

# 2012 International Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Awareness Day

**Every year on September 9th, International FASD Awareness Day is observed.** People all around the world gather for events to raise awareness about the dangers of drinking during pregnancy and the plight of individuals and families who struggle with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD).

The first FASDay was celebrated on 9/9/99. This day was chosen so that on the ninth day of the ninth month of the year, the world will remember that during the nine months of pregnancy a woman should abstain from alcohol. FASD is an umbrella term describing the range of effects that can occur in an individual whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. These effects may include physical, mental, behavioural and learning disabilities with lifelong implications. It is estimated that 1:100 persons have FASD in Canada. “The need for awareness of this disorder is urgent” says Jennifer McKee parent “FASD not only has impacted my son for every moment of his day, it too has constant stress and challenges on our family”.

All communities face unique challenges and have varied strengths and resources that affect how they respond to FASD related issues, Halton is no exception. The one factor that is consistent among all communities is that inadequate resources are available to provide what is needed to properly support people living with FASD and to prevent FASD, yet many of Halton’s neighboring communities such as Hamilton and Peel have developed FASD supports and services through the mobilization of community partnerships to improve the lives of children, youth and young adults living with FASD and their families. Halton’s time has come to do the same.

Halton’s development of a local FASD strategy is in its infancy. In 2010, the Halton Human Service and Justice Coordinating Committee (HHSJCC) determined there was a need to develop a strategy to address FASD in Halton because of the belief those suffering from the effects of FASD are over represented in the justice system. “This disorder is difficult to address because there is often a lack of available information from the mother that would greatly assist with a diagnosis and there is also a stigma associated to an admission by the mother” says Cheryl Gustafson Chair – Halton FASD Committee.

HHJCC held a FASD conference for the purpose of raising awareness and increasing community knowledge. On June 8, 2011, senior managers or their delegates from various community and hospital based organizations (representing mental health, child and youth, justice, school boards, addiction services, public health, developmental services, and parents of children with FASD) were represented at the first ever Halton FASD conference.

On February 17, 2012 a planning day was held with community stakeholders resulting in the creation of “A Vision for Addressing FASD in Halton”. As a result of the planning day, a dedicated Halton FASD leadership group was formed and is meeting regularly to move the Halton FASD vision into action. If you require further information contact Cheryl Gustafson RN, BScN, MN, CPMHN(C), Chair Halton FASD Committee at 905-845-2571 ext: 6782.