

Judy was the Head Nurse on the pediatric ward at the Whitehorse General Hospital in 1972. She had been on the job for just two weeks when she met Dr. Kojo Asante, a pediatrician who was here on holidays – through his work he had met Dr. Stirling Clarren and had become familiar with what was then called Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. Dr. Asante served as a visiting pediatrician for eight years and Judy worked alongside Dr. Asante on the children’s ward and in his 1985 Yukon study on FASD in the Yukon. Through this work, and the pictures of children with FASD provided by Dr. Asante, Judy realized that she had, in fact, been working with critically ill children who had undiagnosed FASD in Toronto. Judy was present at the births of many children affected by prenatal drinking during her career as a nurse. Judy also had her heart stolen by a tiny little girl who had first been identified as a “preemie” but who was quickly diagnosed with FASD by Dr. Asante. This little girl lived on the children’s ward for fourteen months as everyone thought she was going to die. Judy ended up taking this little girl home for visits for some time until she was adopted. Judy then applied to adopt, and specifically requested a child with FASD. Since adopting her son Matthew, Judy has been a strong and informed advocate for FASD at the local, territorial, and national levels. Judy and Matthew have presented together at many conferences and FASD events.

Through her experiences as both an adoptive mother and a nurse, Judy continued to learn and speak about FASD. Dr. Asante was continuing to diagnosis children with FASD, and policy makers were beginning to understand the need for ongoing supports and services. Judy was often asked about best ways to prevent people with FASD from becoming involved in the justice system, and she could speak passionately about the demands of parenting her son with FASD, and her very real fears for the future.

In the mid 1990s, Judy and other FASD advocates started the Alcohol Related Birth Defects Subcommittee of what was then the Yukon Association for Community Living (YAACL), with some funding provided from the YAACL family inclusion fund. FASSY was created as a separate not-for-profit society in 1996. Once Judy retired, she was hired as the ½ time Director and worked from space provided at YAACL. The focus in those early days was on prevention and for five years, a major initiative was the distribution of prevention bags, with the logo designed by April Buffalo Robe. Judy served as the Executive Director of FASSY from 1996-2008. Further supports and services were added. Some of the big projects supported by FASSY during those years included: Child Development Centre support, “With a Little Help” From my Friends – a project designed to focus on peer supports but confirmed the importance of support workers, and the evening activity program organized with CAIRS and the Salvation Army located at the Salvation Army Building, which supported productive use of time and cultural activities.

While Judy is very proud of the work of FASSY, she cautions that we can never become complacent and must always be prepared to advocate for the people we serve. This advocacy includes lobbying for funding and continuing to support people so that their time can be used productively. It is also very important to expand the support for families of people with FASD and to keep learning from the lessons of the past.