



**Blair Donkin**

11:30pm Jul 12

By our 15 year old for her school speech.

I have a sister. She's 10yrs old and in society's view she is the perfect child; Intelligent, articulate, musical, arty, social, friendly, generous and pretty.... But she has another side to her, one that only the people who know her are exposed to, and it's a side which she has absolutely no control over, no matter how hard she may try, and no matter how many times she is corrected, her brain is wired to tell her differently. She is impulsive, stubborn, easily distracted, she struggles to recognise the consequence of her behaviour or take responsibility for it, she battles to delay gratification and is unable to empathize with others. Living with my sister can be immensely frustrating and plain hard work. She has the potential to become a teen parent, to clash with the law and she may struggle to keep a job, all because her birth mother chose to drink alcohol while pregnant.

So what is this disability that has made itself right at home in my family and is 'dictating my sisters' actions? - it is FASD, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders. FASD is a name which covers a range of more specific disorders; all of them caused by women drinking while pregnant - it doesn't matter if it is spirits, wine or beer, it's all the same to an unborn baby. While my sister's mum was chucking down the alcohol, the toxin was flowing from her blood stream, through the placenta and into the fetus. Not only was my sister drinking the same amount of alcohol as her mother but instead of leaving her with a slight hangover, the alcohol set about destroying the neurons in her brain and hindering my sister from having the best start to life possible.

The UN states that a child has the right to grow up physically and spiritually in a healthy and normal way, but how can they do that if we drink alcohol during pregnancy? I've come to realize that our society doesn't understand the consequences of drinking alcohol while pregnant, we just live in the moment and we don't realize that a child has the potential to not only have neurological complications but they could also end up with physical, social and learning problems... from potentially one glass of alcohol. This alcohol isn't just going to affect the child but the whole community; family, friends, school, and maybe even the courts! Did you know that 60% of children with FASD in NZ land up in trouble with the law! 90% have another mental health problem such as depression and ADHD, 45% have trouble with drugs and alcohol and 50% end up involved in inappropriate sexual behaviour. These stats are so shockingly high because the connections within these children's brains are wired in such a way that they don't see the consequence of their behaviour and so they can easily succumb to peer pressure just so they feel like they can fit into society.

But it needn't be this way. Living with a sister who has FASD hammers home that this is a lifelong disability - it can't be cured. But FASD is completely preventable, there is one simple solution - don't drink alcohol while pregnant. This isn't just about the impact FASD has on my sister and her future, but we are the ones creating and raising the future generation, we are the ones that have a choice, the choice to heed the rights of a child and to make their best interest our priority. We have the power to change a nation. Remember : what we drink our unborn child drinks too."