



Statement

Sept. 9, 2020

International FASD Awareness Day

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Awareness Day was first celebrated in 1999 with a focus on improving prevention, diagnosis and support for individuals with FASD. On this FASD Awareness Day, I want to take time to acknowledge the importance of increasing awareness of FASD in a strengths-based and non-stigmatizing way.

Historically, and often presently, language used to describe those with FASD is based on shame, blame and negative stereotypes, resulting in discrimination and stigma against children and youth with FASD and their families. Assumptions are often made about what people living with FASD can and cannot do, they are labelled in derogatory and harmful ways and their actions are often misunderstood.

During the past year, my Office has been engaged in a special project with children and youth with FASD and their families, First Nations communities and professionals working to support young people with FASD. We had the opportunity to spend significant time with an incredible group of children and youth living with FASD and the people who love them. Each young person involved in the research possesses invaluable strengths, gifts and knowledge that deserve to be nurtured so they can reach their fullest potential. Here is an example drawn from a parent's reflections: *"So, he's out on the baseball field and the kids are all running back and forth and they're doing laps across the baseball field, and guess where "S" is? Back with the little one that ... is in the walker. I'll run with you he, he says. That's my boy right there. And that's what we talk about every day when he goes to school. Remember, if you can be anything in the whole world, be kind."*

I will release a public report this fall that speaks to what RCY has learned about the experiences of children and youth with FASD. This report will include recommendations for changes in provincial supports, but I also hope it contributes to increased awareness and challenges the misunderstanding and stigmatization children and youth with FASD often face. In listening to the experiences of these young people, I am struck by how the language and framing of FASD impacts how they – and others like them - are received, treated or supported in their community. Increasing awareness of FASD through a strengths-based and non-stigmatizing approach can impact the lives of children and youth with FASD in a positive way.

This shift is already taking place as knowledge and thinking about FASD evolves and is informed by the expertise of people living with FASD and their loved ones, the creative ways that communities are responding to the needs of their young people, as well as the research on brain development. In listening to the lived expertise of those across B.C., RCY has developed new understandings and awareness of the impacts of the diagnosis and how shifting the framing of FASD can contribute to the success of children and youth with FASD. New awareness helps to distance us from the past and move us towards a more compassionate and supportive community for those with FASD.

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