

## Group aims to educate Niagara about fetal alcohol syndrome

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It's a disorder that affects nine babies out of every 1,000.

Dianne Labelle, a fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) facilitator and educator, says it's a disorder that everybody should be aware of and be educated about.

"My goal and my mission is to educate and bring awareness about fetal alcohol to the public of the Niagara peninsula," said Labelle, adding there are different areas that need help. "Whether it is to help somebody affected by the disorder, or to help in preventing mothers not to drink during their pregnancy, the word needs to get out to the public. We need to plant the seed and get the information out there."

FASD is a disorder that begins in the womb. It begins when mothers consume alcohol or drugs during any stage of their pregnancy. She said that the disease is completely preventable.

"The good thing is the disorder is 100 per cent preventable, so people don't have to suffer, as long as the public is educated and stop it before it starts," she explains.

Labelle said a big step is to educate and bring awareness to young people.

She goes to schools across Niagara where she holds seminars to help spread the word and gain awareness of the disorder, she said. "If children learn at a young age they'll know the risk and consequences of drinking during pregnancy."

Labelle said the impacts and effects of FASD vary. Different birth defects and the degree of the disability depend on how much alcohol is consumed, what stage and how often during the pregnancy.

"The effects really vary from abnormality in the face, the central nervous system defects and intestinal track defects," she explained. "These are the areas which can be affected from the time of conception to the time you're born, depending on if a woman drinks during the pregnancy."

Health Canada says FASD is a national public health, education, economic and social concern because as those affected suffer a lifelong disability and may need lifelong support.

"Children suffering from this disorder will be effected for the rest of their lives and they will need support throughout their entire life," Labelle said.

She said FASD results in delays in a person's development, intellectual problems and problems in their social lives. A person suffering from the disorder, she said, will only have half the mental capacity they should, so if they are 10 physically, mentally they are only five.

Labelle has joined forces with the Kiwanis Central club of St. Catharines in tackling the problem.

Jack Walters, president of the Kiwanis central club in St. Catharines said children are the group's focus.

"Our interest lies with the kids," he said. "Educating children is our number 1 priority."

For more information on FASD, visit [www.fasstar.com](http://www.fasstar.com).

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