

FASD Awareness Day 2020

Charlotte's Story



Hello I am a birth mum to five beautiful children. My youngest was diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder from birth. I am wanting to help spread the word about the risks of drinking while pregnant. No amount is safe at any point during pregnancy. No drink = no risk.

My story is one of a recovering alcoholic and it can be a difficult story to read and was extremely difficult to live through. It was one of the most devastating and scary times in my life. I've never really enjoyed drinking but I am a recovering addict. I had left my home city for a fresh start with my eldest child and newborn baby. My life was good and I went on to have two more children and had been clean for more than four years. I was the happiest I had been in many years and I was blessed with my beautiful children which I felt truly were a gift from God. I then relocated to a new town and a larger property as we needed space and as I look back now see this was a bad decision for it would take me away from a very close friend I met who is still one of my closest friends to this day and I was left isolated. I didn't drive and where I moved wasn't within walking distance to anything other than the supermarket and I felt very stranded.

My husband, who has always been a very hard worker, enjoyed a few beers after work and it wouldn't bother me. I very rarely drank during my four years sobriety. I was enjoying being settled and just being a good mummy but this house move impacted me deeply and with raising four children (three very close together in age) I started to have a drink in the evenings instead of returning to my addiction to substances. I justified it to myself. After all, why not! Everyone has a couple of drinks on an evening to wind down don't they! It's acceptable and it's legal! I have never particularly liked beer so drank vodka and a mixer. It was a small bottle to begin with but I started noticing it was getting earlier and earlier in the day that I was reaching for my first glass. I take a prescription for anxiety now but at the time I didn't and as most people feel with a hangover, I felt fragile and my anxiety was magnified. I would be scared to go outside without a drink inside me for Dutch courage and so it continued. I was consuming a litre bottle over 24 hours every day for over one and a half years. If I didn't drink I would shake to the point I would lose use of my legs and have seizures. The main problem was that I wouldn't be able to function to care for my children and I was trapped under the control of alcohol and was in constant fear of losing my children if anyone found out what a mess I was in and it was killing me.

The day I found out I was pregnant I was ashamed and scared and in such despair. I contacted my support worker who put me in touch with a substance misuse midwife. I've never felt so devastated in my life but this set the ball in motion for change and it meant my baby and I would get the right medical support. At six weeks pregnant I was attending pre-recovery and was advised under no circumstances to attempt to reduce my alcohol intake on my own as I risked seizures and more harm to my unborn baby. Imagine the anguish I was feeling. A week later, I miscarried and felt it may have been for the best but when I attended an early scan the nurse told me I had been having non-identical twins and one baby was still there fighting to survive.

I knew at that point that despite any shame or judgements from anybody, I would fight through and get strong again and use every service available to us. I was offered inpatient detox for ten days when I was fourteen weeks pregnant. During those seven weeks waiting for detox my body was failing and I was still caring for my children in every way although eventually I was a wreck. I was trying to reduce my intake myself and ended up having a seizure just before I was due to detox. I don't remember the seizure but I was in A&E when it happened and I have the utmost respect for all the people who have cared for me and my daughter. I left hospital with two black eyes, a broken nose and my teeth had gone through my lip but my daughter fought on and a week later I entered the detox centre. They saved mine and my daughter's life and enabled me to be here and raise my children. I have never drank again and neither has my husband.

Our fight was only beginning as we had weekly scans, drug and alcohol tests, social services meetings, and Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous recovery meetings. It was stressful but necessary and I had no fear because I was on track. It's only when I started my sober life that my children were placed on the at-risk register and not before. I just remember crying and screaming in panic when it happened but we came out the other side and my children were fully taken back off the register and we were set free and by this time I was then sad to see all the professionals go.

The baby had stopped growing and it was decided to do a C-section four weeks early. The staff were extremely prepared but I was not. She wasn't breathing when she was born and all I could see were her two beautiful tiny feet. She did not cry and I heard doctors calling her name and trying to save her before taking her off to the special care unit. I was used to having my babies placed straight onto my breast to bond but not holding your baby and knowing if they are even breathing was terrifying. My mum has always told me that my daughter was meant to be here and in honesty she saved my life and our family and in return I work hard to repay that every day. She was diagnosed at birth due to our history and has facial features and she's the most petite little lady. She struggles to gain weight and was born with a heart defect which is repairing itself. She had a full cleft palate and was tube fed for the first 10 months and has a fear of swallowing food. She has a defect in one of the eyelids and a raised diaphragm. She's had many operations and has spent a great deal of time in hospital. I've never been prouder of this little girl. She's the bravest happiest little lady who loves climbing and exploring and has no fear and our world wouldn't be the same without her.

I wanted to share my story to explain the risks of drinking alcohol in pregnancy. I was at the extreme end of drinking in pregnancy and although I have skimmed through the issues, we still have a long journey ahead. If you are pregnant and have been drinking alcohol even if it was just social drinking until you knew you were pregnant and have now stopped, please speak to your midwife or doctor or local recovery service so that they can check your baby's health and wellbeing and to support you well throughout the pregnancy. If you suspect your child may have FASD then speak with your GP and contact FASD Network UK. Help is available.

If you have been affected by issues in the article or want to find out more please contact:

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