

DORPS KOERANT
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<http://dorpskoerant.co.za/2017/09/08/fasd-international-foetal-alcohol-spectrum-disorder-day/>



FASD International Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Day

To commemorate International Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Day, the Western Cape Minister of Social Development embarked on a youth development outreach in the Eden region. International FASD Day is held every year on the 9th September. The youth outreaches reached over 200 young people, and took place in Brandwacht (Mossel Bay) and in Pacaltsdorp (George).

The visits formed part of our ongoing stakeholder engagement efforts with rural youth to address issues of poverty, unemployment, substance abuse, and to drive a strong anti-FASD initiative.

FASD refers to the disorders that develop in an unborn baby if the mother consumes alcohol during the pregnancy. The alcohol consumed is absorbed into the blood stream, and is poisonous to the foetus, affecting its organs. Babies are usually born with physical and mental disabilities, which severely affect their life chances.

These engagements will see the development of targeted youth development programmes, such as those already launched in De Doorns with NGO partner FasFACTS, and recently on the West Coast (Vredendal) in partnership with the Landbou Gemeenskap Ontwikkeling. The programme employs young people and trains them as community workers to tackle substance abuse and FASD.

The prevalence of FAS in the province hampers the objective of improving education outcomes and the health of citizens in the province.

According to research conducted by our funded NGO partner the Foundation for Alcohol Related Research (FARR), South Africa has the highest incidences of FASD in the world. Some 6 million people in South Africa are irrevocably affected by having been exposed to alcohol in the womb. The

Western Cape is particularly affected by the most serious form of FASD, namely Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS).

A 2016 study funded by DSD indicated that the prevalence of FASD in the West Coast was 64 children per 1000 affected (6,42%). This can be compared to the findings in the other recent studies conducted in Kimberley (60/1000) and the Witzenberg area (96/1000). However the prevalence rate of 122/1000 found in De Aar, still makes it the highest reported FASD rate worldwide.

We need to tackle this problem if we wish to break the cycle of poverty in many of our communities.

In total, DSD has allocated R96.3-million to the fight against substance abuse, which funds 36 organizations working over 51 sites. Of this, R2.7-million is allocated to fund 3 specialist FASD organizations, the Foundation for Alcohol Related Research (FARR), FasFacts, and Early Years. These organizations are working with approximately 6000 people to help reduce and prevent the harm caused by FAS.

Each of these NGOs assists the department in various ways;

- The **FARR** conducts prevalence studies on FASD and implements a Healthy Mother Healthy Baby program on the West Coast and Beaufort West. This identifies high risk pregnant women before 20 weeks of pregnancy to assess health status, and evaluates babies born to these mothers at 9 months of age for FASD and other health problems.
- **Early Years** provides training and substance abuse awareness to ECD Practitioners, home based carers, and parents on how to handle children with FASD in ECD centres.
- **FAS FACTS** conducts the Baby on Board program in the Cape Winelands and surrounding areas. Their services include training to communities on identification of FASD and support services to individuals and families.

These are just some of the many initiatives and programmes being offered by DSD in partnership with other provincial departments, NGOs, and individuals.

However the success of our interventions depends on communities and individuals working with us. Most importantly, we call on pregnant women to take responsibility for their unborn babies and to not drink alcohol. We will only be able to tackle FASD properly, if we continue to work "Better Together".