

time he had had a powerful pistol stored in the attic above his closet and enough ammunition to blow away the whole neighbourhood . . . By the end of December (1990) my health was not doing well at all, the stress was just so unbearable . . . Finally, on January 15 (1991), when he had threatened three times to kill Dennis and acted as if he would, I called the police and they finally responded.”²⁹

Mrs. Joiner and her husband endured years of enormous stress, and confusion about why their adopted son behaved the way he did, because he was not correctly diagnosed until quite recently. Special education was not available through the school system, counselling and other expenses were extremely high, and the overall strain put their marriage in jeopardy. Ethan, however, is now living in foster home in a small community and “doing much, much better.”³⁰

After a local newspaper ran a story on Ethan, Mrs. Joiner made contact with other families in a similar situation and a support group has been formed:

“This support group offers us an opportunity to exchange information, for instance which doctors to avoid, which ones may be sensitive to and informed about foetal alcohol syndrome, and which social worker might listen. It gives an opportunity to share frustrations and support each other in crisis. Most of these families are just hanging on by their fingernails.”³¹

Mrs. Carberry, who is from Whitehorse, gave testimony which had many themes in common with Mrs. Joiner’s. For parents, extreme fatigue is a constant fact, and the strains on a marriage are very great. The need for continuing support at all levels is very important. Mrs. Carberry is a member of the Alcohol-Related Birth Defects Committee of her local Association for Community Living. The committee has compiled a kit which is sent to every pregnant woman in the Yukon. The kit has information on a healthy pregnancy, including the effects of drinking on the foetus. Funding for this program initially came from a grant from Health and Welfare Canada, but that funding has now been discontinued.³²

Foetal alcohol syndrome and foetal alcohol effects are major problems in the Yukon, particularly among aboriginal peoples. The Yukon government has prepared an action plan on FAS and FAE and also requires warning labels on containers of beverage alcohol, the only jurisdiction in Canada to do so.

Some of Mrs. Carberry’s comments are quoted below:

“ . . . my first point is that the impacts on an individual . . . are really multi-dimensional. They are . . . the foetal alcohol effects, the birth defects, the mental disabilities in some cases, many, many physical problems . . . The second (point) that I think we cannot overstate is what happens when children are separated from their families . . . there’s separation from their culture if they’re native children . . . there are the effects of abuse and neglect. For my children, all of those things are apparent. It’s not just the foetal alcohol effects that are creating problems for them. It’s the separation from their family, it’s the poor foster care that they got, the impacts of sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect and everything else.

“ . . . the demands on care-givers — whether they’re birth families, foster families, extended families, adoptive — are enormous.

²⁹ Proceedings, Issue 12, pp. 4, 9, 12, 13.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

³² Proceedings, Issue 12, p. 26.