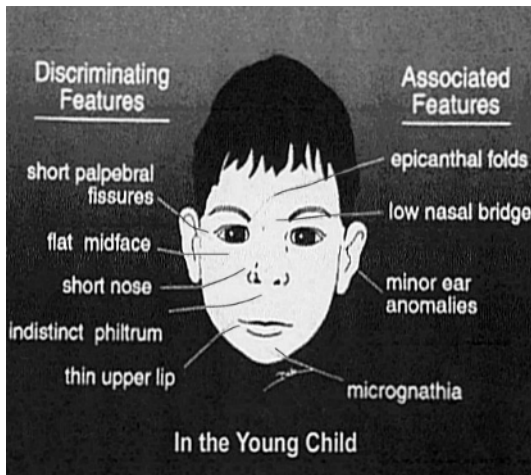


**Building Bridges with Understanding:  
The acquisition of Practitioner Knowledge in relation to  
the management of support of children with Foetal  
Alcohol Syndrome and related disorders**

*Collaborative project with Sunfield and Worcestershire County  
Council Early Years Service*



Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) is an umbrella term describing the range of birth defects that can occur in an individual whose mother drinks alcohol during pregnancy. Foetal alcohol exposure is the leading known cause of intellectual disability in the Western world (Abel & Sokol 1987). More than 6000 children born each year in the UK with FASD which means 1 in 100 children born are affected.

Teaching and supporting children with FASD may require innovative approaches based on neurobehavioural strategies. This approach would allow for the development of pedagogies which address the functional and cognitive complexities rooted in, and emanating from, the central nervous system damage.

Based on the figures published in 2002, we know there are approximately 6000 children with FASD who have now reached school age. Given that 'infancy may represent the greatest opportunity in a child's life to prevent adverse mental health outcomes' (Speiker 2007) it is imperative we ensure our Early Years Practitioners have the knowledge base and skills required to support these children at their point of learning need. Resources to achieve this aim are currently unavailable.

The aim of this project is to enhance practitioner knowledge and understanding of the issues pertaining to FASD and its implications for the child as a life long

learner. It does not aim to equip practitioners diagnostically, but rather to give them a repertoire of early interventions to use when working with children they think may be affected by FASD. Working in collaboration with Worcestershire County Council, resources will be developed through consultation with Early Years Practitioners, trialled, refined and disseminated to support future training and professional development. It is anticipated that at its conclusion the project will leave in place a nationwide training resource for Early Years Practitioners and a platform for developing support groups for both professionals and parents.

Phase I of this project will involve the preparation of Information Briefing Sheets giving details of FASD and the impact on the child's life long journey. These Briefing Sheets will aim to support practitioner professional development and will be prepared in consultation with a focus group.

Phase II will involve the recruitment to the project of a Research Assistant whose remit will be to develop resources to support Early Years Practitioners. These resources will be prepared in consultation with practitioners and then trialled in a range of settings.

Phase III will involve the production of finalised, evidence-based, resources and prepare for wider dissemination.

## References

Abel, E. L. and Sokol, R. J. (1987). Incidence of fetal alcohol syndrome and economic impact of FAS-related anomalies. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 19, 51-70.

Speiker, S. (2007). Improving the mental health of infants in foster care. *CHDD Outlook*, 18, 4.