

Birth Mother Network (BMN)



National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

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National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

The Scarlet Letter



**Forever Marked as a Bad,
Immoral, Unloving, Abusive
MOTHER!!**

www.nofas.org/coh

- Established in 2005 to increase support for birth mothers, strengthen recovery for women who drank during pregnancy, and support families affected by FASD
- 130 birth mothers in the BMN database
- Annual BMN Business Meetings
- 12 State or Regional Coordinators
- 22 Trained BMN Speakers

The NOFAS Circle of Hope; Birth Mothers Network

Prevent FASD by reducing the stigma and providing support for women who drank during their pregnancy (s), and their families:

Future Vision

The COH-BMN will become a strong national network that will work to mentor women who are struggling with addiction and with the issues of having a child or children with an FASD.

Mitchell, K. 2009



CIRCLE OF HOPE

News from the Circle
CIRCLE OF HOPE: A Birth Mother's Network
June 2004, Volume 1, Issue 1

The Circle of Hope is a vision I have had in my heart for many years now. Reaching out to other birth moms and helping them to get through the pain and grief of causing irreversible damage to our own children has become my life's passion.

A Network of Birth Mothers with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum

My daughter, Karli, was diagnosed with FAS in 1988 when she was 16 years old and at that time I was very alone with that diagnosis. I had four years of recovery from my alcoholism at that time. I know hundreds of women in recovery, yet I had never known one to have a child diagnosed with FAS. It was a very painful time in my life. I felt ashamed and isolated. Even in the world of 12 step recovery, it was a difficult experience to share. I seemed to have been the only one that had the bad fortune of severely damaging one of my precious children. Fortunately, I had a great support system at that time that got me through the cycle of grief that I experienced. My journey in recovery taught me to release the past and to own my Warrior-Self. Women who survive years of addiction and abuse are some of the strongest women that I know. I had to learn to own that and to allow that part of me to be in charge.

Today, Karli is a beautiful woman who is now 31 years old. She is a glimmer of light in all of the lives that she touches. For many years I fretted over what was wrong with Karli, and believed that my life was burdened due to her disabilities. I could not have been more confused! The reality is that Karli is a very special spirit with great strengths and insights. Karli still has no understanding of time or money. My husband Michael pointed out that these are very human needs, which cause the majority of us great stress in our daily lives. How many days do I worry because I'm late, or worry over money. We used to compare Karli's progress to others in a linear timeline (she should be driving now, she should be in college now) and came to understand that life is a circular journey of many lessons. This quote by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin really captures my beliefs: "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; rather spiritual beings having a human experience."

We came to appreciate that Karli had taught us much more than we could ever hope to teach her! She is a person who is not capable of judgments of others; she accepts all just how they are and is the most forgiving soul I know. For years I whined, why me, why me? How I ask why me, why me, how could I be so very blessed to have this angel in our lives?

Birth mothers are a special breed of women and have endless strengths. United together, we can help to pull suffering women out of the trenches of addiction, and help them to own their warriors. Together we can cry, we can heal, and we can own our paths and grow from our suffering. Who knows, what we perceive as a human tragedy, may actually be a divine plan of spiritual healing for all of us?

Sincerely,
Kathy Tavensier Mitchell

Page One

- Mission Statement

- The mission of the BMN is to increase understanding and support and strengthen recovery for women who drank during their pregnancy(s), as well as for their families.

- The Vision

- The BMN will become a strong national network that will work to mentor women who are struggling with addiction and with the issues of having a child or children with an FASD.

Birth Mothers Network Values

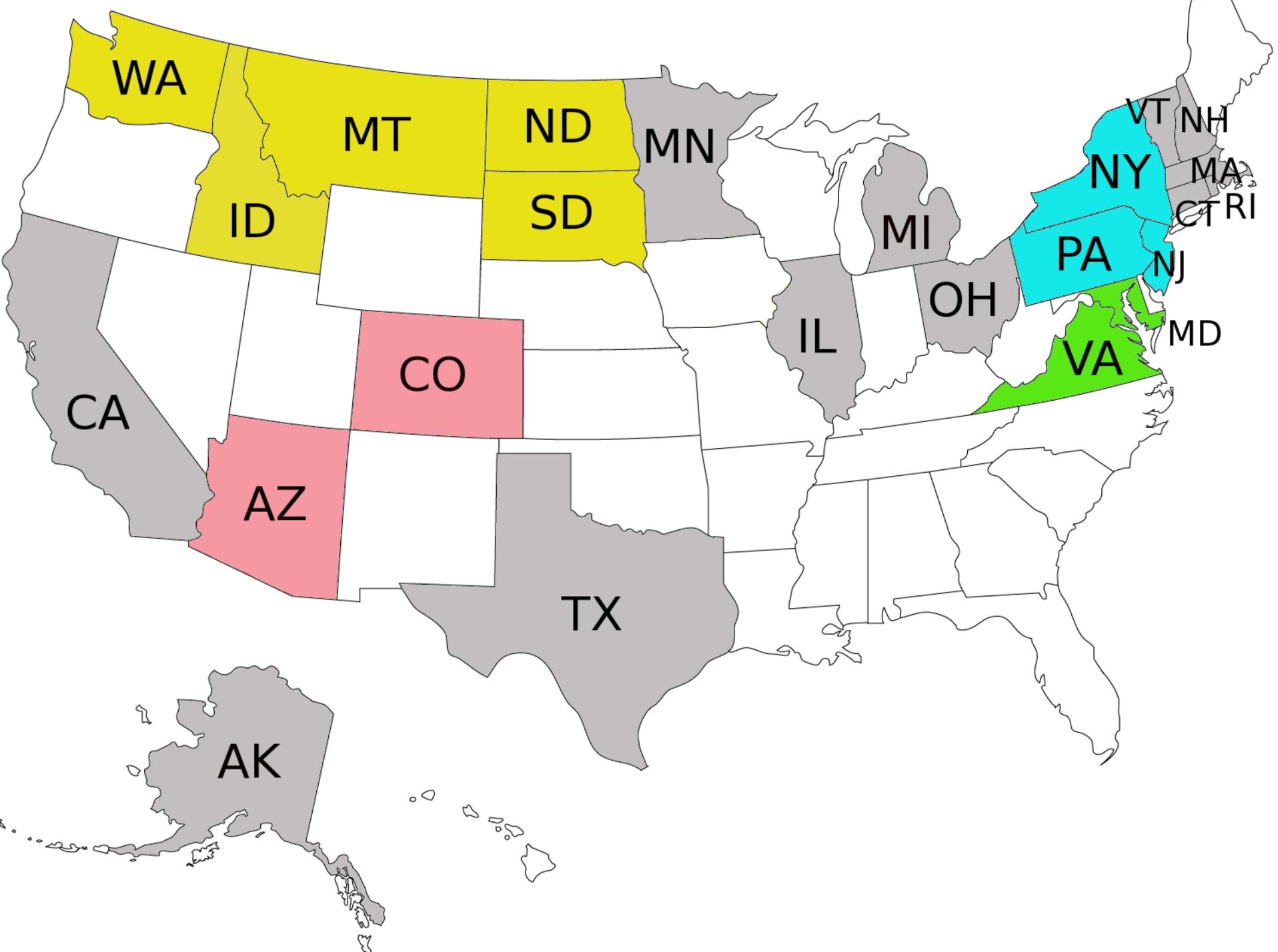
- Utmost level of confidentiality
- Values honesty and integrity of all members
- Reduce the stigma of FASD
- Safe environment
 - Welcomes all women without fear of judgment, shame, or ridicule

Birth Mothers Network Objectives

- Establish BMN as recognized and familiar entity among FASD constituents
- Educate policy makers and agency directors about FASD
- Increase FASD activities in state/local areas
- Identify channels to promote BMN

Birth Mothers Network Activities

- Participate on state FASD Task Force or other state agency dealing with FASD
 - Assist with creation of FASD state coordinator where one does not exist
- Meet with FASD State Coordinator when available
 - Assist with creation of FASD state coordinator where one does not exist
- Collaborate with and support FASD projects and legislative activities



Birth Mother's Survey 2010

Average Age of Mothers at Time of Survey: **45**

N = 33

81% of participants identified themselves as Caucasian.

9% of participants identified themselves as Black or African American.

9% of participants identified themselves as American Indian or Alaska Native.

48% of participants completed some technical school or have an associates/2-year degree.

52% of participants have a Bachelor's degree.

38% of participants completed some graduate school or have a graduate degree.

Average Yearly Family Income of Participants: \$75,000.00

Birth Mother's Survey Data Analysis

- The average number of children of the participants was 2
- **95%** of all collective pregnancies were alcohol exposed
 - majority of women reported that they drank 2-3 times per week or more
- **43%** of pregnancies were exposed to drugs and alcohol.
- **43%** report having a diagnosed with an FASD
- **9%** report having a child diagnosed with FAS
- **36%** report having no effects on their children
- **19%** report stillbirth or infant death

Mothers Age's at Time of Birth & Birth Outcomes

28 of the **64** births resulted in a diagnosis of an FASD

Average age of mothers at first pregnancy: **24**

13 of those children were diagnosed with an FASD

1 child died at 4 months

Average age of mothers at second pregnancy: **27**

10 of those children were diagnosed with an FASD

1 child died at 3 months

Average age of mothers at third pregnancy: **30**

3 of those children were diagnosed with an FASD

1 child died at 2 months

Average age of mothers at fourth pregnancy: **30**

2 of those children were diagnosed with an FASD

1 child died at birth

Average age of mothers at fifth pregnancy: **32**

0 of those children were diagnosed with an FASD

1 child died at 2.5 months

Alcoholism/Addiction

- **67%** of participants have been diagnosed with alcoholism and believe it is an accurate diagnosis
- **43%** of participants have been diagnosed with drug addiction and believe it is an accurate diagnosis
- **72%** of women have been in treatment for addiction disorders.
- **24%** of women reported being social drinkers.
- **57%** of women surveyed have been in inpatient or residential treatment
- **29%** of those women reported being in residential treatment two or more times
- **71%** of women reported that they are sober today with **57%** having five or more years of sobriety
(**62%** of those women reported that they attend or have attended AA or other 12-step programs)

Future Directions:

- PCAP and PAC in Washington State (PCAP-BMN?)
- PCAP in Michigan
- BMN in Ohio
- BMN in Hawaii
- BMN in the UK
- International panel of birth moms

Addiction Treatment Professionals: Can prevent FASD

- Provide counseling sessions for women who have used substances including alcohol while pregnant
- Educate your staff about FASD; contact NOFAS to receive information about the *NOFAS FASD Curriculum for Addiction & Allied Health Professionals - Level I and Level II. (NAADAC Course, Provider # 704, 22 CEU's)*;
- Distribute FASD prevention brochures in your agency waiting areas;
- Include current FASD education in your curriculum;
- Refer women who have used substances while pregnant or who have children with FASD to the NOFAS Circle of Hope Birth Mothers Network (COH-BMN)
- Assist your patients by providing referrals to have their children assessed for possible FASD.

Women in Recovery Summit

2 Day Meeting Designed to:

- educate women at highest risk for having a child with FASD
- educate the counselors that serve women in treatment
- educate policy makers for the purpose to inspire to create and enhance systems of care and support services for families affected by FASD.

**“Never doubt that a small group of
thoughtful, committed citizens
can change the world;
indeed it’s the only
thing that ever has”**

Margaret Mead