



## Ballarat Courier

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### Foetal alcohol risk warning

PREGNANT women must be warned of the risk of causing irreversible brain damage to their unborn children by drinking, drug and rehabilitation groups say.

A range of organisations have linked together to highlight the issue of foetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

Campaign organisers defined FASD as irreversible brain damage linked to exposure to alcohol during pregnancy.



# Risks of drinking while pregnant

**Stephen Lunn**  
Social affairs writer

ONE in every 100 Australian babies is born with some degree of irreversible brain damage due to the consumption of alcohol during pregnancy, but many women continue to drink and doctors continue to ignore the problem, health experts warn.

Society's blasé attitude to drinking while pregnant in the face of the incurable nature of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and its capacity to leave children with permanent learning and behavioural problems is what worries organisations such as the Australian Drug Foundation, the Salvation Army and the National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee.

Courts and prisons are clogged with people suffering from undiagnosed FASD, which is more akin to mental illness or disability and therefore more a medical than legal problem, they say.

"There's absolutely no scientific proven level of safe drinking during pregnancy. Alcohol is a drug that can harm an unborn baby in different ways," said Sonia Berton, chief executive of Melbourne-based alcohol treatment service Arbias.

"The most common harm is permanent brain damage resulting in learning difficulties, attention deficit disorder, behavioural problems and many other issues.

"Children, teenagers and adults who have FASD may end up with a significant disability.

They may end up with huge problems maintaining employment and a number of people will end up in the law courts. Unfortunately, FASD can be misdiagnosed; sometimes doctors think a child has ADD when, in fact, the problem is FASD."

There is a temptation to think FASD is little more than a fashionable way for parents to hide the fact their child is downright bad, and for mothers to take the blame instead.

Elizabeth Russell, mother of 24-year-old Seth, says she fervently wishes that were the case.

"If Seth was just a bad kid, I would be very happy because I know he would have the opportunity to grow out of his behavioural problems. But as it stands, he has been diagnosed with FASD, which means it is permanent," Ms Russell told *The Australian*.

Ms Russell, 53, said drinking was very much a part of her life until 10 years ago, and was during her pregnancy when she lived in Mackay, in central Queensland.

"When Seth was 12, he started to be truant from school, doing badly, getting into the wrong crowd. A year later, he was exploring with sex and drugs, marijuana, sniffing, generally doing all the things a mother doesn't want," she said.

After an initial diagnosis of ADHD, Ms Russell was still concerned her son wasn't getting the right treatment, and went to the US, where Seth was found to have FASD. "He's now on differ-

ent medications, including anti-psychotics for schizophrenia. It's good that we know he has a problem, not just that he is a problem," she said.

The extreme end of FASD is fetal alcohol syndrome, where the child's physical characteristics are altered by the damage. But practitioners warn the neurological damage such as in Seth's case is no less permanent.

"We really have poor data in Australia about how common the problem is," said Elizabeth Peardon, developmental paediatrician at the Westmead Children's Hospital in Sydney. "In the US, where there is better data, they estimate up to 1 per cent of all live births are affected," Dr Peardon said.

The most recent research, conducted late last year, revealed that 34 per cent of pregnant women consumed alcohol during their most recent pregnancy. And research earlier this year revealed that up to two million Australians were drinking at levels that risked brain damage.

National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines, endorsed in 2001, advise that pregnant women "may consider not drinking at all", but if they do drink, to keep their consumption to less than seven standard drinks a week and no more than two on one day. Draft guidelines under discussion advise pregnant women that the safest option is not to drink alcohol.



Elizabeth Russell with her son Seth, 24, who suffers from fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, in Melbourne yesterday.

Picture: Scott Wilby



## Brain-damaged siblings fight for recognition and help

By JILL STARK

ALL day at school Claire wears her "social mask" in an attempt to fit in with her classmates.

"I try to pretend to be someone I'm not and act normal, but I feel different. It's like hitting your head against a brick wall, because on the other side there are people who are normal."

She sounds every bit the articulate 17-year-old, but Claire Duley and her brother Brendan, 14, have foetal alcohol syndrome. Their brain damage might not be obvious at first, but foster mother Neroli Endacott, who has cared for more than 100 children with complex needs, says they are her biggest challenge yet.

Like toddlers trapped in teenagers' bodies they suffer short-term memory loss, meaning a

simple act like brushing teeth must be re-learned again and again. They are prone to fits of rage and depression, have trouble socialising, and need round-the-clock monitoring because "they're a risk to themselves as well as other people".

The children are ineligible for a place in a special school and get little financial help because foetal alcohol disorder is not recognised as a disability.

Holding down a job, managing money or sustaining a relationship will be virtually impossible. "They say about kids with foetal alcohol that the boys get locked up and the girls get knocked up," Ms Endacott says. "Claire tells me that she wouldn't get raped because she'd say no,

and she wouldn't get her drink spiked because she'd put her hand over her drink. That's the way they think. It's very simplistic, like a child."

The siblings came to her home on the Gold Coast three years ago after their birth mother, Tracy Duley, could no longer care for them. She sees her children regularly and Ms Endacott does not blame her for their condition, saying Ms Duley has been sober for almost a year.

Getting the children diagnosed was a struggle. "We fight the educators to educate them and we fight the doctors to recognise their condition," Ms Endacott says.



We fight the doctors to recognise their condition", Brendan and Claire Duley, who have been diagnosed with foetal alcohol syndrome, with their mother Tracy (left) and carer Neroli Endacott (centre). PHOTO: STEVE HOLLAND



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## Sufferers exposed to a lifetime of pain

EXPOSURE to alcohol can cause a range of disabilities under the umbrella term foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD).

At the severe end of the spectrum is foetal alcohol syndrome, usually characterised by low birth weight and facial abnormalities of the eye, mouth and lips.

The baby may also have a small head and damage to the internal organs. Hearing and sight may also be impaired.

Children with FASD can have varying degrees of neurological damage, which can include a lower than average IQ, learning difficulties, attention problems and hyperactivity.

Short-term memory is often affected and many sufferers have poor impulse control, fail to understand consequences and can be prone to extreme mood swings. As a result, many go on to experience mental health issues, spend time in jail or have drug and alcohol problems. Damage to the brain is permanent and irreversible.

With the condition being recognised in medical literature only since the 1970s, there is still little research and much debate on what level of alcohol intake causes damage to the foetus.



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# Call for action on babies damaged by mothers drinking

By **JILL STARK**  
MEDICAL REPORTER

A HIDDEN generation of brain-damaged children is being born with foetal alcohol disorders but a huge gap in expertise is forcing many families to go overseas for help, experts have claimed.

A hard-hitting campaign launched today will warn that one in 100 Australian newborns could be suffering irreversible brain damage caused by alcohol exposure in the womb.

Sufferers can have birth defects, learning difficulties and complex behavioural issues. But only 2% of doctors feel confident in detecting the condition and many children are misdiagnosed with attention deficit disorders, hyperactivity and autism.

Backed by Victoria's Chief Magistrate Ian Gray and leading national drug support agencies, the campaign by alcohol-related brain damage service Arbias will call for mandatory warning labels on alcohol products and training for doctors. With research showing almost 60% of Australians have never heard of foetal alcohol disorders, national education campaigns have also been advocated.

With no diagnostic services, the extent of the problem is unclear, but Arbias chief executive Sonia Berton believes there could be at least 200,000 sufferers, based on US figures where drinking patterns are similar.

"Foetal alcohol spectrum disorder is the most preventable cause of mental disability in the Western world but is not even recognised as a disability in Australia," Ms Berton said.

Anne Russell, from the Russell Family Fetal Alcohol Disorders Association, had to travel to Canada to have her son Seth diagnosed after Australian doctors could not explain his violent, suicidal behaviour as a teenager.

"This is happening all the time and kids are getting labelled louts and delinquents and criminals when they've got significant brain damage," she said.

Canadian lawyer David Boulding, an expert on foetal alcohol disorders and the justice system, says up to 60% of sufferers end up in prison. "As a citizen paying taxes you need to demand that the Government start doing diagnostic and support services because you're paying for it three and four times over," he said. "These people plug up your courts, your social welfare, your jails your hospitals, your emergency services."

Neuropsychologist Martin Jackson said that every foetus and woman reacts differently to alcohol so it is impossible to determine a safe level of drinking. Recently revised alcohol guidelines have warned pregnant woman not to drink at all.

But Dr Christine Tippett, president of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, said telling women one glass of wine could be dangerous is "simplistic and alarmist".

She said the majority of babies with foetal alcohol disorders had mothers who regularly drank heavily in pregnancy.

"The message has to be to women that if their child misbehaves it's not because they had one or two drinks in pregnancy," Dr Tippett said. "People who have a problem with excess alcohol intake are often people who smoke or who may use drugs so it becomes very difficult to isolate the part alcohol plays."

New research shows one in five Australians think it's safe to have a drink a day during pregnancy. Another survey shows 34% of women had drunk during their last pregnancy and 24% said they would continue to drink in any future pregnancy.



Adelaide Advertiser

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# Alcohol a dire risk to unborn

TORY SHEPHERD  
HEALTH REPORTER

PREGNANT women must be warned of the risk of causing irreversible brain damage to their unborn children by drinking, drug and rehabilitation groups say.

A range of organisations has linked together to highlight the issue of foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD).

The groups, led by Arbias, a national organisation that promotes education about alcohol-related brain injury, are pushing for warning labels on alcohol bottles.

Thousands of babies are brain damaged by the alcohol their mothers drink, Arbias chief executive officer Sonia Berton said yesterday.

The group launch an aware-

ness campaign on FASD today.

Ms Berton said international studies show one in 100 newborn babies could be born with FASD every year, and she wants to see the research replicated here.

FASD is irreparable brain injury that can cause learning and behavioural difficulties, and short-term memory loss.

"Alcohol is a drug that can harm an unborn baby in different ways during pregnancy," she said. "The most common harm is permanent brain damage resulting in learning difficulties, attention deficit disorder, behavioural problems and many other issues.

"If you are pregnant or considering pregnancy, no alcohol is the best and safest choice for your unborn baby," she said.

Normanville woman Sue Miers is the spokeswoman for the National Organisation for Foetal Al-

cohol Syndrome and Related Disorders, and has a 25-year-old foster daughter with FASD.

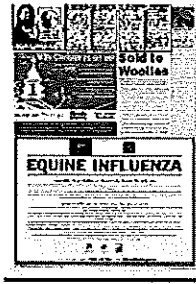
She said some studies found as many as three or four babies in 100 could be affected by FASD.

"We know that young women in Australia are drinking lots, we know that pregnant woman are drinking lots."

Her daughter, Lola, said having FASD meant she had behavioural problems, struggled to learn from her mistakes and to control her own drinking.

**“No alcohol is the best and safest choice for your unborn baby.”**

- ARBIAS CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER SONIA BERTON



## Campaign warns of alcohol danger

A MAJOR campaign is underway to warn people about the potential dangers of alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

Campaign organisers say it's time the community woke up to the reality of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

In essence, FASD is irreversible brain damage in a baby, child, teenager or adult linked to exposure to alcohol during pregnancy.

The campaign has been organised by arbias - who shocked the nation

in August by revealing that two million Australians drink at levels that risk brain damage - along with NOFASARD and the Russell Family Fetal Alcohol Disorders Association.

Campaign supporters include The Salvation Army, the Community Alcohol Action Network, the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation, the Alcohol and Other Drugs Council of Australia, the National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee and

the Australian Drug Foundation.

arbias CEO Sonia Berton said the campaign was designed to educate, not alarm.

She said the key was to get information out into the community so that people can make an informed choice.

Research indicates that as many as one in 100 newborn babies are born with the effects of FASD.

Children with FASD can face a massive range of issues including huge learning problems, short-

term memory loss, difficulty controlling emotions (especially anger), being easily distractible, having an inability to manage money, difficulty maintaining employment and an inability to learn from mistakes.

Affected individuals may also have significant problems establishing and maintaining friendships and other relationships including difficulty parenting appropriately.

More information is available at [www.arbias.org.au](http://www.arbias.org.au)



**POTENTIAL DANGER:** arbias CEO Sonia Berton says the campaign is designed to educate, not alarm.

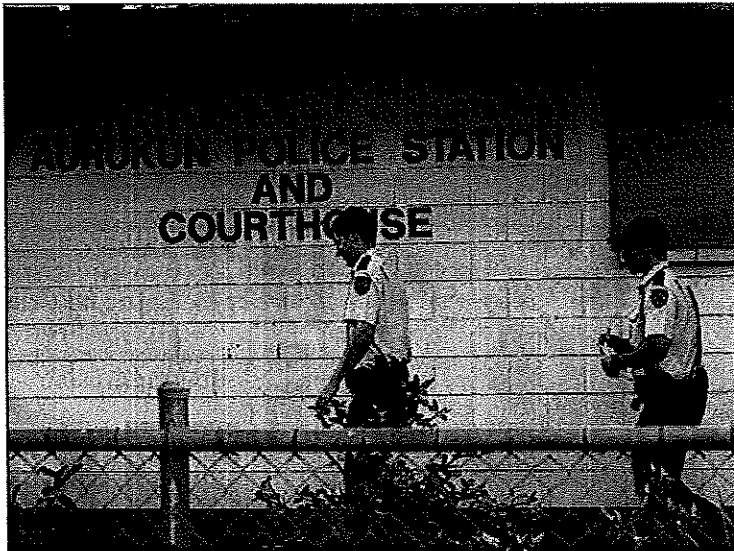


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**difficult needs. There is a long path of recovery ahead of this little girl.**

QUEENSLAND PREMIER ANNA BLIGH



In the spotlight: Children's sexual behaviour in Queensland's Aurukun community has been highlighted by a gang rape case





Community blighted by child sex, alcoholism and riots the backdrop for abuse of 10-year-old

# Gang rape added to girl's life of trauma

SYDNEY

The girl at the centre of the multiple rape case in far north Queensland has been through more trauma in her 12 years than most suffer in a lifetime.

Like so many indigenous children, she was born with foetal alcohol syndrome. Disadvantaged from birth, she is reportedly "mildly intellectually impaired".

When she was seven, she was molested by a family member and contracted syphilis.

She became "highly sexualised", so for her protection the Department of Child Safety removed her from her family in Aurukun and sent her to live with a succession of foster families. She was ultimately placed with a white family in Cairns.

But the sexual assault had left its mark. Early last year the girl's foster carer told child safety officials she was offering to perform sex acts in exchange for cigarettes and alcohol.

Nonetheless, officials returned the girl to her family in Aurukun in April 2006, after she indicated she wanted to go back.

Less than two months later, at the age of 10, she was raped by nine men, including six aged between 13 and 16, over a succession of days.

Cairns-based District Court Judge Sarah Bradley did not record convictions against the six teenage attackers and gave others, aged 17, 18 and 26, suspended sentences.

The prosecutor did not ask for a jail sentence and Judge Bradley, in her sentencing remarks, said that the girl had "probably agreed" to have sex with the nine.

Soon after returning to Aurukun, the girl presented at a medical clinic requesting a pregnancy test and con-

doms. According to a departmental report, she told clinic staff she was having consensual sex.

The girl's experiences have highlighted the dysfunction of the remote Aurukun community, where sex among children is not unheard of, girls barely in their teens are having babies, alcoholism is rife, and there are frequent riots between tribes.

A Department of Community Services official who appeared at the multiple rape court case in October told the judge that many Aurukun children had a precocious attitude towards sex.

"There are a lot of children in this community who think the same way about sexual matters as (one of the rapists) does," the official said.

Her observations were echoed by the lawyer representing some of the offenders.

"Their level of understanding as to appropriate sexual conduct isn't good, and maybe it's because their experience in relation to other people within the community, and their conduct, isn't good," he said.

Pointing out there were 14-year-olds giving birth in Aurukun, he said: "It just reinforces the lack of education and resources that are given to this community to assist with what clearly is a significant problem."

The department official said the State Government had recently begun running sexual health programs in Aurukun, which included teaching young people about "the appropriateness of who your sexual partner will be".

The 12-year-old girl is back in the care of the Department of Child Safety and is receiving medical and psychological treatment.

"She does have a number of com-

plex and difficult needs," Queensland Premier Anna Bligh said. "There is a long path of recovery ahead of this little girl."

It emerged yesterday that the Queensland Crime and Misconduct Commission had received a complaint about the handling of a second indigenous rape case.

The complaint related to an Aboriginal girl who was assaulted by two men at different times in an undisclosed community.

A commission spokeswoman said a complaint had been received about three months ago and was being looked into by investigators appointed by the Department of Child Safety.

Ms Bligh warned of "radical action" if a review found fault with the State's justice system.

She said a review of 64 sentences given to sexual offenders on Cape York over the past two years could help determine if the standard of justice was lower in Queensland's indigenous communities.

Hetty Johnston, founder of Bravehearts, a group which campaigns against child abuse, called for an external review of child sex cases by a retired judge.

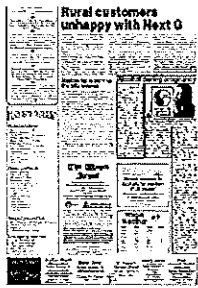
"We believe that this problem is endemic, it is systemic," Ms Johnston said.

But Ms Bligh rejected calls for an inquiry into the gang rape case, saying: "Until we have seen all of those cases it would be premature to say this is systemic."

The review of cases would show whether further action was warranted, she said.

"But if those cases show that it is, I won't hesitate to take very radical action if necessary."

She does have a number of complex and



## Alcohol during pregnancy

A CAMPAIGN is underway to warn locals of the potential dangers of alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

A range of organisations have linked together with the backing of high profile Australians to highlight that Australia must wake up to the issue of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

In essence FASD is an irreversible, irreparable brain injury in an unborn baby linked to alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

People in the coverage of the *Argus* are being urged to download fact sheets and become more

educated about FASD.

It is estimated one in 100 newborn babies may be born with the symptoms and characteristics of FASD each year.

Organisers highlight that for women considering pregnancy or who are pregnant, no alcohol is the best and safest choice for their unborn baby.

Campaign supporters include The Salvation Army, the Community Alcohol Action Network, the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation, the Alcohol and Other Drugs Council of Australia, the National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee and

the Australian Drug Foundation.

Special websites are in place with fact sheets and information about FASD. People are being urged to find out more by visiting [arbias.org.au](http://arbias.org.au), which has links to other websites to help.

The new campaign is called 'It's time to recognise FASD'. Arbias CEO Sonia Berton says the campaign is designed to educate not alarm.

She says the key is to get information out into the community so that people can make an informed choice.

She says there are no major government fund-

ed services anywhere in Australia specifically helping families with FASD.

Tired of waiting for anything to happen, arbias – which is a not for profit organisation with support from a massive list of MPs from all parties around the nation – has launched Australia's first diagnostic service to help parents, carers and families with children or adults with FASD.

The new service is already helping to diagnose Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and make appropriate recommendations to help some families.



NONE: Arbias chief executive officer Sonia Berton is launching a new campaign to highlight the dangers of alcohol consumption during pregnancy.



# Raped girl endured lifetime of trauma

Cosima Marriner

THE girl at the centre of the multiple rape case in Far-North Queensland has been through more trauma in her 12 years than most suffer in a lifetime.

Like so many indigenous children, she was born with foetal alcohol syndrome. Disadvantaged from birth, she is reportedly "mildly intellectually impaired".

When the girl was seven, she was molested by a family member and contracted syphilis. She became "highly sexualised", so for her own protection the Department of Child Safety removed her from her family in Aurukun and sent her to live with a succession of foster families. She was ultimately placed with a white family in Cairns.

But the sexual assault had left its mark. Early last year the girl's foster carer told child safety officials she was

offering to perform sex acts in exchange for cigarettes and alcohol. Nonetheless, officials returned the girl to her family in Aurukun in April 2006, after she indicated she wanted to go back. Less than two months later, at the age of 10, she was raped by nine men, including six aged between 13 and 16, over a succession of days.

Such early brutal sexual encounters have completely robbed the girl of her innocence and warped her view of what is appropriate behaviour.

Not long after returning to Aurukun, she presented at a medical clinic requesting a pregnancy test and condoms. According to a departmental report, the girl told clinic staff she was having consensual sex.

The girl's experiences have highlighted the dysfunction of the remote Aurukun community, where sex among children is not unheard of, girls

barely in their teens are having babies, alcoholism is rife, and there are frequent riots between tribes.

A Department of Community Services official who appeared at the multiple rape court case in October told the judge, Sarah Bradley, that many Aurukun children had a precocious attitude towards sex. "There are a lot of children in this community who think the same way about sexual matters as [one of the rapists] does," the official said.

Her observations were echoed by the lawyer representing some of the offenders. "Their level of understanding as to appropriate sexual conduct isn't good, and maybe it's because their experience in relation to other people within the community, and their conduct, isn't good."

Pointing out there were

14-year-olds giving birth in Aurukun, he said: "It just reinforces the lack of education and resources that are given to this community to assist with what clearly is a significant problem."

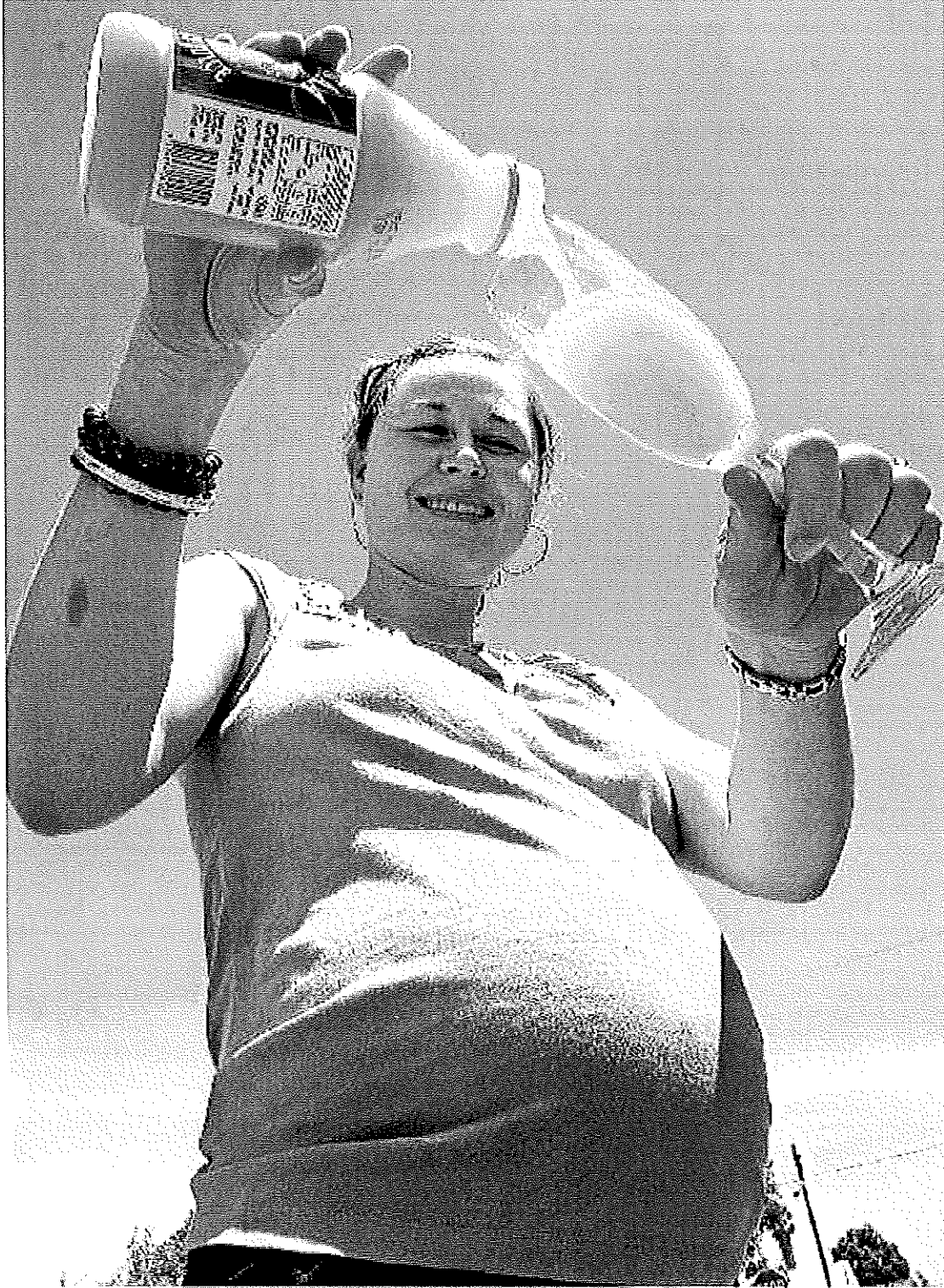
The department official said the State Government had recently begun running sexual health programs in Aurukun, which included teaching young people about "the appropriateness of who your sexual partner will be".

But the for the little girl, the damage is done. She is back in the care of the Department of Child Safety and is receiving medical and psychological treatment. "She does have a number of complex and difficult needs," Queensland's Premier, Anna Bligh, said. "There is a long path of recovery ahead of this little girl."

There were 14-year-olds giving birth in Aurukun.



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**ORANGE JUICE:** Amy Lambert, dietitian at the Mildura Aboriginal Health Services and an expectant mother, says most pregnant women should be aware of the risks of drinking alcohol. Picture: Stacey Merlin



# Booze, babies don't mix

## Zero alcohol only safe amount for unborn child

By Nat Cavallaro

WHILE pregnancy is a time of joy for most women, there are risks.

Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder is an irreversible, irreparable brain injury in an unborn baby linked to alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

By simply avoiding alcohol during pregnancy FASD can be prevented but it is only recently that a major campaign has been launched to target pregnant women.

Until recently it was believed limiting alcohol consumption during pregnancy was enough. But new research released by Alcohol Related Brain Injury Australian Services has shown zero consumption is the safest option.

Despite this, the message may not be getting through to Australian women, many of whom still think minimal drinking is safe.

The National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2004 showed 62 per cent of women had drunk alcohol during pregnancy.

**'We are doing our best to get the message to pregnant women that less is best, none is better.'**

Vicki Broad, nurse unit manager of midwifery at Robinvale Hospital, said many women still thought drinking a small amount was safe.

"We have a large number of women who come through here who think it

is acceptable to drink while pregnant until we explain to them the harm it can cause their baby.

"ARBIAS have a brochure out as part of their 'It's Time To Recognise FASD' campaign and I am giving that to pregnant women the first time I see them because it is important this message gets out in the community.

"The message has become quite clear this year – no alcohol is best. In the past there was a lot of information that suggested a little alcohol was okay but we now know better."

Ms Broad stressed that every woman was different and what might be okay for one isn't for another.

"The fact is there are no safe levels of alcohol for any woman during her pregnancy.

"Some women may drink a lot while pregnant and their child will be fine. Those cases cannot be explained and it is not recommended that pregnant women compare themselves to their friends or others."

Mel Dunstan, midwife of Women's Business at Mildura Aboriginal Health Services, said because the disorder was hard to recognise, it was difficult to tell how many cases came through the system.

"We are really promoting zero consumption now, though. We are doing our best to get the message to pregnant women that less is best, none is better."

Ms Dunstan said many women still were not aware of the dangers of drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

"They know it's bad but they aren't sure exactly what it can do. We make

sure it's the first thing we talk about when we see a pregnant woman for the first time."

Amy Lambert, dietitian at the Mildura Aboriginal Health Services and an expectant mother, said most pregnant women should be aware of the risks.

"I'd be surprised if they didn't know about the risks, but the more information the better."

According to ARBIAS, one in 100 newborn babies may be born with the symptoms and characteristics of FASD each year in Australia.

Sonia Berton, chief executive officer of ARBIAS, said the effects of brain injury were lifelong.

"Children, teenagers and adults who have FASD may end up with a significant disability.

"They may end up with huge problems maintaining employment and a number of these people will end up in the law courts.

"Unfortunately FASD can be misdiagnosed. Doctors sometimes think a child has ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) when in fact the problem is FASD."

Children with FASD can battle a range of issues including learning problems, short-term memory loss, difficulty controlling emotions, inability to manage money and not learning from mistakes.

ARBIAS has launched a campaign to target pregnant women and part of this campaign is a logo – the silhouette of a pregnant woman saying no to alcohol.

ARBIAS is suggesting this logo be put on all alcoholic drinks.

## **WARNING LABELS FOR ALCOHOL ON THE HORIZON**

Wellington, Dec 13 NZPA - Labels on alcohol warning about the dangers of drinking during pregnancy may not be far away now that New Zealand and Australia seem to agree on the issue, Alcohol Healthwatch says.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) yesterday called for comment on an application to amend the Australian New Zealand Food Standards Codes to require labelling of alcohol beverages with a pregnancy health advisory warning.

Consideration of the application, made by the Alcohol Advisory Council (ALAC), has been awaiting the completion of the review of the Australian Drinking Guidelines.

The draft of these guidelines includes a clear message that alcohol consumption when planning pregnancy, during pregnancy and breastfeeding is not recommended.

Alcohol Healthwatch director Rebecca Williams said that bodes well for the consideration of the warning labels application as both countries were now aligned on the issue.

Previous Australian guidelines offered mixed messages about drinking during pregnancy, which was a barrier to warning labels.

Ms Williams said if the new Australian guidelines were adopted they would be consistent with the New Zealand Ministry of Health advice which also recommends women abstain from alcohol during pregnancy.

She said warning labels formed an essential part of a strategic approach to preventing Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

"It is of paramount importance that there is a clear and consistent message to women of child bearing age that drinking alcohol during pregnancy carries a high risk," she said.

"There is no known safe consumption level so abstinence is the only way to ensure that alcohol is not damaging a baby's health."

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause irreparable damage to the brain of the developing baby and a range of other effects known as FASD.

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## WHAT HAPPENED?

A 10-YEAR-OLD girl was pack-raped twice in an indigenous community in far north Queensland – the second time after being returned there by child safety officers.

Cairns district court judge Sarah Bradley did not record convictions against six teenage attackers and gave three others, aged 17, 18 and 26, suspended sentences over the 2006 rape. She found the 10-year-old girl "probably agreed" to have sex with the males.

The ruling caused public outrage.

The case has sparked a review of 64 sentences given to sexual offenders in Queensland's far north over the past two years, and the prosecutor in the case, Steve Carter, has stood aside while the case was investigated.

He had described the attack as "naughty" and "a form of childish experimentation" involving a willing participant.

## Judge Bradley defended

AN AUSTRALIAN barrister yesterday said that the district court judge was right not to jail nine males who pleaded guilty to the gang rape of the 10-year-old girl in far north Queensland.

Greg Barns, a barrister with a special interest in prison reform, believes the outrage over the sentences and remarks of Cairns district court judge Sarah Bradley is unwarranted.

Mr Barns, based in Tasmania, defended Judge Bradley.

"It has to be remembered that six of the nine defendants were under the age of 16 and jail is rightly regarded as . . . inappropriate as a punishment for them," he said.

"Secondly, custodial sentences are not the way to rehabilitate people, particularly Aboriginal Australians. They simply lead to increased recidivism and an exacerbation of existing behavioural difficulties."

## Second case emerges

THE handling of another indigenous rape case is under investigation in Queensland.

Yesterday it emerged the Queensland Crime and Misconduct Commission has received a complaint about the handling of a second indigenous rape case.

The complaint relates to an Aboriginal girl who was assaulted by two men at different times in an undisclosed community.

Queensland Premier Anna Bligh warned of "radical action" if a review finds fault with the state's justice system.

Ms Bligh says a review of 64 sentences given to sexual offenders on Cape York could help determine if the standard of justice is lower in Queensland's indigenous communities.

But Hetty Johnston, founder of lobby group Bravehearts, called for an external review of child sex cases by a retired judge.

AAI



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**'So you know, there but for the  
grace of God goes most of the  
children in this community.'**







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# OUTRAGE

Born with foetal alcohol syndrome. First gang-raped at the age of seven. Gang-raped again three years later. Offers sex in exchange for booze and cigarettes. This is the world of the young victim in the rape case that has shocked Australia. **Cosima Marriner** reports.

**T**HE little girl at the centre of the gang-rape case in far north Queensland has been through more trauma in her 12 years than most suffer in a lifetime. Like so many indigenous children, she was born with foetal alcohol syndrome, the daughter of a mother with a drinking problem.

Disadvantaged from birth, she has reportedly been diagnosed as being "mildly intellectually impaired".

When the girl was seven years old, she was gang-raped by five youths and contracted syphilis.

The Queensland Child Safety Department removed the girl from her family in the remote community of Aurukun and sent her to live with a succession of foster families.

She was ultimately placed with a white family in Cairns. But the sexual assault had left its mark.

Early last year the girl's foster carer warned child safety officials that she was offering to perform sex acts in exchange for cigarettes and alcohol.

Nonetheless, officials deemed it best to return the girl to her family in Aurukun in April 2006. Less than two months later, at the age of 10, she was gang-raped by nine men, including six aged between 13 and 16.

Such early brutal sexual encounters have robbed the girl of her innocence and warped her view of what is appropriate behaviour. Not long after arriving back in Aurukun she went to a medical clinic requesting a pregnancy test and condoms.

According to a departmental report, the 10-year-old told clinic staff she was having consensual sex.

The shocking experiences of the girl have highlighted the dysfunctionality of the Aurukun community, where sex among children is not unheard of, girls barely in their teens are having

babies, alcoholism is rife, and there are frequent riots between warring tribes.

A Community Services Department official who appeared at the gang-rape court case in October told Judge Sarah Bradley that many Aurukun children had a precocious attitude toward sex.

"There are a lot of children in this community who think the same way about sexual matters as [one of the gang rapists] does," the official said. "So you know, there but for the grace of God goes most of the children in this community."

Her observations were echoed by the lawyer representing some of the gang-rape offenders.

"Their level of understanding as to appropriate sexual conduct isn't good, and maybe it's because their experience in relation to other people within the community, and their conduct, isn't good," the lawyer told Judge Bradley.

"There'd be a number of sexual relationships that occur at Aurukun between teenagers under the age of 16."

Pointing out there were 14-year-olds having babies in Aurukun, the lawyer said: "It just reinforces the lack of education and resources that are given to this community to assist with what clearly is a significant problem."

The department official said the state government had recently begun running sexual health programmes in Aurukun, which included teaching young people about "the appropriateness of who your sexual partner will be".

But for the girl, the damage has been done. She is now back in the care of the Child Safety Department and is receiving medical and psychological treatment.

"She does have a number of complex and difficult needs," Queensland Premier Anna Bligh said this week. "There is a long path of recovery ahead of this little girl."



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## **MOST TALKED ABOUT AURUKUN RAPE CASE**

# Outrage should be aimed at effects of soft bigotry

BEING named after a mass murderer (Hitler, Stalin) is a harsh reminder of the extent of hard bigotry to which the indigenous elders who celebrated their native title at Pirnini ("Justice on ancient land", 11/12) this week were subjected to as young stockmen.

Now the outrage expressed at the handling of the case of the 10-year-old Aurukun gang-rape victim by the Queensland legal and welfare authorities ("Prosecutor who called gang rape of girl, 10, 'naughty' stood down", 12/12) should be directed at the pernicious effects of the contemporary soft bigotry of cultural relativism. Such cultural relativism prevents indigenous children achieving the equality of health and education which are the building blocks of opportunity for engagement in the mainstream economy.

How does it work? From the absence of parental education and close supportive surveillance of mothers so that they understand that by not washing their babies they will inevitably get widespread sores infected by streptococcus that leads to kidney and heart disease that leads to early death. From no one bothering that few Aboriginal babies outside of urban centres in Australia's far north get fed enough to grow properly, so that they are labelled as having "failure to thrive" as though it were a disease rather than the inevitable consequence of nutritional neglect. From no one having the responsibility to step in to stop the social outrage of alcohol abuse amongst young women so that fetal alcohol syndrome (with permanent brain damage to the baby) is at least 100 times more common in places such as Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek than in white society.

Noel Pearson argues that white guilt leads to soft bigotry. The tragedy of society's response to the child victim of sexual assault at Aurukun should act as a turning point in how mainstream society treats the children of

the powerless and dispossessed.

**Dr John Boulton**  
Newcastle, NSW

IT appears that part of the failure of the justice system lies in not acknowledging the counter phobic reaction of children subjected to sexual abuse. Unable to protect themselves, the only way to retain some measure of mental survival to the horror they are presented with, is to accept their fate and to comply, in an attempt to prevent further physical violence and mental torment.

The correct response of any older person is to recognise that such a child is desperately in need of help, not a ready participant to the acts. It would appear that such simple understanding has been severely lacking in the justice system, not only in the tragic case of the Aurukun girl, but sadly in many courts, where this behaviour is used as an excuse by the legal profession in protecting those who abuse children and vulnerable adults.

**Ruth Goozell**  
Nowra, NSW

PROFESSOR Freda Briggs (Letters, 12/12) is absolutely right in suggesting that Australia has been shamed by the Queensland child sex abuse saga. As evidence of the worldwide impact of this case, it was reported on Tuesday, December 11, in the front section of my local newspaper in Bloomington-Normal, Illinois, under the "Our World" section, where it was presented as just as newsworthy as the swearing-in of Argentina's first elected female president. We are a city of only 120,000, so that means the sex abuse story — headlined "Rapists of girl, 10, escape prison terms" — reached all major US newspapers.

Crown prosecutor Steve Carter should be dismissed and the judge, Sarah Bradley, removed from the bench. Judges are supposed to overrule ignorant and biased prosecutors.

**Laura E. Berk**  
Distinguished Professor of Psychology  
Emerita, Illinois State University

SURELY all people who live in Australia should be equally subject to its laws, regardless of their "cultural differences". If child rape, forced marriage or genital mutilation — just some of the cultural deviations that occur in our society — are illegal, why should these be given lenient treatment because of the cultural background of the perpetrators?

Similarly, should those suspected of terrorism, often on dubious evidence, have their normal legal rights taken away? In a fair and democratic society, all citizens are deemed to have equal rights under the law. This is not a principle we should so easily forsake.

**Daphne Benham**  
Magill, SA

WE entrust the courts to deal with complex and sensitive legal matters then become outraged when the result does not suit us.

The offenders admitted their behaviour was wrong by pleading guilty. A very harsh penalty would not help the little girl rebuild her life with her family and community. The prosecutor and the judge did their best, and those who insist the girl be kept isolated from the "evil blacks" should revisit the child when she is 40 years old, after going from foster home to foster home, isolated in white society and not allowed back to her own.

It's no more wrong for the court to consider the attitude of the victim's Aboriginal community to which she will eventually return than it is for Anna Bligh to insist her white community attitudes must prevail. Imposing white rule over Aboriginal society creates the problem. Isn't it time to find real solutions?

**Michael Mansell**  
Legal Director, Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre



## No charges laid in another vile rape

Renee Viellaris

ANOTHER shocking case has emerged of an indigenous girl being repeatedly raped and denied justice.

The girl, now 12 and living on the Gold Coast, was high from paint sniffing when she was raped by a least three men last year in an undisclosed indigenous community.

No charges were ever levelled against the middle-aged men and it's understood Child Safety officers have come under fire for being too lax in investigating the girl's claims.

The case is being investigated by an external agency appointed by the Child Safety Department but Minister Margaret Keech admitted yesterday that the review had not been finalised.



**REPORT ...**  
**Desley Boyle**

Boyle, who ordered a report into the matter at the time.

Ms Boyle was told the girl had been engaged in sexual behaviour before she was 10 and was treated for sexually transmitted diseases.

Doctors must refer suspect cases of rape and underage sex to police.

Ms Keech told *The Courier-Mail* she wanted the review to be thorough and would not put timeframes on investigations.

Ms Keech inherited the case from former minister Desley Boyle.

Although she has been through counselling, it's believed the girl may have fetal alcohol syndrome and is struggling to overcome her trauma.

It's not known whether doctors referred the girl's case to the department or police.

The external agency, which has interviewed case workers and other relevant parties, will refer its report to the Crime and Misconduct Commission when it has been completed.

It comes as more details are revealed about a 10-year-old who was pack-raped in Aurukun. The nine males escaped a custodial sentence and convictions because they were not requested by the prosecutor.

The girl, now 12, also has fetal alcohol syndrome and has a mild impairment.

One of the case workers who failed the girl has been sacked and two others, who faced disciplinary action, are in the process of disputing the findings.

The details about the girl were released in a report by Ms Boyle last year but the case only sparked public outcry when the media revealed Judge Sarah Bradley did not impose a jail term on the nine males responsible.

She also said in her sentencing remarks that the girl probably "agreed to have sex with all" of the offenders.

It's understood the girl was trading sex for alcohol and drugs.



# Alcohol abuse with unborns

## Organisations come together to stop FASD

A RANGE of top organisations have linked together with the backing of high profile Australians to highlight that Australia must wake up to the issue of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

In essence FASD is an irreversible, irreparable brain injury in an unborn baby linked to alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

People in the Gatton, Lockyer and Brisbane Valley areas are being urged to download fact sheets and become more educated about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

It is estimated that one in 100 newborn babies may be born with the symptoms and characteristics of FASD each year in Australia.

Organisers highlight that for women considering pregnancy or who are pregnant, no alcohol is the best and safest choice for their unborn baby.

A major campaign is now underway to warn people in the Gatton, Lockyer and Brisbane Valley areas about the potential dangers of alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

Campaign organisers say it's high time the community woke up to the reality of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

FASD is irreversible brain damage in a baby, child, teenager and adult linked to exposure to alcohol during pregnancy.

The campaign has been organised by Arbias (who shocked the nation in August when they revealed 2 million Australians drink at levels that risk brain damage) along with NOFASARD and the Russell Family Fetal Alcohol Disorders Association.

It's now estimated as many as one in 100 newborn babies are being born with the effects of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) each year in Australia.

New Roy Morgan research just released shows 58 per cent of Australians have never heard of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and 19 per cent of those surveyed believe that one drink or more daily is safe for the foetus. 75 per cent of people surveyed want the Federal government to create a national advertising campaign on FASD and 71 per cent want warning labels on alcohol products.

The new campaign is called 'It's time to recognise FASD'.

Arbias CEO Sonia Berton says the campaign is designed to educate not alarm. She says the key is to get information out into the community so that people can make an informed choice.

She says there are no major government funded services specifically helping families with FASD.

Tired of waiting for anything to happen, Arbias - which is a not for profit organisation with support

from MPs from all parties around the nation - has now launched Australia's first diagnostic service to help parents, carers and families with children/adults with FASD.

To get more details visit [www.arbias.org.au](http://www.arbias.org.au).

The new service is already helping to diagnose Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and make appropriate recommendations to help some families.

The new campaign has gained the support of many high profile people including the Law Reform Commissioner for NSW, ex-Royal Commissioner and ex-Supreme Court judge the Hon Greg James QC, the Chief Magistrate of Victoria Ian Gray and other well known people.

Sonia Berton said, "There's absolutely no scientific proven level of safe drinking during pregnancy.

Alcohol is a drug that can harm an unborn baby in different ways during pregnancy.

The most common harm is permanent brain damage resulting in learning difficulties, attention deficit disorder, behavioural problems and many other issues."

"Children, teenagers and adults who have FASD may end up with a significant disability.

"They may end up with huge problems maintaining employment and a number of these people will end up in trouble with the law."



**Gatton Lockyer Brisbane Valley Star**

Wednesday 12/12/2007

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Region: Gatton QLD Circulation: 18,029

Type: Regional

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page 2 of 2



ARBIAS CEO SONIA Berton is launching a new campaign with others to highlight that Australia has a very real issue with FASD. A new logo has been unveiled warning pregnant women of the dangers of drinking whilst pregnant.



Great Southern Herald

Wednesday 12/12/2007

Page: 5

Section: General News

Region: Katanning WA Circulation: 1,599

Type: Regional

Size: 77.08 sq.cms.

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# Pregnant warned: stay off alcohol

WITH the Christmas season nearly here, a timely campaign is underway to warn Katanning residents of the potential dangers of alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

Campaign organisers are pushing awareness of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), brain damage caused by exposure to alcohol during pregnancy.

It is estimated that 1 in 100 babies are born with the effects of FASD each year in Australia.

Representing one of the campaign organisers, Sonia Berton of arbias, ex-

plained there had not been a scientific level of safety during pregnancy.

"Alcohol is a drug that can harm an unborn baby in different ways during pregnancy, the most common harm is permanent brain damage resulting in learning difficulties, attention deficit disorder and behavioural problems," Ms Berton said. She explained FASD could commonly be misdiagnosed as Attention Deficit Disorder.

"We have a simple message, if you are pregnant, no alcohol is the best and safest choice for your unborn baby," Ms Berton said.



## Manjimup Bridgetown Times

Wednesday 12/12/2007

Page: 9

Section: General News

Region: Manjimup WA Circulation: 3,384

Type: Regional

Size: 48.43 sq.cms.

Published: --W----

## Pregnancy and alcohol a bad mix

A MAJOR campaign is under way to warn people in the Bridgetown, Manjimup and Boyup Brook areas of the potential dangers of alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

A range of top organisations have linked together to highlight the issue of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

FASD is an Irreversible, irreparable brain injury in an unborn baby linked to alcohol during pregnancy and people in the Lower South West are being urged to download fact sheets and become better educated on the issue.

It is estimated one in 100 newborn babies may be born with symptoms and characteristics of FASD each year.

Anyone wanting more information can visit [www.arbias.org.au](http://www.arbias.org.au)



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## Campaign begins to thwart alcohol abuse during pregnancy

A major campaign is underway to warn people in and around Oberon of the potential dangers of alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

A range of top organisations with the backing of high profile Australians to highlight that Australia must wake up to the issue of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

In essence FASD is an irreversible, irreparable brain injury in an unborn baby linked to alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

People in the Oberon area are being urged to download fact sheets and become more educated about FASD.

It is estimated that one in 100 newborn babies may be born with the symptoms and characteristics of FASD each year in Australia.

Organisers highlight that for women considering pregnancy or who are pregnant, no alcohol is the best and safest choice for their unborn child.

In essence, FASD is irreversible brain damage in a baby, child, teen-

ager or adult linked to exposure to alcohol during pregnancy.

The campaign has been organised by 'arbias' who shocked the nation in August when they revealed that two million Australians drink at levels that risked brain damage, along with NOFASARD and the Russell Family Fetal Alcohol Disorders Association.

CEO of 'arbias', Sonia Berton, explained the risks associated with drinking during pregnancy further.

"There's absolutely no scientific proven level of safe drinking during pregnancy," she said.

"Alcohol is a drug that can harm an unborn baby in different ways - the most common harm being permanent brain damage resulting in learning difficulties, attention deficit disorder, behavioural problems and many other issues."

The campaign has culminated in a logo being unveiled, which organisers say should be attached to all alcohol products a la the warnings now found on cigarette packets.





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Size: 71.36 sq.cms.  
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## Alcohol damages babies' health

**A BORDER** counsellor has supported a national push to warn pregnant women of the risk of causing irreversible brain damage to their unborn children by drinking alcohol.

Dr Penny Vine said while it was important to prevent foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, it was equally important to identify the disorder in children.

Several drug and

rehabilitation groups linked together to highlight the disorder which can leave children exposed to alcohol during pregnancy with learning, communication, behaviour and attention span problems.

They have called for warning labels on alcohol bottles to warn women about the disorder and a campaign to educate the wider community.

And they say

there is no scientific proven level of safe drinking during pregnancy.

Dr Vine said in her experience she was seeing many parents having enormous difficulty in caring for children with the disorder.

She said some of these children found themselves in trouble later in life with the law because of their perceived misbehaviour.



**Age**  
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**Published: MTWTFs-**

## Girl's life highlights everything wrong in Aurukun

By **COSIMA MARRINER**

THE girl at the centre of the rape case in far north Queensland has been through more trauma in 12 years than most in a lifetime.

Like so many indigenous children, she was born with foetal alcohol syndrome, the daughter of a mother with a drinking problem. She has reportedly been diagnosed as "mildly intellectually impaired".

When the girl was seven, she was molested by a family member and contracted syphilis. She became "highly sexualised" and for her own protection was removed from her family in Aurukun by child safety officials and put in foster care. She was eventually placed with a white family in Cairns.

But the sexual assault had left its mark. Early last year, the girl's foster carer warned child safety officials that she was offering to perform sex acts in exchange for cigarettes and alcohol. Nonetheless, officials deemed it best to return the girl to her family in

Aurukun in April 2006, after she indicated she wanted to go back.

Less than two months later, at the age of 10, she was raped over a few days by nine men, including six aged between 13 and 16.

Such early, brutal sexual encounters have robbed the girl of her innocence and warped her view of what is appropriate behaviour. Not long after arriving back in Aurukun, she turned up at a medical clinic requesting a pregnancy test and condoms. According to a departmental report, the girl told clinic staff she was having consensual sex. Child safety officials were alerted, but they did not immediately contact the police.

The girl's shocking experiences have highlighted the dysfunctionality of the remote Aurukun community, where sex among children is not unheard of, girls barely in their teens are having babies, alcoholism is rife and there are frequent riots between warring tribes.

A Department of Community Services official who appeared at

the gang rape court case in October told Judge Sarah Bradley that many Aurukun children had a precocious attitude towards sex.

"There are a lot of children in this community who think the same way about sexual matters as (one of the gang rapists) does," the official said. "So, you know, there but for the grace of God go most of the children in this community."

The official said the state government had begun running sexual health programs in Aurukun, which included teaching young people about "the appropriateness of who your sexual partner will be".

But for the girl, the damage has been done. She is back in the care of the Department of Child Safety and receiving medical and psychological treatment.

"She does have a number of complex and difficult needs," Queensland Premier Anna Bligh said.

"There is a long path of recovery ahead of this little girl."



# THE AGE

Australia's independent newspaper. Established in 1854.

Justice for all is unconditional. It is unjust to believe otherwise

A 10-year old girl  
was raped and her  
assailants were  
freed. This should  
not have happened  
anywhere under  
Australian law.

**A**T THE heart of the case in October in which nine attackers who pleaded guilty to gang-raping a 10-year-old girl were allowed to walk free by a Cairns judge is neither the appalling behaviour of the young men involved nor the dubious rationale of the now suspended prosecutor, Steve Carter, who described the incident as "childish experimentation" and "consensual in a non-legal sense". The essence of the case does not rest with the curious decision of the judge, Sarah Bradley, who ordered no conviction be recorded against six of the offenders, who were juveniles, and that six-month sentences, suspended for a year, be given to the three other offenders, including a 25-year-old.

Nor does it pivot on the fact the gang rape took place in April 2006 within an indigenous community on Queensland's Cape York Peninsula. All the above are, by comparison, peripheral to the real central element: the physical and mental vulnerability of a girl who cannot be named — in a cruel irony, her legal anonymity allows her possibly the only dignity in a disgraceful affair that has further blighted a wretched life already beset by violence, trauma and upheaval.

This girl, diagnosed as "mildly intellectually impaired" and affected by foetal alcohol

syndrome was raped in Aurukun by five juveniles when she was seven, contracting syphilis and severe genital injuries. Authorities from Queensland's Department of Child Safety took her out of the area and put her with various foster families, including a non-indigenous family in Cairns, until the department, reportedly wary of "stolen generation" accusations, returned the girl against her wishes to Aurukun, where she became the victim of a second multiple rape, contracting gonorrhoea. This "victim-statement", on behalf of the girl who is now 12, shows how she also fell victim to the workings of a state government child-welfare department as well as the processes of the law. She deserved far better in each case.

An eight-month investigation into the Child Safety Department's handling of the case shows that, although the department had been told the girl had been gang raped and had a sexually transmitted disease, it did not pass this information on to police in line with statutory obligations. One senior officer has been sacked and two others remain suspended on full pay, pending appeal. Other findings by the investigating committee, and of wider concern, include possible non-reporting to police of other alleged criminal



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offences against children, and loss of critical departmental documents.

Public reaction has, at least, been swift and decisive. Queensland's Director of Public Prosecutions, Leanne Clare, SC, has stood down Steve Carter (the senior legal officer responsible for Cape York matters in the DPP's Cairns chambers) pending an inquiry into his conduct. Queensland's Attorney-General Kerry Shine is appealing against the sentence, and the DPP is also reviewing 75 sentences handed down for sexual assaults in Cape York indigenous communities over the past two years. Queensland's Premier Anna Bligh has called the sentence "completely out of touch with community expectations" and said it

begs "serious questions about the way that the court has applied itself". These questions could well include why Mr Carter appeared to defend those charged rather than prosecute them, and why Justice Bradley should have accepted Mr Carter's recommendations even though it is she who ultimately decides the sentencing.

In the end, justice suffers. Australia's laws and legal system apply to all. When the law does not allow for discrimination, then there can be no favouritism or leniency on any grounds. A girl was repeatedly raped and her assailants have walked free. This paradox should not have occurred. An inquiry is the only way to a just resolution.

