This page was exported from - Shelburne Free Press
Export date: Fri Oct 30 1:52:15 2026 / +0000 GMT

FASD International Awareness Day being recognized Sept. 9

Dufferin Child and Family Services (DCAFS) are looking to improve support and diminish the stigma of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) this month, by raising awareness for the often invisible disability.

?FASD is a lot more prevalent than people think or that people are aware of, but it's a disability that often doesn't receive recognition? explained Tara Leskey, FASD Coordinator for Dufferin-Wellington-Guelph. ?It's quite an invisible disability, because you can't really see it, so a lot of individuals are often misdiagnosed with other disabilities and a lot of that's related to the stigma associated with just the name in itself.?

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, and affects both the brain and the body.

According to Canada FASD Research Network, current studies suggest that almost 4 per cent of individuals in Canada or around 1.4 million people, have FASD.

Based on a 2016 census profile over 11,378 individuals living in Dufferin, Wellington, and Guelph are estimated to have FASD, with an estimated 4,000 children and youth under the age of 18.

Leskey noted that the number of cases DCAFS sees is significantly lower than the estimated number of people living with FASD, and is based on individual needs. She also added that FASD can often be misdiagnosed for other disorders including ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and Oppositional Defiant Disorder.

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

One aspect of FASD International Awareness Day, is addressing the stigma that individuals with FASD and their parents face, as well as tackling misinformation.

?There's a lot of assumptions and misconceptions about FASD, but we know FASD can be caused by mother's drinking alcohol at any stage during their pregnancy,? said Leskey.

One common misconception about FASD the Leskey points out is that it's one hundred per cent preventable.

The Canada FASD Research Network says that approximately 50 per cent of all pregnancies are unintended and that women often continue their usual pattern of alcohol consumption in the early weeks of an unplanned pregnancy.

Another misconception of FASD is an association to social, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds including lower income, under educated, and struggles with addiction.

?It can affect any population and we know this from research that shows it affects all income brackets, and all education levels. Women from all walks of life can unknowingly expose their child to alcohol,? said Leskey.

While FASD Awareness Day is helping bring recognition of the disability, the day also helps draw awareness to under servicing locally.

Leskey says it is difficult for families to get a FASD diagnosis especially in Dufferin and Wellington as there is no diagnostic clinic.

?In order for families to get a diagnosis, they have to access services privately. They have to pay for private practitioners to do the assessment,? said Leskey.

?If we make assumptions that women do this intentionally to harm their unborn child, then they're less likely to go for help because the person they seek help from might pass judgement on them. But, if we reduce the level of stigma maybe more families would come forward seeking help and people would be more willing to offer services and support.?

FASD International Awareness Day will take place on Sept. 9. To find out more information on services and support available go to www.dufferinwellingtonfasd.com.