

# kids these days...

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North Central Alberta Child & Family Services Authority

## THE MILLION DOLLAR QUESTION

The question of how much money is required to raise a child with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) was brought up recently in a fascinating series done by CBC Radio. According to their analysis, the cost averages out at \$1 million per child.

While listening to their interviews, several questions came immediately to my mind. For example, how much do we really know about this condition? Why is it still an issue when we hear so many warnings about it? Why are such high numbers being reported? Have we become better at diagnosis? Or are there just more women drinking during pregnancy? Then, why do some women still drink when pregnant anyway? Unfortunately, neither the interviewer nor I had any easy answers to those questions.

The million dollar figure quoted by the radio host may seem astronomical; however the care and the supports that become available to these kids are essential. That money pays for family supports such as various early intervention services, Clinical Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Pathologists, psychologists, behavioural consultants, respite and physiotherapy – these are all tools that help children with FASD grow up to live meaningful lives and be as successful as possible.

On the other hand, what if such supports are not provided or not provided in a timely manner? Well, we would probably still pay that million dollar bill, but the money could be spent through the health or justice systems ..... or maybe the child falls through the cracks and we save the money but not the child! So really, as a society, we have a “pay now or pay later” scenario.

The question then comes down to value versus values. Simply put, if

given the choice, do we choose to save the money or save a child? After all, the disability is not the child's fault, and is not something that just goes away with time. Fortunately, in our social system, we have a tradition that when children need help it is given.

Recently I heard an amazing story from a young man with FASD who outlined some of his personal struggles with heart-wrenching details. It was painful to hear his story, but like in a good movie there was a happy ending. Over the years, with personal commitment and strong support, he had learned to cope effectively with his situation and become both independent and successful.

That young man's message ended with hope, and caused me to realize how important it is to see that same hope extended to children, youth and families struggling with FASD.

Kids these days deserve to begin life with promise and potential. So we need to keep emphasizing the message of FASD prevention, while also removing any stigma that is associated with the disease. And it's certainly about a lot more than a million dollars!

Find out how you can help prevent FASD and community resources available for those affected by visiting [www.fasd-cmc.alberta.ca](http://www.fasd-cmc.alberta.ca).

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Any feedback or comments are welcome and can be sent via email to [david.rideout@gov.ab.ca](mailto:david.rideout@gov.ab.ca)