

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – 9 September 2025



Manchester-based actors, national and local experts gathered to raise awareness on International FASD Day of the risks of alcohol and pregnancy and the need for diagnosis and support for people with FASD

(Manchester) – Several well-known Manchester-based actors took to Exchange Square to help raise the profile of the need for better support for those with FASD, an overlooked neurodevelopmental condition that is caused by alcohol-exposed pregnancy. In Greater Manchester alone 1,400 18-year olds are entering adulthood without diagnosis and support. The actors, who said that they hadn't known enough about this issue, met with people with FASD, their families and national experts from the Greater Manchester FASD Network and The National Organisation for FASD. The event sponsors seek to highlight the gap in local commissioning for FASD diagnosis and support, as well as the continued need for funding for FASD services across all localities, given statistics that show more than 40% of UK pregnancies are alcohol-exposed and an FASD prevalence rate of 2-4% of the population according to a gold-standard study done in Salford. (More text below)



Manchester based actors and friends lend their support in Exchange Square to raise awareness of FASD on International FASD day



Fintan Buckard (Phoenix Rise) and Cory McClane (Waterloo Road) giving out postcards about FASD and cupcakes to members of the public



Lauren Patel (Wallace and Grommet) and Ollie Rhodes (Waterloo Road) talk about FASD in schools with Joanna Buckard, National FASD



Lauren Patel (Wallace and Gromit) and Ollie Rhodes (Waterloo Road) meet Andy Jackson (an adult with FASD).



Cory McClane (Waterloo Road) and Liam Scholes (Waterloo Road) meet with young adults with FASD (Rachel Jackson, Georgia Roberts and Rossi Griffin).



Cory McClane and Liam Scholes talk to Georgia Roberts (Young adult with FASD) and David Gilbert (University of Salford)



Zak Sutcliffe (Waterloo Road) poses with Andy Jackson (adult with FASD)

Katie Liddle who coordinates the Network said, "We have been increasing awareness across the localities but the more we talk with people with FASD, their families and professionals, the more we hear about the importance of meeting the needs of this overlooked

population.” Susan McGrail from FASD Greater Manchester said, “Families living with FASD across Greater Manchester urgently need better understanding and support.”

People with FASD emphasise how important it is that they have diagnosis and support as they enter adulthood. Georgia Roberts, a young adult with FASD says, “When people turn 18 everyone’s expectations change. Without a diagnosis it can seem even more complicated. Absolutely everyone needs to understand how FASD affects adults, so people with FASD might be correctly identified. Then the right informed support can be given that will allow the thousands of people who have FASD in Greater Manchester to learn successfully self advocate.”

TV Actors add their voices to raise awareness



Olly Rhodes (Waterloo Road, The Last Kingdom, All Creatures Great and Small) said “I didn’t realise at first that FASD was so common, I don’t actually think I had heard of it properly before becoming involved with this event and the charity, but it’s such an important issue to tackle and I look forward to continuing the conversation on and raising awareness surrounding the risks of alcohol consumption whilst pregnant.”

Zak Sutcliffe (Waterloo Road, Hollyoaks, The Last Kingdom, Seven Kings Must Die) said, “I’ve only heard very minimal information about FASD in the past, I’m thankful to the charity for letting me support as I learn.”

Fintan Buckard (Phoenix Rise, Coronation Street) says, “I’ve actually grown up knowing about FASD, of course because my mum works in the field. So when I end up telling my friends about the condition it’s always the first they’ve ever heard of it. The lack of knowledge around this condition is poor and the topic was barely skimmed over in school, as brief as ‘heavily drinking alcohol during pregnancy can give birth defects’ which is outdated! So I’m very happy to be at this event and spread awareness about the risks of alcohol and pregnancy and FASD.”

Cory McClane (Waterloo Road, Hollyoaks), said I’m honoured to be backing a cause that shines a light on the impact alcohol can have during pregnancy. It’s shocking how little awareness there is around FASD, despite how common it is. This event is a great opportunity to connect with the community, hear personal stories, and support the incredible work the charity is doing to educate and inform

Lauren Patel (Wallace and Gromit, Everyone’s Talking About Jamie, Waterloo Road) “I had no idea FASD was so common. I’m grateful to be invited to attend and support the charity in their important work.”

Liam Scholes (Waterloo Road, Coronation Street)

National FASD’s Chief Executive Sandra Butcher said, “We are so honoured these actors have joined us to highlight the need for more information and support about FASD. It’s a sign that times are changing when those in the spotlight are willing to shed light on the needs of people who are too often overlooked and in the shadows in our society. Greater Manchester has led nationally on FASD prevention and response, but even here and especially in the current financial climate, leaders need to understand how spending money now on FASD prevention and support will save them money in the long run.”

Susan McGrail from FASD Greater Manchester also said, “At present, there are no clear FASD pathways, leaving parents and carers to navigate diagnosis and care alone. FASD is a lifelong condition, yet families face delays in recognition, limited services, and a lack of joined-up care. With the right early help, education, health, and social care support, children and young people with FASD can thrive — but without it, families are pushed into crisis. Greater Manchester now has the opportunity to build on important foundations already laid around alcohol exposed pregnancies and initiatives like Drymester, creating FASD pathways and ensuring that no family feels isolated or left behind.”

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Media note: As an organisation we have been inspired and encouraged by the GM-based family of former Race Across The World Star Sam Gardiner, who in the wake of his tragic death in Stockport last summer have led a national effort to encourage people to contribute a Just Giving fund for National FASD in his honour. That fund is nearly £35,000 with Gift Aid. <https://www.justgiving.com/page/sam-gardiner> Please also note that the Greater Manchester FASD Network is funded by the NHS Greater Manchester Integrated Care System and run by the National Organisation for FASD in cooperation with a local steering committee that includes FASD Greater Manchester.



Background information



What is FASD?

"FASD results when prenatal alcohol exposure affects the developing brain and body. FASD is a spectrum. Each person with FASD is affected differently. While more than 400 conditions can co-occur, FASD is at its core a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition. All people with FASD have many strengths. Early diagnosis and appropriate support are essential, especially for executive functioning." (Source: FASD: Preferred UK Language Guide, Seashell Trust/National FASD, 2020)

How many people have FASD?

A recent gold-standard study by the University of Salford showed that 2-4% have FASD. That's a higher rate than autism. Most people with FASD are unrecognised, undiagnosed or misdiagnosed.

How is FASD diagnosed?

The SIGN 156 guideline is the guidance now across Scotland, England and Wales. It says that to have a diagnosis you need to have "Pervasive and long-standing brain dysfunction, which is defined by severe impairment...in three or more of the following neurodevelopmental areas of assessment": motor skills; cognition; memory; neuroanatomy/ neurophysiology; academic achievement; language; attention; executive function, including impulse control and hyperactivity; affect regulation; or adaptive behaviour, social skills or social communication.

Alcohol in pregnancy in the UK

Over 40% of women in the UK use alcohol during pregnancy, making the UK the 4th highest rate of alcohol exposed pregnancies in the world.

What is the NICE Quality Standard?

NICE Quality Standard 204 (2022) identifies areas for improving quality of care regarding: advice on avoiding alcohol in pregnancy; prenatal alcohol exposure; referral for assessment; neurodevelopmental assessment; and management plan. Unlike guidance, local areas in England and Wales have to 'have regard' for Quality Standards and report on progress in improving care.

What is FASD awareness month?

The 9th day of the 9th month is International FASD Day. This is to draw attention to the importance of going alcohol-free for the 9 months of pregnancy. In the UK we celebrate September FASD Awareness Month. This year for awareness month, National FASD is releasing a new report "Not Commissioned: Systemic Confusion in the NHS about alcohol, pregnancy and FASD." That report can be found here (it will be live on 9/9). <https://nationalfasd.org.uk/not-commissioned-report/>

Key official quotes

“There is no known safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy. NICE, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Quality Standard 204 (2022).

“Drinking any alcohol can cause difficulties in pregnancy and can result in Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), causing lifelong disabilities for children. There is no safe time or safe amount of alcohol to drink during pregnancy.” Public Health England, “Maternity high impact area: Reducing the incidence of harms caused by alcohol in pregnancy” (2020)

“There is no known safe level of alcohol consumption in pregnancy. Even low to moderate levels of PAE [prenatal alcohol exposure] can negatively impact a fetus and these adverse consequences can persist into adulthood.” SIGN 156, “Children and Young People Prenatally Exposed to Alcohol” (2019)

“The government recognises the importance of FASD.” Department of Health and Social Care, “FASD Health Needs Assessment for England” (2021)

“There is no ‘mild’ FASD.” “FASD Health Needs Assessment for England” (2021)

“Prenatal alcohol exposure should be actively considered as a possible underlying cause for neurodevelopmental delay.” SIGN 156, “Children and Young People Prenatally Exposed to Alcohol” (2019)

“The needs identified for this population group focus on: a lack of robust prevalence estimates in England; the importance of multi-sector working to support individuals through the life course; better training and awareness for health professionals; better organisation of services to improve accessibility; a need to develop innovative approaches to support those living with the condition.” “FASD Health Needs Assessment for England” (2021)

“[W. Sussex] appears to be gatekeeping access to its services ... The council has a duty to ensure there is sufficient educational provision available in its area to meet demand. The lack of suitable placements for the boy in the council’s SEN schools suggests it is not meeting this duty.” Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman ruling (2021) that a local area couldn’t exclude someone with FASD from services for those with ‘autism and learning disability.’

“No specific public health messaging on fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) has been undertaken in the last five years.” Maggie Throup, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Health and Social Care, Hansard, 21 Sept 2021 (Note this coincides with the 2016 release of the CMOs’ guidance)

“If you are pregnant or think you could become pregnant, the safest approach is not to drink alcohol at all, to keep risks to your baby to a minimum.” Chief Medical Officers guidance (2016)

“The Government take alcohol concerns, across the board, very seriously and even more so when they relate to pregnancy. We are making progress—I hope—to prevent future FASD cases, and trying to change the landscape on prevention and treatment for those affected. But there is not an ounce of complacency in us—there certainly is not in me. We will continue to work towards improvements in the area.” Steve Brine, then Health Minister, Hansard, 17 Jan 2019

Kind regards,

Joanna Buckard

Director of Innovation

I typically work Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday

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