

PRESS RELEASE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MOFAS Provides Pre-Adoptive FASD Education to Prepare Adoptive Families for the Unexpected

April 27, 2010; St. Paul, MN: There are risks when adopting, as with any childrearing. Knowing what to expect and being prepared, helps not only the parents but the child be successful and reach their best potential.

MOFAS Offers Pre-Adoption Education

It was over 10 years ago that Christine and Tim Davis welcomed a tiny Russian orphan girl into their lives. They were excited like any other new parents. But as early as pre-school, they started to notice some behaviors that didn't seem right. So they took their daughter to a clinic in Duluth, where she was diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). "We had no idea," said Christine. "Nothing was ever said when we were adopting Grace."

Adoptive families like the Davis' come into adoption with good intentions and expectations. While important, good intentions must be accompanied by knowledge and understanding of the potential challenges that can lie ahead. For the past four years, the Minnesota Organization on Fetal Alcohol (MOFAS) has worked collaboratively with adoption and social service agencies like Children's Home Society & Family Services (CHSFS), Lutheran Social Services, Hope Adoption and MN Adopt/Adoption Support Network, to provide pre-adoption education to adoption professionals and families considering domestic and international adoptions. MOFAS staff and volunteers provide training on what Fetal Alcohol Spectrums Disorders is, what to look for, and how to get support and services if necessary in hopes of avoiding situations like these.

"Education before adoption is imperative," says Marilyn Gebauer, a Domestic Adoption Social Worker with CHSFS. "It is not a deterrent for adoption, but rather prepares the prospective adoptive parents for the possible emotional and behavioral problems encountered in some adopted children." She says, "All too often people believe they will adopt the perfect child. Many times that is true. But when it's not, we need to provide them with as much information as possible, as many coping skills as possible, and help them have realistic expectations of what a balanced and healthy family life will look like."

The fact is, prenatal alcohol exposure is common. In MN alone, it is estimated that 8,500 babies are born each year with brain damage caused by prenatal alcohol exposure. Children who have experienced foster care have higher rates of FASD. This may contribute to the findings of a recent study that reported more than half of children adopted from Eastern European countries were affected by FASD.

FASD Diagnosis in MN

With Minnesota ranking among the highest in numbers of families adopting children internationally, diagnostic clinics around the state have seen an increase in families seeking an FASD diagnosis. Many of these children suffer from early childhood trauma, malnutrition, abandonment as well as prenatal alcohol exposure. "Getting a thorough and appropriate evaluation can be a lifeline for these struggling families," says Dana Johnson, Professor of Pediatrics with the International Adoption Medicine Program at the University of MN. "For many of these families and children with challenging educational and behavioral issues secondary due to prenatal alcohol exposure, getting a diagnosis is the first step in helping them put these behaviors and learning challenges into context and getting the services and supports they need to help their child reach their full potential."

Families in Minnesota are fortunate to have accessible, consistent and accurate diagnostic services available at ten health care organizations around the state. For a complete listing, go to www.mofas.org/resourcedirectory or call MOFAS at 1-866-90-MOFAS for more information. MOFAS has also worked to develop a team of clinicians from those ten diagnostic centers who formed a Clinical Diagnostic Consortium, recognized nationally as a model state-of-the-art clinical approach.

Ongoing Family Support

Parenting can be difficult in the best of circumstances, but parenting a high-needs child can sometimes be overwhelming. The Larson family understands this all too well. They landed in the U.S. with their two children from Russia on Thanksgiving Day, 2003. Almost immediately they were confronted with behavioral challenges that led to an FASD diagnosis for both their children. They connected with the Minnesota Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome shortly afterwards and began learning about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders through the Family Seminar Series. "This was a life saver to hear that we were not alone," says Jodi Larson. "We learned so much about FASD; how it affects behavior and the physical body, the best referrals for therapy, how to advocate for our children and how to access systems like the schools and the government. It has been an unbelievable journey, from the depth of despair to the height of joy," continues Jodi, "FASD is a major part of our lives."

MOFAS continues to provide ongoing support for families like the Davis' and Larson's who have been affected by FASD. Through Family Retreats, the Hand in Hand Series, which is offered both in-person and online, and the new Virtual Family Center on the MOFAS website at www.mofas.org, families can interact, connect and share their experiences with other families who understand what they are going through. Through message boards, blogs, webinars and weekly chats, parents raising children with FASD can find useful information and resources that will help them not feel so alone, and provide ongoing support to ensure that they not only survive, but thrive.

MOFAS was founded in 1998 by former First Lady, Susan Carlson, and is the only statewide source for training, information, resources and support on Fetal Alcohol

Spectrum Disorders. The mission of MOFAS is to eliminate disability caused by alcohol consumption during pregnancy and to improve the life for those living with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders throughout Minnesota. For more information contact MOFAS at 651-917-2370 or toll-free 1-866-90-MOFAS; 1885 University Avenue, Suite 395, St. Paul, MN 55104; www.mofas.org.

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