

Dear SPLA reps

I am a paediatrician working in the area of FASD, both clinically and research.

I was invited to help build capacity for FASD by the Anyinginyi Health Service of Tennant Creek last year and travelled there to provide teaching and meet with community over a few days.

In the brief time working with the brilliant and dedicated health care providers and educators of Tennant Creek and also from speaking with families, I was deeply moved and saddened by the evident need for more services to support and enable health, diagnosis and therapy for developmental needs including specifically meeting the requirements of FASD. Professionals outside of health told me how they were providing basic health services to facilitate wellbeing and education attendance as no other capacity was available to meet these needs. They spoke of the evident cognitive difficulties manifest in the children and their concern with how few amenities they had to meet their diverse needs.

Families who met with me spoke of their lived trauma, their difficulty with accessing prenatal care, and many other reasons for prenatal alcohol exposure and ongoing psychosocial difficulties.

The multitude of social, environmental and material deficits and factors preventing children from attending school and having a normal capacity to learn is not helped or addressed by financially punishing these same families when their children do not attend school; indeed you are very aware that the disadvantage is often intergenerational.

Perhaps our failure as a society to preserve the cultural integrity and support health, education and material needs for the parents is one of the many reasons contributing to children not making it to school.

The level of need and specific services for FASD in the Northern Territory are as real as those now measured in the Fitzroy Valley, Western Australia, a project that has been lauded at the United Nations and for which FACSIA granted an initial considerable sum of money to allow the prevalence study to proceed. There are more than 100 children in the Northern Territory waiting for their care and their hope for their FASD as the hope is now growing in the Kimberley. There are children across this land of all ages and ethnicity waiting for specific FASD diagnostic and therapeutic services.

A recent report referenced by ABC Radio National Law Report, lists the problem of incarcerated individuals with cognitive disability. We are negligent if we do not meet the specific diagnostic and therapeutic needs of children with a FASD in any part of Australia, as many of these children and youth will become one of the statistics of incarcerated youth and adults, with cognitive impairment, facing a lack of equity before the Law.

I encourage you to visit the Northern Territory and really ask them how they are desperate for care for FASD and all developmental and educational and health needs. You may not go because they have not sent you enough submissions? Have you ever thought that perhaps they are so busy meeting needs both within and beyond their own job descriptions that the very professionals who you need to speak with, simply don't have the space or energy to petition for you to come. You have funding and the professional remit as our government to travel and talk with us and ask us what we think.

Please go and meet with my colleagues in NT. I look forward to meeting you in Perth.

sincerely

Raewyn Mutch

MBChB, DipRACOG, FRACP, PhD
Paediatrician
Alcohol and Pregnancy Research
Telethon Institute for Child Health Research.