

Why we should prevent FASD

My name is Humphrey Otita. My son who is almost 13 years old has a diagnosis of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, FASD. I'd like to share with you, what my son's life has been like so far, living with FASD.

Dom came into our care when he was 4 weeks old, and we finalized his adoption approximately 2.5 years later. We found out after the fact that his birth mom was documented to have consumed alcohol during pregnancy, which is linked to many of Dom's current and early delays with infant development including gross motor skills, fine motor skills, speech, walking, and being fisted, among other issues. In fact, the first week of being in our care, he had to be taken in to the emergency room because he was in distress, including a very elevated heart rate. That was a very tough start to an incredible life, and the challenges are still on-going in various ways. A few examples follow.

During third grade in public school, Dom had significant issues at school, leading to his being expelled and missing school for approximately one and a half years while the school district was figuring out what to do with him. He wound up being accepted into District 287, which is a school that serves students who learn in a Federal Setting IV Special Education environments. He is currently in sixth grade there and still has challenges at school frequently.

His significant issues at school that led to his expulsion ranged from hiding under the table in the classroom, to running away from school when the doors were open, to in-classroom rage and attacking others and destroying property, to the point where one day the school called the police/EMS, and Dom had to be physically restrained and transported to the hospital. In his rage, at the age of seven he was not hesitant to fight the four police officers who were trying to restrain him.

That was not the only time he had to be transported to hospital by EMS and police. It happened during a scheduled doctors visit, and several times while he was at his mother's home. Dom has physically destroyed property in the home including broken TV, broken couch, a shattered car windshield, and other items. He has also physically attacked people including biting and punching.

One of the other hardships that I see in my son stems from increasing self awareness and the adverse impact on self esteem. Like all, kids he wants to fit in and belong, and be like his peers, but there are things he isn't able to do which is embarrassing and difficult. For example, he is currently not able to write, struggles with fine motor skills, and academically he is a few years behind the norm for his age. It is tough to see a kid go through all this just because alcohol was consumed while he was in utero.

Dom requires many services just to keep afloat. He has come a long way in his life and there are moments of goodness when he is enjoying life and doing fun things with people. He and I have had many wonderful moments together. His life is not all bad... but when the moment is bad, it is really bad.

With all of the examples I have shared, one thing to note is that Dom does not have anything physical that indicates he has FASD. He looks just like every other child and it often begs the question of why isn't he behaving like other children do?

As a parent, I have been impacted as well. Parenting is difficult by definition, and when you add FASD to it, it becomes incredible complex. Traditional methods don't work. Punishments don't work. Incentives work some of the time. FASD parenting comes with lots of disruptions and frustrations, but that is besides the point. This is about the kids. Prevention is priceless.

You may have heard the numbers. 13% children in MN born are with FASD. Living with FASD is expensive, and often requires state funds to supplement family funds. The CDC estimates that the lifetime cost of care per person with FASD is \$2 million. Not only does it cost money, but it costs time and energy, both emotional and physical energy.

I personally appreciate what the state is currently doing to support FASD prevention as well as services. It means a lot to me and I am forever grateful for that. Every little bit helps and any opportunity to do more will lead to even better results. Specifically:

1. No person deserves to live with a high impact condition that is 100% preventable.
2. There is a high return on investment. Dollars invested in FASD prevention potentially saves \$2 million from a lifetime support services.
3. A reduction in societal issues that result from the lack of understanding of FASD in responding to volatile situations involving those with a diagnosis.

Thank you for your time today, and I hope my testimony helps persuade you to increase the FASD prevention grant to Proof Alliance.