another source of feedback on the course and the knowledge learned. Testimonial videos are available [here](#) or by clicking on each video in Appendix 5.

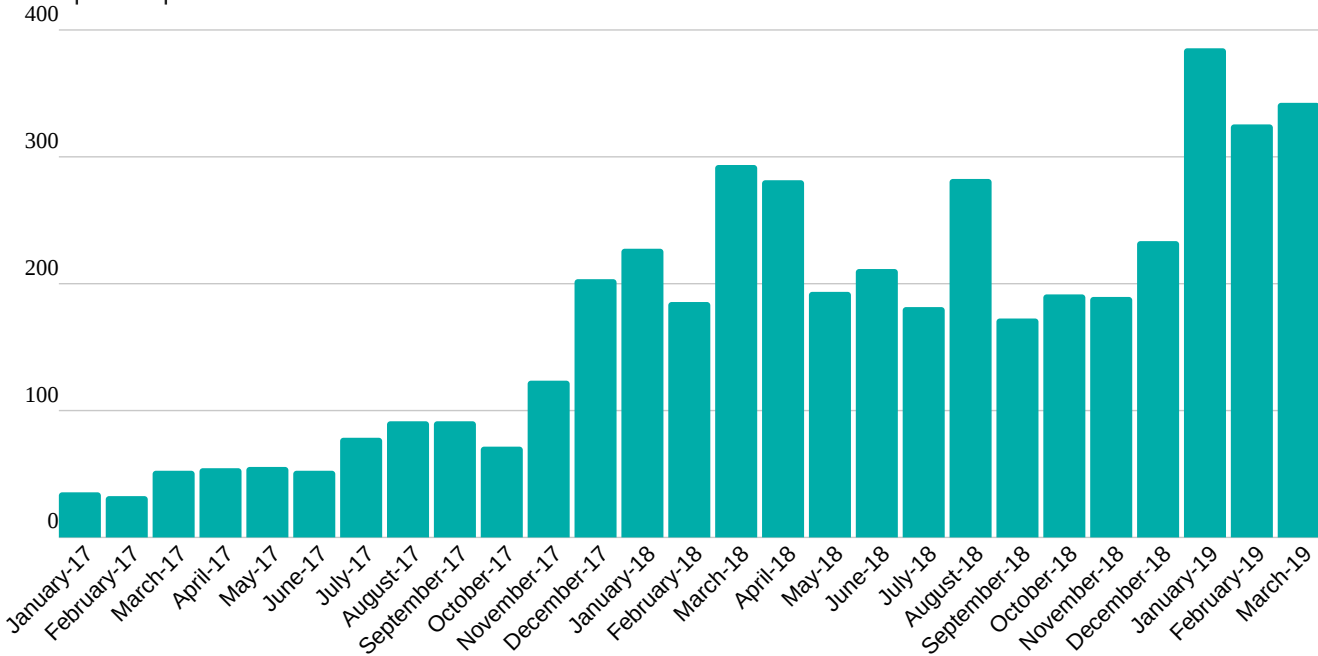
# SUMMARY COURSE DATA

In the past 2 years, people from 109 different countries around the world have registered in the course. Over 28,400 are now enrolled, and 4,978 have completed the course and obtained a certificate. Of these, 17,694 enrollees and 3,988 who've completed the course are from Alberta. Participants are enrolled from over 280 towns and cities distributed across Alberta. More detail is available in Appendix 6. The following graphs summarize data highlights.

**Enrollment per Month**

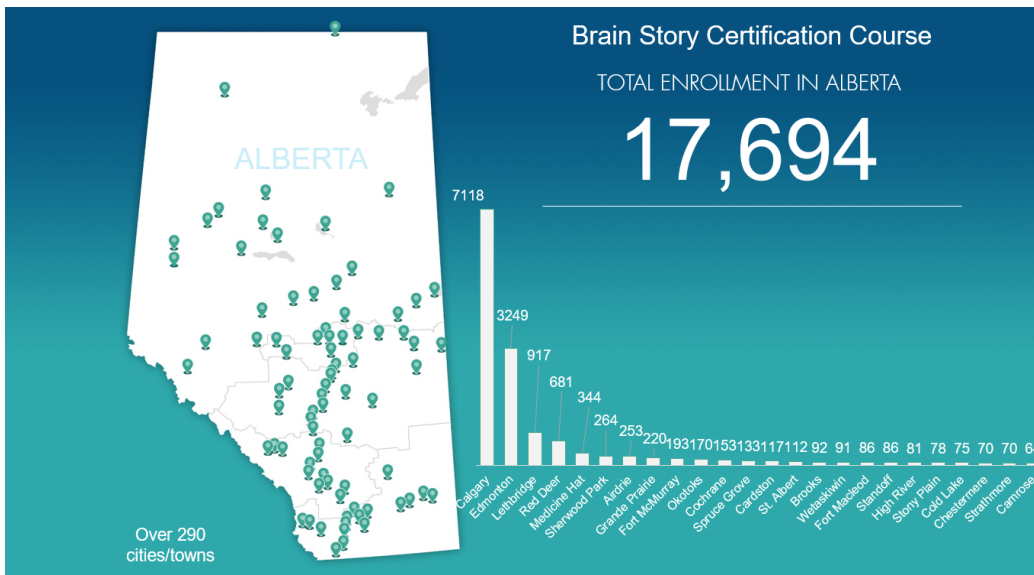
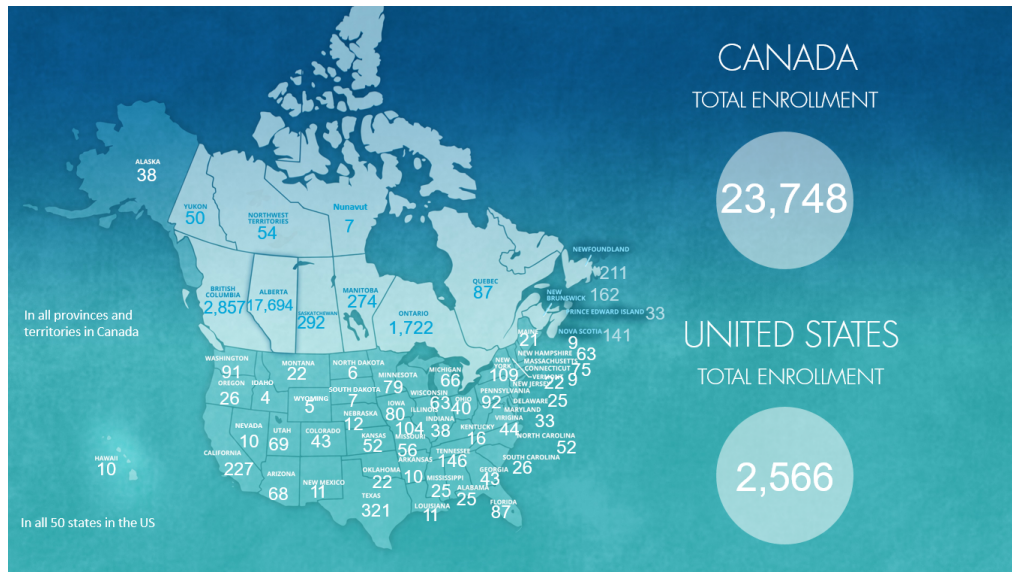
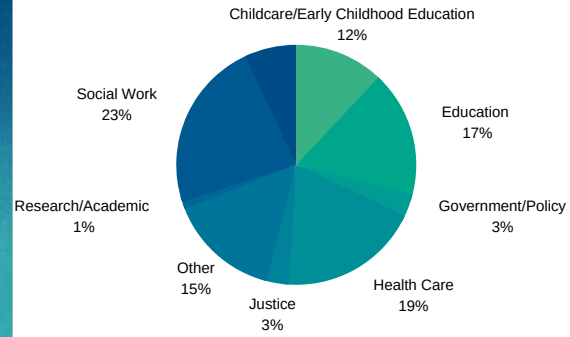


**Completion per Month**





Participants Enrolled Field of Work

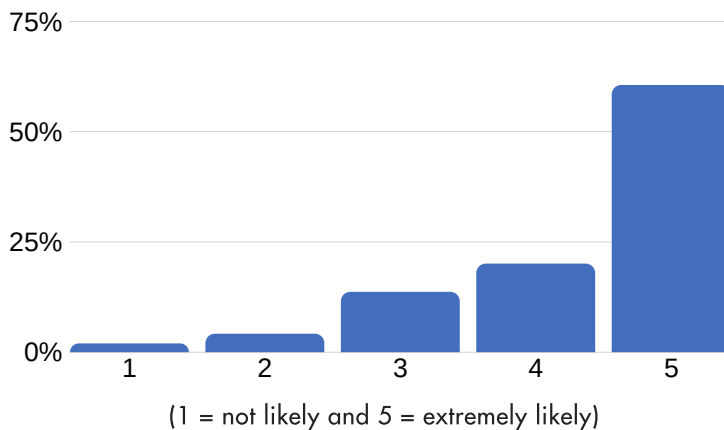


# SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK WITH A FOCUS ON IMPACT

## Feedback from Individuals

Post-survey results from 3,547 participants who completed the survey since August 28, 2017 are summarized below. The bulleted list provides a summary of comments followed by a few testimonials in each summary area.

How likely are you to recommend this course to a colleague or friend?  
n=2,859  
as of April 15, 2019



- Overall participants will or already have recommended the course to friends, colleagues and family
- Course should be used as training for front line workers
- Course should be part of parenting classes for people planning on having children, incorporating into grade 12 curriculum

*"Very interesting. Opens one's eyes about backgrounds, behaviours, and family life but it also provides hope in that there is help available if anyone needs it."*

*"This was an eye opening and incredibly valuable course to the area in which I teach, addictions and mental health. It demonstrates the impact of serve and return with respect to brain architecture development. This will assist in reducing stigma in this population. I feel it is a mandatory course for all health practitioners and those that come in contact with children during these critical development stages. The public at large could benefit from this knowledge as well."*

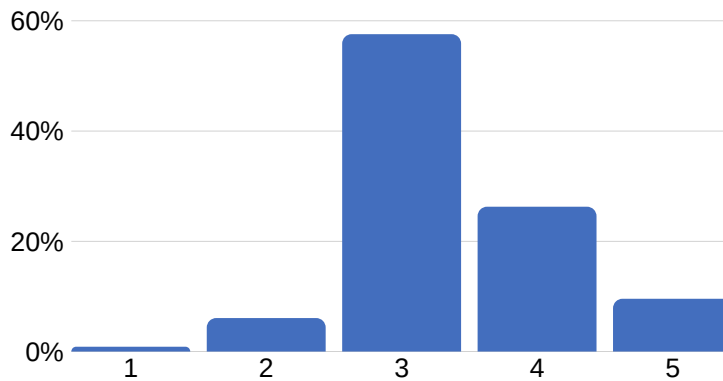
*"I would recommend this course!! And have already (and will to continue to) recommended it!! From parents to service provided this course was relevant and very insightful, hopeful and exciting."*

*"I have already told colleagues to sign up and I am sending the link to some of the parents of the teens I work with too. Everybody needs this information!"*

Please rate the difficulty of the course content  
(not including the course quiz questions)

n=3,150

as of April 15, 2019



(1 = too easy and 5 = too difficult)

- Informative and relevant content
- Difficulty level was well balanced
- Science concepts at the beginning of the course more difficult to understand but valuable to understanding overall concepts in rest of course
- Content of course was well laid out and structured
- Great speakers and interesting videos

*"I thought the course content was excellent with theories backed up by research data and experiences."*

*"A great variety of styles, some fantastic lecturers and invaluable statistics and information."*

*"The course content was excellently organized in such a way that it gave a comprehensive picture of the complex interplay between social factors and brain development."*

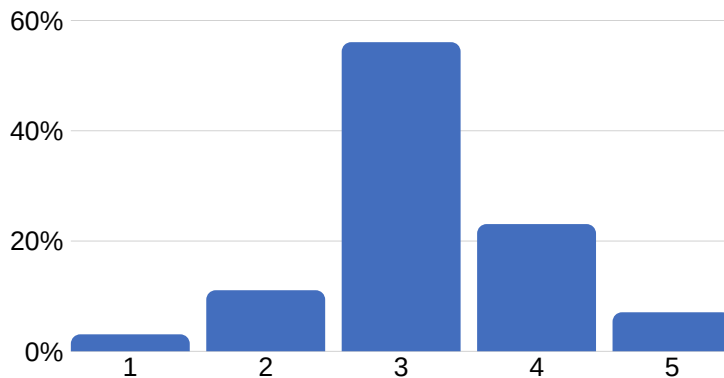
*"I felt it was relevant and deep. Well done and the effort put into this is vastly appreciated."*

Please rate the difficulty of the course quiz

questions

n=3,160

as of April 15, 2019



(1 = too easy and 5 = too difficult)

- Very informative and interesting
- Challenging but reasonable and fair
- The questions did a great job of assessing the participants knowledge

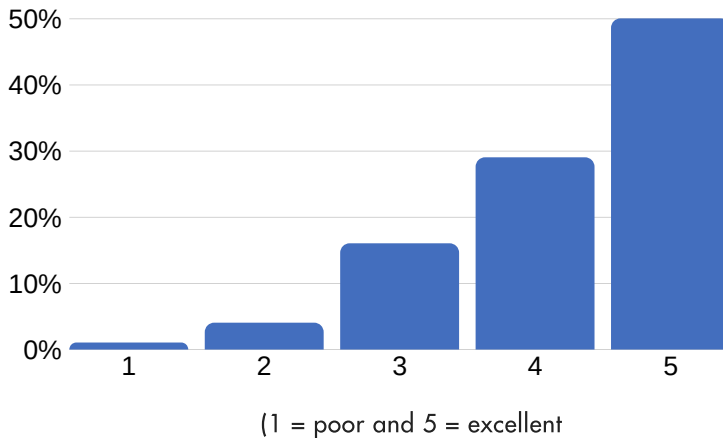
*"The course evaluation and the feedback were appropriate to the relevance of the content."*

*"The questions were clear and made sense. All information required to answer them was delivered in the course content."*

*"I think there was a good balance between some questions being difficult enough where you actually had to be paying attention and some easier questions. I think this balance is good so it means you're actually testing people and they're not just speeding through the courses."*

*"I enjoyed the quiz because I feel they summed up each module well."*

Please rate the online learning experience of  
this course  
n=3,126  
as of April 15, 2019



- Participants most appreciated that course is self-paced, no deadline to complete and freely accessible
- Helpful to have transcripts and ability to replay videos

*"The online learning experience was excellent."*

*"Fantastic. Really easy to log on and off and continue where I left off on various devices including my laptop, work computers, iPad..."*

*"it was easier to navigate through the modules and i enjoyed the teachings."*

*"The online learning experience was excellent. I found the course content to be interesting and compelling. The speakers were enthusiastic and engaging. I found myself looking forward to spending time working on the course."*

Participants were also asked:

Now that you have learned about the connection between early experiences and lifelong health, do you think it will inform your practice as a professional, a leader, or a member of your community or family? What do you intend to do next?

\*\*\*99% of survey respondents answered "Yes"\*\*\*

1,488 people answered this question

What do you intend to do next?

- Continue to learn; lifelong learning, training
- Try to be more sympathetic/empathetic/mindful with clients and others
- Pass on information to others
- Integrate this information into my work with children/youth/adults/students
- Help me advance in my career
- Interact with my children/grandchildren
- Will use the ACEs survey
- Incorporate more Serve and Return
- Practice what I learned, counsel, teach
- Use the Brain Architecture Game tool
- Use the knowledge to work on projects and to further research.

## Feedback from Organizations and Groups

As of March 31, 2019, the Palix Foundation has met with numerous organizations and groups within institutions from different sectors - health, education, justice, human services – including, but not limited to Alberta Health Services, the school system, family violence, youth mentoring, children’s residential services, adult recovery and police services to solicit feedback on the course and its impact. Table 1 lists organizations that are leading the way in terms of embracing the Brain Story Certification Course. As noted, some organizations and groups have now made the course a mandatory part of the hiring process and/or ongoing professional development expectations. Appendix 7 provides guidelines and questions to think about when embarking on a process to introduce and implement a course taking process in organizations and with groups.

Table 1

Alberta Parenting for the Future Association*- Edmonton	Heartland Agency- Calgary
Aspen Family and Community Network Society- Calgary	Holy Spirit Catholic Schools- Lethbridge
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Calgary and Area *- Calgary	Kainai Board of Education*- Standoff
Boyle McCauley Health Centre- Edmonton	Kepler Academy*- Edmonton
Boys & Girls Club – Alberta wide	Lethbridge School District No 51- Lethbridge
Bridges Family Programs Association of Southeaster Alberta- Medicine Hat	McMan Youth, Family and Community Services Association- Alberta wide
Child & Adolescent Addiction, Mental Health & Psychiatry Program (CAAMHPP)- Calgary	Providence*- Calgary
Calgary Board of Education- Calgary	Red Deer Public Schools- Red Deer
Calgary Catholic School District- Calgary	Renfrew Educational Services- Calgary
Calgary John Howard Society - Calgary	Rocky View Schools- Airdrie
Calgary Police Service- Calgary	Simon House Recovery Centre*- Calgary
Canadian Mental Health Association- Alberta wide	Terra Centre- Edmonton
CASA*- Edmonton	The Alex- Calgary
Catholic Family Services Calgary*-Calgary	The Family Center*- Edmonton
Catholic Social Services Red Deer- Red Deer	University of Lethbridge* Dr. Gibb's Neuroscience Class
Changes for Hope*- Edmonton	Unlimited Potential Community Services- Alberta wise
Children’s Cottage Society*- Calgary	Webber Academy- Calgary
Covenant Health- Edmonton	Westwind School Division- Cardston
CUPS*- Calgary	Women's Outreach*- Red Deer
Discovery House *- Calgary	Wood's Home*- Calgary
Edmonton Public Schools- Edmonton	YMCA- Alberta wide
Enviros- Calgary	Youth HQ- Red Deer
Family Services of Central Alberta- Red Deer	YW Calgary- Calgary
Fresh Start Recovery Center*- Calgary	

\*Mandatory



Following are observations and conclusions from the data gathered through feedback sessions. Appendix 8 provides several in-depth examples and testimonials.

Before beginning the course, a few organizations invited the Palix Foundation to give a preliminary presentation on the course content followed by a question and answer period. Most organizations that did not have a presentation before beginning the course commented on how this would have been useful to contextualize the content within the work they do and to motivate them to take the course.

The most common way for organizations to encourage employees to take the course was to make it mandatory, to allow work time to take the course and to incorporate regular opportunities to discuss the knowledge gained and its relevance as a group. In some instances, organizational leaders formed a curriculum committee and took the course together before rolling it out to the rest of the organization.

In addition to making the course mandatory, some organizations also instituted a deadline for completion and/or included completion of the course as part of the onboarding training process along with providing new employees with given time at work to complete the course. Some organizations also incorporated the course as a part of their business plan specifying that it is mandatory. There were also several organizations with learners taking the course individually on their own time and at their own pace, with no group discussions. Feedback indicated that constraints and barriers to more systematically implementing the course can be significant, particularly in larger institutions where providing time for professional development and training during working hours is challenging.

Other feedback indicated that the course knowledge facilitated a paradigm shift in the way employees see clients, while some course participants have also started to change policy and practice within their organizations based on the knowledge. In some organizations, some staff found the knowledge challenging in understanding their own personal journey and what that means to them. The course catalyzed discussions about how to better support these staff and how to improve skills sets and capacity among all employees. Some organizations also developed new theories of change and evaluation frameworks based on the knowledge. While feedback indicated that some organizations need more support to develop robust practice, data collection and evaluation approaches, in others capacity to achieve greater and deeper understanding of the difference the science is making in practice and its contribution to active skill building and improved outcomes is growing. The quote below from the YW Calgary exemplifies this change.

*"Our evaluations have changed in relation to The Brain Story information because now, rather than just looking for types of change, for example that someone's income might have changed or someone's housing status might have changed, now we're actually looking for change in the way that they respond under those challenging experiences in their lives."*

Organization leaders are also sometimes not fully aware of their employees' educational backgrounds. Feedback obtained indicated that the course has created an opportunity for all staff to be trained under the same language and same content areas. The employer then knows that everyone has learned the same information and can speak the same language, particularly by making the course mandatory. Feedback also highlighted that the knowledge delivered through the course enhances alignment across different parts of the organizations and builds relationships and collaboration.

At feedback sessions, organizations also found it helpful to see who else in their community is taking the course. Common feedback was that everyone should know this information and that it was helpful to be aware of other organizations being educated in the brain science and implementing trauma informed practices.

A best practice approach and steps to consider when implementing the course within organizations and with groups derived from the feedback follows. A guide with more details to help facilitate course taking processes is in Appendix 7. This guide and approaches to taking the course may also be of interest to other jurisdictions and organizations that are interested in learning from models in Alberta as they move the knowledge into this communities. We would be very happy to work with change agents in other parts of Canada, and internationally to provide guidance, create connections and learn from others as they implement their own brain story learning journeys.

**1. Create readiness and awareness:**

Invite the Palix Foundation to provide an introductory presentation to organizational leaders and staff about the brain story and the course, that also includes playing the [Brain Architecture Game](#) to reinforce the scientific concepts.[9]

**2. Take leadership and ownership for implementation:**

To demonstrate leadership, buy-in and build knowledge competency at the leadership and decision-making levels, encourage organizational leaders to complete the course first before rolling it out in the rest of the organization.

**3. Make the course mandatory and support completion:**

Make the course a mandatory part of ongoing professional development and performance management plans and provide the support and time needed for staff to complete it. Require new employees to complete it before they begin employment and/or include it as an asset or requirement in the hiring process.

**4. Integrate and facilitate "so what" discussions:**

Identify leads in the organization to create regular, facilitated opportunities for staff to discuss what they are learning and how to apply this learning in their work and organizations as they proceed through the course. Consider taking the course in groups or as an entire organization to enhance and embed learning further.

**5. Participate in a feedback session with Palix Foundation staff:**

About half way through the course or once most staff have completed it, invite the Palix Foundation to host a session to hear your feedback on the course and knowledge application processes, and to discuss learnings in the context of the Foundation's broader knowledge and perspective of implementation efforts related to the course and other community participants. These sessions also provide an opportunity to situate learnings in the context of the science of resilience and the role organizations and groups play in building the foundations of resilience throughout the life course.

[9] See: <https://www.albertafamilywellness.org/resources/video/the-brain-architecture-game>

## CONCLUSIONS TO DATE

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The course processes have catalyzed significant learning opportunities for those taking the course. Moreover, the Foundation has listened to feedback from course participants and updated the course based on it as part of its continuous improvement efforts. The updated version launched on April 16, 2019 (now also available in French) aims to enhance user experience, includes new resources and is more streamlined and easier to navigate.

Clearly, the course is filling a knowledge gap and demand continues to increase. Particularly noteworthy is the observation that many organizations both large and small are now making the course a mandatory component of staff professional development and/or requiring it as part of the recruitment process. This highlights the importance and relevance of the course content to organizations working with children and families. The course also appears to strike the right balance between stretching the learner as a course leading to a certification should do, while being feasible to undertake for a wide variety of individuals from different educational backgrounds and disciplines.

While feedback on the course has been overwhelmingly positive and momentum is significant, it also provides important insight into the barriers and challenges associated with processes related to taking the course and creating incentives to do so. For example, feedback on common barriers and challenges (which also highlight opportunities for focus and change) include:

- Effectively influencing upstream efforts to systematically integrate the knowledge as part of cross sector/system workforce development.
- Achieving collective understanding about the importance of the knowledge in creating a continuum of care.
- Understanding and overcoming barriers and constraints to systematically implement the course within organizations and institutions (e.g. how to allow time to take course during working hours in a busy service delivery context; how to support staff in their own journeys through employee assistance programs that are also based on the brain story knowledge and require the course competency).
- Understanding incentives and processes needed to systematically apply the knowledge to inform practice change, data collection and evaluation.

We at the Palix Foundation have also learned a great deal since the course was launched about our role as a flexible, responsive, iterative foundation committed to creating high quality experiences to engage with and embed the brain story knowledge. As we've learned over the years, our positive, respectful relationships with change agents are critical to these processes, as is face to face engagement. While the course is an online resource, providing facilitated in person opportunities to discuss the content, and in particular, how to apply it is very important. We've also learned that a sustained effort is required along with a flexible approach and appreciation of community differences and degree of readiness allowing for community leaders to guide what works in their contexts. In these processes, discipline to the knowledge is the sine qua non, while the process to develop and put knowledge competency into practice must be flexible, iterative, community led and context specific.

In collaboration with multiple and varied change agents in many jurisdictions in Canada and internationally, the Palix Foundation, through AFWI, continues to explore ways to promote enrollment and completion of the Brain Story Certification Course as a tool to build contemporary and critical workforce knowledge competency in the brain story knowledge.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Obtaining knowledge competency by completing the Brain Story Certification Course is a fundamental first step to developing brain science-based changes and innovations in behaviour, practice, programs and policy. The knowledge is driving new ways of thinking and innovating “on the ground” but as highlighted in the AFWI strategy progress report (Appendix 2) how to assess, capture, share and scale these innovations is a next frontier for even more focused attention. Fortunately, Change in Mind and Frontiers of Innovation (FOI)[10] provide disciplined platforms and approaches for understanding and addressing this timely and exciting opportunity to improve outcomes. Building and systematically documenting and sharing the evidence base related to brain story-based interventions at all levels – systems and policy, within organizations and with individuals - is where change agents and leaders are turning their attention. In particular, there is growing momentum to understand the contribution of the knowledge to practice change and subsequently to sustainable and improved prevention and intervention efforts leading to better individual and family outcomes. The Palix Foundation is committed to continuing to catalyze these efforts and to working with an array of partners on our collective learning journey by providing the Brain Story Course as a standardized and consistent tool for change and innovation to contribute to better outcomes for all children and families.

[10] For a summary of FOI interventions based on the brain science see:  
<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/current-frontiers-innovation-portfolio-projects/>

## APPENDICES

1. Embedding the Brain Story
2. AFWI Strategy Progress Report
3. Course Outline
4. Curriculum Committee
5. Testimonial Videos
6. Course Analytics as of April 15, 2019
7. Guidelines and Questions
8. Examples of Feedback and Impact from Organizations and Groups

Better health and well-being for Alberta families is within reach. By empowering change agents to understand and act upon the Brain Story, the AFWI is sharing tools to improve lifelong outcomes for physical and mental health, including addiction.



[AlbertaFamilyWellness.org/Training](https://AlbertaFamilyWellness.org/Training)

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