

FARR's Adolescent Support Programme
Christel Botes



"Life is a matter of choices, and every choice you make, makes you." ~ John C. Maxwell

The Foundation for Alcohol Related Research (FARR) is dedicated to building positive futures in South African communities by significantly reducing birth defects caused by alcohol consumption during pregnancy. The focus of our major activities is on Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD).

At our various project sites, the organisation's impactful community-based interventions and awareness initiatives focussing on alcohol harm reduction have made FARR a household name in the area.

While doing FASD research and awareness in the Prince Albert, Leeu Gamka, Merweville, and Klaarstroom communities, FARR realised that the adolescents need more guidance and support to enable them to face the challenges of the adult world. We thus decided to develop and implement a needs-based Adolescent Support Programme focussing on the age group 12-18 years. The objective is to teach life skills and equip the young people to make better informed decisions. The overall aim is to encourage young people to apply what they've learned to decrease teenage pregnancy and reduce birth defects due to alcohol consumption during pregnancy. The project is sponsored by *Aware.org*.

Our topic for the September Adolescent Support Programme was "Teenage pregnancies, the reality of so many young South Africans".

During adolescence and puberty, one undergoes many changes including physical, psychological, and emotional changes. A normal part of becoming an adolescent and undergoing puberty is the desire to explore sexual feelings. It is, however, essential for adolescents to realise that all decisions have consequences, and thus it is vital to discuss these, to know yourself, your core values, and your options in making important, potentially life-changing decisions. Topics discussed with the adolescents include:

- Am I going to have sex, before being in a committed relationship or marriage, or not? And why?
- What are my options?
- What is safe sex?
- What is sexual exploitation?
- How many sexual partners am I going to have during my life? What are the implications?
- What is a STI (sexually transmitted infection)?
- What do I know about family planning?
- Am I and my sexual partner ready to become parents? What does it mean to be a responsible parent?
- If I fall pregnant what are my choices? Implications such as illegal, unsafe abortions, depression and the risk of suicide are also discussed.

The Adolescent Support Programme includes information sessions with interactive learning, roleplays, games, and other "edutainment" activities.

Should you want to join or obtain more information, please contact the Project Coordinator Christel Botes at 072 483 4336

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Johan Mulder
Petrus Bostander
Tel: 023 5411 985
Cell: 067 0218 850
082 4497 692


