

Alcohol Babies Anonymous
St. Catharines, ON
May 2008- April 2009 Annual Report

Alcohol Babies Anonymous gained charitable status on May 1st, 2008, after being incorporated federally early the same year (February 6th). The organization's first year of operation was a busy and productive one.

Our first organizational project was the design and production of a maternity T-shirt encouraging alcohol-free pregnancy. Fifty shirts were ordered from a company named "Print by Nite", Ontario Street, St. Catharines, in the spring of 2008. Posters advertising the availability of the shirts at no cost to the recipient were provided to Niagara Region Public Health, the Maternity Centre of Hamilton, the Healthy Babies Initiative, and Hannah House pregnancy home. Women who emailed us stating their intention not to drink during pregnancy had a shirt delivered to them at the agency where they saw the promotion. Distribution began in the summer of 2008, and by our organization's first anniversary in May of 2009, over forty of the shirts had been given away. We will likely be ordering another fifty shirts in the upcoming budget year.

Our next project was the construction of a website, www.alcoholbabies.com. The website is now in full operation, although several additions and modifications will be made in the upcoming year. Reactions to the site have been very positive.

In January 2009, we sponsored a mini-conference for public education purposes. A meeting room was obtained at no cost at the St. Catharines Super Store. Nancy Hall, FASD services coordinator for the City of Hamilton, agreed to come, charging us only for her transportation. The event was promoted largely through electronic means to parent support groups, children services agencies, and places of worship, among other venues. Titled "FASD: Strategies, Not Solutions", the Saturday morning session attracted over 35 participants, including some affected persons as well as their siblings and other family members.

The last initiative undertaken during our first year of operation was a physician education campaign. Members of our support group distributed well over a hundred packets of information about FASD to area M.D.'s, nurse practitioners, and other medical professionals, encouraging them to enrol in a federally-sponsored on-line course on how to counsel pregnant women about their use of alcohol. The Family Counselling Centre, an arm of Niagara's child protection services, also distributed our materials. We offered a chance at custom artwork to participants. Local radio was not willing to feature this effort, and despite reminder visits and personal appeals, absolutely NO response to this effort was obtained from the medical community. Physicians may have taken the course without entering their names in the draw, or may take it some time in the future, of course. Also, the materials distributed may eventually be instrumental for educational purposes, but the lack of response to the project as such was disappointing.

In addition to the specific activities detailed above, a support group for FASD-affected families was held monthly at the sixth floor conference room of the Niagara Health System's Ontario Street site. This room was obtained at no cost in the fall of 2008, and provides a centrally located and comfortable meeting place for the dozen or less attendees who regularly attend to seek and provide support others in the challenges of dealing with prenatal alcohol exposure. The Niagara Health System is to be commended for furnishing the room.

ABA has also joined the Niagara Task force on FASD, a regional effort. Members of our board have attended a number of meetings with this group and hope to continue with it.