**Make SHIFT Happen**

**The Pas and Area FASD Committee**

**December 2020**

Once you have the mind shift happen, you will want to know more about The Pas and Area Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder FASD Committee.  A small but mighty group of service providers, people with lived experience, educators, and caregivers has been making a difference for The Pas and Area for over 2 decades.  Since the late 90s, the group has advocated for diagnostic assessment, early intervention services, educational sessions, and partnerships in local, provincial and national initiatives regarding supports for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

Initially, the committee came together to fill a gap in assessment for children who may have had prenatal exposure to alcohol.  An assessment team existed in Winnipeg but it was difficult and stressful for families to travel to the city for their appointments.  The idea of a remote Northern assessment clinic was welcomed by a special needs educator and 2 social workers.  In Manitoba, a geneticist and pediatrician were on the forefront of diagnosis for children and an occupational therapist (Dorothy Schwab) made suggestions about the types of adjustments that could be made to classrooms, homes, and coping strategies of caregivers and children.  The Clinic was supported by a Manager of the then named Clinic for Alcohol and Drug Exposed Children (CADEC). The local committee partnered with Manitoba Coalition on Alcohol and Pregnancy or MCAP to bring specialists to the area and ease the families experience of assessment.  Fast forward to 2020 and the area has their own Diagnostic Coordinator working in partnership with the MB FASD Clinic, Northern Health Region, and multiple service providers to support families through the diagnostic journey with dignity and respect.

Advocating for early intervention services developed through relationships with Family Services, Child Welfare, Children’s Disability Services, Education, Justice, and the NHR pediatrician.  Through constant participation in Winnipeg-based organizations like the MB Coalition of Chairs, and conversations about gaps in service with MB FASD Strategy, The Pas was fortunate to secure the Mentor Program, which assists women who use substances with getting connected to community resources and supports.  In 2010, the program was renamed the Insight Program and today has a coordinator and 2 mentors supporting women in the Northern Health Region.  In 2006, the group wrote letters to various political leaders to advocate for Jordan’s Principle to be implemented so all kids would be able to access services regardless of where they lived—a principle that was passed by unanimous voting in the MB Legislature in 2007 and is currently established on OCN and at Cree Nation Tribal Health.  At Cree Nation Tribal Health, the STAR Program has been running for many years supporting women in First Nations Communities with mentors with funding from FNIHB. A yearly FASD Family Camp was organized by STAR at Moose Park on Opaskwayak Cree Nation so that families could come together and learn about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and meet available supports in the community.  For about 7 years, from 2010 to 2017, The Pas Justice Office housed a part-time coordinator of the FASD Youth Justice Program locally to facilitate assessment of youth involved with the Justice Program.

Filling educational gaps has been a long-standing goal of The Pas and Area FASD Committee.  There have been many renowned speakers over the years including Dorothy Schwab (OT), Kim Barthel (OT), Miles Himmelreich (person with FASD), Dr Nathan Ory (psychologist), Jeff Noble (caregiver), and Healthy Child Manitoba FASD Strategy.  The speakers brought mind shifting information on topics such as Looking After Each Other, Shine Some Light, FASD 101, Becoming a Behaviour Detective, Trauma-Informed Care, Visions and Voices, (young people with lived experience), Bringing It Back to the Brain, How Attachment Shapes our Lives, and Managing Sensory Issues.   On a smaller scale, the committee has hosted Lunch and Learns on various topics, produced poster campaigns, facilitate monthly information series over telehealth, developed a logo, designed pamphlets, shared information, and donated FASD-related books and resources to local libraries.  In 1994, the first FASD Awareness Day walk was organized by the committee walking down the middle of the street (without police escort!) from Town Hall to the Pas Family Resource Centre at the corner of 2nd and Fischer.  The walk and lunch became an annual event continuing yearly until 2020 when it was interrupted by a world-wide pandemic.  Along with the celebration on Sept 9thevery year, the group worked to include community leaders and elected officials, read the Proclamation, schedule radio interviews, create pamphlets/posters, library displays, organize mall displays, have 50/50 draws, participate in trade shows and craft sales, share videos and personal stories, plan BBQs.  Every June, students are selected to receive one of three bursaries ($200 unless shared between multiple graduates) named the Peter Stevenson Memorial Bursary at Margaret Barbour Collegiate Institute, the Claudia Demchynski Memorial Bursary Kelsey Learning Centre, and the Despite the Odds Bursary at Oscar Lathlin Collegiate.

Committee membership has waxed and waned over the years but the community partnerships remain.  We have strong alliances with Northern Health Region Health Promotion, MacDonald Youth Services, Kelsey School Division, Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, Rosaire House, UCN ECE Program, Northern Regional Parent Child Coalition, Marni Streit, and Manitoba Foster Family Network.  Locally, the FASD committee has been fortunate to have support from Rotary, Kinsmen, The Pas Community Renewal Corporation, and the Grub Box. Regionally, the group has worked with the Flin Flon/Creighton FASD Committee over the years to provide shared educational opportunities and advocate for services in the North.   Provincially, members participate on the MB FASD Coalition and attend the Council of Chair and Looking After Each Other annual gatherings held throughout Manitoba.  Nationally, committee members have attended conferences and trainings and brought information back to the community about best practices, research, and language of dignity.

Send us a message on Facebook @The Pas and Area FASD Committee if you'd like to learn more.