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Awareness being raised for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder

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The month of September marks the international awareness for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FASD), and local action group, Dufferin Wellington Guelph FASD, is looking to diminish the stigma and improve support for the often-invisible disability.

?There's not a lot known about it, it's not something that's talked about widely and certainly people who are living with FASD are often misunderstood and misinterpreted,? said Jennifer Moore, chief executive officer of Dufferin Child and Family Services. ?That's why we feel that it's really important to raise awareness so that we can help break down some of the stigma and assumptions that are attached and hopefully be able to provide some support.?

FASD International Awareness Day has been recognized annually on Sept. 9, since 1999 and looks to bring global awareness to the disability. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, or FASD, is a lifelong disability that is caused by being exposed to alcohol prenatally, which effects the brainand body.

According to Canada FASD Research Network, FASD is the leading developmental disability with current studies suggesting that up to 4 per cent of individuals or about 1.4 million people in country have FASD.

FASD can cause difficulty with learning, memory, impulsivity, control as well as impact academic achievement and social interactions.

?FASD is actually a brain injury and like with many brain injuries, it's not obvious to people who don't know an individual or understand their circumstances that they're affected this way, which makes it really challenging because there are definitely some behaviours aligned with FASD that can be really misunderstood by the general public, community service providers, parents, and caregivers,? explained Moore. ?This is a spectrum disorder and there's experience in a variety of different ways in a variety of different levels within each individual.?

Part of FASD International Awareness Day is to address the stigma that individuals with FASD and their families face as well as the misinformation surrounding the disability.

?There's so much judgement on a parent if their child ends up being diagnosed with FASD. There are assumptions made that a parent must be using alcohol to excess all throughout their pregnancy and are super neglectful in terms of their unborn baby, however, the reality is that there is no definitive information to indicate how much alcohol causes this,? said Moore.

A common misconception about FASD, Moore noted is that it's 100 percent preventable.

The Canada FASD Research Network reports that over 60 per cent of all pregnancies are unplanned.

To raise awareness for FASD, the Dufferin Wellington Guelph FASD will be participating in the annual Red Shoes Rock initiative. Red Shoes Rock is a grass roots movement, started when Canadian educator and advocate, RJ Formanek, who wore red shoes on an international stage to discuss FASD. The movement gained international recognition as a way to bring attention to the disability.

The local FASD action group will be hosting a walk on Sept. 9 starting at 6:45 p.m. at the Market Square in Guelph and will also see FASD Awareness Day proclaimed in Dufferin County for the second year.

?If we can help to reduce some stigma then there may be a likelihood of more early diagnoses, which could end up really impacting

the trajectory for children and youth,? said Moore.

Dufferin Wellington Guelph FASD are asking community members to wear red on International FASD Awareness Day to show support.

FASD International Awareness Day will take place on Sept. 9.

To find out more information on serves and support available locally go towww.dufferinwellingtonfasd.com.