What is the Circle of Hope?

The Circle of Hope (CDH) is a support group for women who have consumed alcohol during pregnancy and/or have a child with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD).

The COH is here to provide you with:
- Referrals and resources
- Factual information about FASD and addiction
- Support for you and your family

Lisa Gladwell: An Inspiration to Us ALL!

A photo of Lisa is featured to the left.

Lisa grew up in the affluent suburbs of Bergen County, NJ. She could have been considered the All-American girl throughout her childhood: excelling in academics and sports, active in her church community, and socially outgoing. She attended college, and embarked on a successful corporate career. To the world, she seemed to be living an ideal life.

However, somewhere along the way, Lisa discovered alcohol could numb the pain hidden inside—it allowed her to “suffer silently” with her inner demons, inadequacies, and fears. In the late 90’s, Lisa became pregnant with each of her two sons and followed the guidelines on alcohol consumption during pregnancy that were in a pamphlet given to her by a well-respected obstetrician. The pamphlet only focused on heavy drinking and was Lisa’s ticket to what she thought was “healthy” drinking during pregnancy. In recovery since 2001, Lisa’s personal journey took her through intensive outpatient programs, as well as an inpatient stint. As an advocate for recovery, Lisa personally understands the struggle towards a grounded recovery and is committed to making the road an easier path for others who seek it.

Lisa decided to go public with her recovery after New Jersey’s child welfare system (DYFS) unjustly terminated her parental rights to her two young sons. Beyond living with the disease of alcoholism, Lisa had done nothing to warrant losing her children. DYFS was discriminating against her simply because she was an alcoholic seeking treatment. In the court’s words, Lisa has the ability to “intellectually understand the nature and consequences of being an alcoholic, but has failed to overcome her affliction.” Thus, it was “unlikely that she [Lisa] will maintain sobriety in the future.” Even though she was sober at the time of the hearing, Lisa’s parental rights were terminated in 2002 and her children were taken away.

Lisa’s recovery advocacy led her to Friend of Addiction Recovery, the largest recovery organization in NJ, where she organized statewide recovery rallies and was co-chair of the Steering Committee. In 2005, Lisa attended the NOFAS Circle of Hope and Women’s Summit in Raleigh, NC, where she joined a fellowship of courageous women, as well as, a mission to prevent FASD and support those affected by this preventable condition.

Lisa has been published five times in the Congressional Record and was invited to testify orally to the House of Representatives Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources about her family’s unjust experience at the hands of DYFS. She has testified to the federally appointed New Jersey Child Welfare Reform Panel, and has provided input to the Pew Commission on children in Foster Care. Overall, Lisa has kept abreast of state and national issues affecting recovery and families.

Lisa recognized the lack of a voice for the vulnerable in our society, and decided to go back to school to obtain a law degree. She is now a practicing attorney licensed in New Jersey and New York. She has continued to volunteer in her community through board membership for mental health nonprofits; bringing 12-step meetings to the women in Bergen County Jail and The Ladder Project, a therapeutic Halfway House for men. Lisa is a graduate of Bergen LEADS and a co-chair of their alumni organization, President of the Father Jim McKenna Memorial Fund, and is currently working on bringing a statewide recovery rally to NJ in September of 2014.

Today, Lisa’s sons are 16 and 17 years old. They are still not permitted contact with Lisa. Although Lisa is thankful that neither of the two are diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, she recognizes that both are victims of her alcoholism, its stigma, and the associated discrimination. As of today, these two young men struggle without the love and support of a healthy Mom: a Mom who strives to live one day at a time with the twelve steps as her guide.

Lisa genuinely believes that recovery is attainable for each and every individual who is seeking it. She is committed to the vision of overcoming the stigma attached to all individuals afflicted by addiction. Furthermore, she believes in celebrating the positive aspects of recovery through increased visibility, support, and public knowledge. Society needs it and our children deserve nothing less.

To join the Circle of Hope or to request more information, please contact Kathy Mitchell at the National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome mitchell@nofas.org

1-(800)-66-NOFAS www.nofas.org
Did you know...

- Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) refer to the range of disorders that can occur when a woman consumes alcohol during pregnancy. The disorders can include physical effects, such as facial abnormalities and growth problems, as well as behavioral effects such as having trouble with learning, self-regulation, and communicating and socializing.
- Alcohol is the most harmful teratogen or drug for a developing baby. It is more dangerous than cigarettes, heroin, crack, or cocaine.
- There is no known safe amount of alcohol to drink during pregnancy.
- When a woman drinks during pregnancy, her unborn child consumes the same concentration of alcohol as the mother. FASD is preventable by abstaining from alcohol consumption during pregnancy.
- FASD is the leading preventable cause of developmental abnormalities and intellectual disability, and a leading known cause of learning disabilities. You can prevent FASD by abstaining from alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

In FASD News...

Pregnancy Tests in Bars to Prevent FASD

There is a new Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) prevention program on the rise in Alaska, which plans to install pregnancy test dispensers to 20 bar bathrooms in December of this year. This two-year program will offer complimentary pregnancy tests, which will be funded through a $400,000 project by the state of Alaska. It will allow women who enjoy consuming alcohol as a lifestyle choice to conveniently confirm whether or not they are pregnant.

The idea is not popular with everyone though. It has been called “absurd” and individuals have assumed that the goal is to corral and discipline drunk women. This opposition has reached social media, and the Twitter morality police stated “surely there are more appropriate places to take pregnancy tests [than bars].” A supporter of the project, Jody Allen Crowe, voiced that the goal is not to attract chronic alcoholics who will continue to drink regardless of receiving a message, but rather women with unexpected pregnancies. Furthermore, since the effects of prenatal alcohol exposure are dose-dependent, the earlier a pregnant woman ceases alcohol consumption, the healthier the baby will be. Interestingly enough, pregnant women who are most likely to drink are not the poor and uneducated, but rather white women of ages 35-44, with comfortable incomes and college degrees. Thus, as the debate continues, Crowe mentions that the real target isn’t chronic alcoholics, but teens facing unplanned pregnancies.

Overall, the Alaska project has attracted a great deal of media attention. Innovative ideas that get the media talking about FASD is a good thing... 

.... Just ask any of our moms from the Circle of Hope!

In NOFAS News...

Celebrating 25 Years of NOFAS

In 1990, NOFAS was established in South Dakota where its founder Patti Munter had seen first hand the tragic consequences of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome on the Pine Ridge reservation and among the Sioux tribes across the state. In the 25 years since thousands of advocates, friends, volunteers, staff, donors, and members of the NOFAS board of directors have joined efforts to help NOFAS strive to fulfill its goal to eliminate Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) and care for individuals and families living with FASD.

Throughout the past 25 years, NOFAS has made great success in pursuing its mission. In 1990, the first Medical School Curriculum was developed by NOFAS and offered at the University of New Mexico. Other medical and allied health programs across the U.S. adopted the NOFAS FASD curriculum and eventually served as the model in developing the Centers for Disease Control medical school curriculum pilot. To date has educated over 60,000 allied health and medical students and practitioners. In 2003, the first national Hope for Women in Recovery Summit was held, bringing together women in early recovery and treatment, addiction treatment professionals, and policy makers. Soon following those national Summits NOFAS established the Circle of Hope Birth Mother’s Network. In 2005, NOFAS Board member, Neal Beer, produced an award-winning episode of Law and Order: Special Victims Unit, which focused on FASD and brought media attention to the disability. Recently, in 2012, NOFAS helped promote and pass the American Bar Association’s FASD Resolution, which resolved to increase training and awareness of FASD and encourage academic and legal professionals to identify and respond to FASD among their professions. Furthermore, within the same year, the Wall Street Journal featured an article on NOFAS and brought media attention to our goals pertaining to FASD. Although only a few accomplishments are featured, NOFAS has achieved much more and hopes to continue its success in advocacy, policy, and media.

May your life be like a wildflower, growing freely in the beauty & joy of each day

Native American Proverb

You are not alone. If you are a woman who used substances while pregnant, or who has a child with FASD contact the COH. We will connect you to a Warrior Mom; a mentor who has been down a similar path.

Join other Warrior Moms on Facebook! To join our private FB site, email Kathy at mitchell@nofas.org

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