

Partnership trains youth to fight foetal alcohol disorder

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The provincial department of Social Development has launched a new youth development initiative using the Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP) to boost the fight against Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) in the West Coast area. The department has partnered with the Landbou Gemeenskap Ontwikkeling (LGO), and provided funding for 15 EPWP posts.

The 15 young people trained will be deployed as community workers into the farming communities on the West Coast. They'll run public education, school holiday programmes, leadership development, anti-teenage substance abuse and anti-FASD programmes, including linking pregnant mothers, who may be drinking, to health and counselling services.

A recent study found the prevalence of FASD in the West Coast at 64 children per 1000 affected. The West Coast prevalence rate can be compared to the findings in the most recent studies conducted in Kimberley (60/1000) and the Witzenberg area (96/1000).

The prevalence rate of 122/1000 found in De Aar, makes it the highest reported FASD rate worldwide. FASD is preventable. Prevention is essential as FASD is incurable. The partnership will see the department's local offices in the region work closely with the LGO to provide social work resources, such as child protection and early childhood development services.

LGO head manager Johan van de Hoven said the initiative greatly expands the organisation's impact and reach. "FASD poses a major challenge to the development of children and, later, adults. I am proud of the partnership with the department, as it brings social services closer to communities," he said.

Social Development MEC Albert Fritz said the department would continue the fight against FASD and all other forms of substance abuse. Foundation for Alcohol Related Research (Farr) chief executive Leana Olivier said: "One of the challenges with FASD is that there is a lot of stigma involving women with kids with FASD.

"There is a lot of blaming the mom. They don't look at the responsibility of the community to support women. We need to raise awareness in the entire community."