

# Local Family Warns of Dangers of Drinking While Pregnant

## Adopted son, Kevin Teichen, suffers from Fetal Alcohol Effect

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Pregnant women sometimes assume that a few alcoholic drinks will be unlikely to affect their developing baby. Not so, say Elmhurst residents Walt and Kathy Teichen, adoptive parents of Kevin, 25, who suffers from Fetal Alcohol Effect.

"It's a terrible disability and many people never even know they have it because doctors don't know about it," said Walt. "It's a complex problem that affects so many people. It's much more prevalent than muscular dystrophy, Down Syndrome or autism."

A recent WGN TV special featuring the Teichens included some sobering statistics. For every 10,000 babies born each day in this country, one will be HIV positive, three will have Muscular Dystrophy, 10 will have Down Syndrome, twenty will have Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and 100 will have Alcohol Related Neurodevelopmental Disorder, or Fetal Alcohol Effect.

"Fetal alcohol is the largest cause of mental and/or intellectual disabilities in most industrialized nations," said Walt. Because alcohol ingested by the mother dissolves the fetus' brain cells, people with this disorder have permanently compromised brain functions. They frequently have poor memory, difficulty with abstract concepts, and antisocial behavior that often leads to criminal activity. Children with fetal alcohol syndrome have distinctive facial features that can lead to diagnosis, but kids with fetal alcohol effect do not exhibit those features and so often fall through the cracks.

"When they become adults, these victims often wind up in jail. This undiagnosed brain defect gives judges no choice but to lock them up because there are no resources for these people," Walt said.

Unfortunately, Kevin Teichen is no exception.

"He has the social skills of a 12 year old and he's 25", Walt said. Kathy and Walt adopted Kevin through a private domestic adoption when he was three days old. "We knew something was wrong early on but he was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder and behavioral problems rather than fetal alcohol," said Walt. "He was in special education starting in first grade and we put him in several special schools to try to get appropriate facilities. By the time he was a senior in high school he was reading at only the sixth grade level and doing math at the third grade level."

And situation worsened when Kevin finished high school.

"He started making bad decisions and hanging around bad people, doing things like bouncing checks," said Walt. "When these kids get out of the structure of the school day, it gets much worse."

When Kevin was 20 years old, Walt and Kathy, found a psychiatrist at Northwestern University who evaluated their son.

"The doctor diagnosed Kevin with fetal alcohol and we had never heard of it. If we had been able to intervene earlier we would have pushed for different services," said Walt. Kevin continues to struggle today and has been arrested and incarcerated several times, as is common for fetal alcohol young adults.

The Teichens have become advocates for people who suffer from fetal alcohol. In 2003 they started an organization now called FAS Team - Fetal Alcohol Support Team.



"We help people with this disability lead more normal productive lives," said Walt. "We've had about 80 families contact us and we provide information. Most have spent thousands of dollars already and might not be able to afford an evaluation."

FAS Team sponsors an annual motorcycle ride that will be held this year on August 19, 2007, as well as a fall brunch at Drury Lane. Both events are designed to raise awareness of fetal alcohol and raise money for the families and people with the disability.

FAS Team is partnering with a Joliet area social services organization called Trinity on a long-term project to build a group home for eight women and men with fetal alcohol.

"If we can provide the funds, Trinity has agreed to train the staff and run the program," said Walt. "Our goal is to raise enough money at our motorcycle rides and other activities to be able to hire a person to raise money from private foundations and large companies."

For more information on fetal alcohol or the Teichen family's program, please visit [www.fasteam.us](http://www.fasteam.us)