

## NEWS

# FASD workshop benefits local groups

**Erin Christie**

*STAFF WRITER*

**U**NDERSTANDING and addressing the complex needs of people with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) was the goal of an all day workshop held at the Sioux Lookout Legion September 2.

The workshop, attended by approximately 130 people, was funded by the Centre For Excellence and facilitated by the Sioux Lookout Community Action Partnership for FASD, a year-long project with the goal of creating and implementing a community action plan (CAP).

The goal of the project has been to develop a plan that will lead to the creation of a comprehensive service network aimed at effectively identifying and responding to the unique needs of children, youth and their families affected by FASD in Sioux Lookout.

"The reason this project was developed was because we were seeing a high need for local service providers to keep improving their working relationship so as to improve the services given to FASD clients," explained coordinator of the Healthy Generations Family Support Programs, Judy Kay, who is also a family support worker who sees a large number of children living with FASD.

FASD is an umbrella term used to describe a range of disabilities, including fetal alcohol syndrome, partial fetal alcohol syndrome, alcohol-related neurodevelopment disorder, and alcohol related birth defects, that may affect people whose mothers drank alcohol while they were pregnant.

Guest speaker Dan Dubovsky, an FASD specialist with the SAMHSA FASD Centre for Excellence, a federal initiative devoted to preventing and treating FASD, explained that the effects of FASD can vary widely from person to person but drinking alcohol while pregnant can typically result in cognitive, social and motor deficiencies and other lifelong problems.

"The fetal brain can be harmed at any time because the brain develops throughout pregnancy. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) reveals that some individuals who were prenatally exposed to alcohol have smaller brains," said Dubovsky.

"Some parts of the brain can also be damaged or missing such as basal ganglia (which controls cognition, emotion and motor activities), cerebellum, corpus callosum (which connects the two halves of the brain, and affects communication in the brain) and others."

Resulting impairments may include, but are not limited to, mental retardation, learning disabilities, attention deficits, hyperactivity, problems with impulse control, language, memory and social skills.

An estimated 40,000 babies are affected by FASD in the United States every year.

Consequences of not recognizing FASD in an individual include multiple admissions for mental health and substance abuse treatment, difficulty in school, repeated difficulty in employment, and repeated trouble with the law.

Consequences of not recognizing FASD in a caregiver result in them often being labeled as neglectful, uncaring or sabotaging.

Dubovsky added that FASD is 100 per cent preventable. FASD is not curable, however with the proper diagnosis, treatment, and support network, many people with FASD can learn coping skills and lead happy lives.

"This workshop is one of six activities that is encompassed in the project," said Kay.

"At the end of September we'll have completed the first phase, which has been creating the community action plan, and in the next six months we'll be working as a collaborative to implement the action plan, which is basically looking at what's currently available and what can we do to improve the services," she continued.

"Right now there are 14 organizations and schools participating in the CAP but in the next six months we plan to extend invitations to all local service providers to assist in developing and implementing the action plan," explained Graham Thompson of New Vision Unlimited, one of the projects' major partners, along with Healthy Generations Family Support Program. For more information about FASD visit [www.fasdcenter.samhsa.gov](http://www.fasdcenter.samhsa.gov)