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<http://www.theherald.com.au/story/4907688/call-to-fight-foetal-alcohol-disorders/>

Call to combat foetal alcohol spectrum disorders

PREGNANT PAUSE: Drinking alcohol during pregnancy causes a lifelong sentence for children born with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders.

WHEN new foster carers Sally and Mark Jones* were told there was a baby boy who needed a home, they saw it as their calling.

The Hunter-based couple already had three biological children, but felt they could offer more.

They had no idea their newborn foster son would eventually be diagnosed with foetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD), a range of incurable, but preventable conditions, caused by exposure to alcohol in the womb.

Mrs Jones said the consequences for her son were devastating.

He was diagnosed with FASD when he was four years old – brain damage that will lead to lifelong learning difficulties, causing risky and aggressive behaviour over which he has limited control.

“Every day is a battle for him,” Mrs Jones said.

“It’s an internal struggle to understand what is going on, how to regulate and how to cope.”

September 9 in International FASD Awareness Day and Mrs Jones agreed to speak publicly in the hope of raising awareness and understanding, and to prevent women drinking during pregnancy.

"The saddest part about the whole thing is that it is completely preventable," she said.

"Experts don't know what is a safe level to drink during pregnancy, so please don't drink at all."

Lyn Russell, an assistant principal learning and support officer with the NSW Department of Education, said too often FASD children "fall through the cracks".

Ms Russell said FASD children were often misdiagnosed.

"A lot of doctors won't diagnose FASD because you have to get parents to state they were drinking alcohol during pregnancy," she said.

"The other issue with FASD kids is they don't get funding for additional support, it requires a whole lot of other diagnosis just to get the funding."

Hunter New England Health drug and alcohol service area director Dr Adrian Dunlop said the incidence of FASD was linked to Australia's binge-drinking culture.

He said in many cases women were unaware they were pregnant and drank through the first few months of pregnancy.