



Media release
27 April 2010

Australian author to visit NZ to help families living with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

An Australian author and birthmother of two adult sons affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASDs) is coming to New Zealand next week to share her experiences of raising children affected by prenatal alcohol exposure.

The free seminar entitled 'Living with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder in the Family: Trying Differently Not Harder' will be held on Thursday April 29 from 10am till 2:30pm at the Barrycourt Hotel in Parnell. It will look at strategies that work and don't work when FASD is a factor for the family.

Guest speaker Elizabeth Russell is the author of three books, most notably her autobiography, 'Alcohol and Pregnancy - A Mother's Responsible Disturbance.' In the book Elizabeth discusses the challenges of raising two children affected by her drinking during pregnancy and her advocacy for improved services for affected families.

Russell says that many families struggle to deal with the behavioral difficulties of FASD.

"Some individuals with an FASD might appear unmotivated, stubborn or defiant when in reality they can't remember, can't understand and can't explain.

"Knowing the pitfalls to avoid and approaching situations in different ways can make a huge difference and save a lot of heart-ache and trouble."

The seminar, hosted by Alcohol Healthwatch, aims to provide important information for those living with or assisting affected individuals in New Zealand.

Alcohol Healthwatch's Christine Rogan, who coordinates the Fetal Alcohol Network says it is important that people not only understand the link between drinking during pregnancy and FASD but also how best to understand, communicate and support those who are born affected.

"Misunderstandings of what is actually going on can make problems far worse than they need be. The earlier a child with an FASD can be identified and understood, the greater their chance is of growing up successfully."

Further details about the seminar are available on the Alcohol Healthwatch website, www.ahw.org.nz

Ends

Key facts about FASD

- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASDs) are caused by the effects of maternal alcohol consumption during pregnancy
- The consequences such as the behavioural and learning difficulties are lifelong
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), the most severe end of the spectrum, is the leading preventable cause of mental retardation in the developed world but accounts for less than 20% of all FASDs
- International estimates suggest that 2-5% of children may be born affected
- When it comes to the brain and nervous system development there is no known safe amount or time to consume alcohol
- Alcohol begins to interfere with brain development at very low levels
- A very small proportion of affected children in NZ have received a definitive diagnosis

Alcohol & Pregnancy - A Mother's Responsible Disturbance Elizabeth Russell, (ISBN: 1-9210-0554-8) Zeus Publishing.

- "A brutally honest account of one family's journey, *Alcohol & Pregnancy - A Mother's Responsible Disturbance* will educate readers and amaze health professionals from all fields. This book gives a human dimension to an insidious and life-threatening condition that has been largely ignored in Australia by government and health workers alike. " Sue Miers, NOFASARD Spokesperson, South Australia.
- "This is an inspiring book. I was inspired by the display of a mother's unquenchable love. I was inspired by a revelation of honesty for which I know few peers. I was inspired by a commitment to refuse to succumb to defeat, but to struggle in the other direction, though the way was obscure." Dr John Whitehall Director of Neonatology The Townsville Hospital, Queensland, Australia
- "In describing the far-reaching and disruptive consequences of FASD, Elizabeth's very personal account raises awareness of the condition in a way that reading a clinical description can never do." Professor Carol Bower, University of Western Australia Telethon Institute for Child Health Research

To arrange an interview with Elizabeth or for more information about the seminar please contact:

Christine Rogan, Health Promotion Advisor
Alcohol Healthwatch

09 520 7037

027 446 7371

christine@ahw.org.nz