



HAPPY CHILD: Mikey Watson, 4, poses with his mother, Shiona, and older brother Rory in their Kingham Road home. -Maggie Petrushevsky photo

Crime spree

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minivan was ripped out last Wednesday night. Vandals have caused approximately \$4,500 damage to customers' and used cars, despite increased police patrols, a new street light on the corner and more lights on the businesses.

Caffeine crime?

A screwdriver was used to slash two tires on the passenger side of a van parked in the rear alleyway behind Pizzaville between midnight and 12:30 a.m. last Thursday. Damages are \$200.



HEAVY STUFF: Cleaning up the refuse around Acton on a recent large garbage day pick up were truck driver Michelle Edwards and her assistant Art Pregent. -Ted Tyler photo

Acton mother says:

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is 'completely preventable'

BY MAGGIE PETRUSHEVSKY
The New Tanner

When they hear bells ringing just after 9 next Thursday morning, Shiona Watson hopes Acton residents will get the message about Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS).

Watson, whose adopted son, Mikey, suffers from FAS, is part of the world wide group trying to raise awareness of the condition.

"We're not an official group," Watson explains. "We're just parents who get together on the internet (on FASLink) to share the joys and difficulties of raising children with FAS."

The group has designated Sept. 9 as FAS Day.

FAS is now the leading cause of mental retardation across North America, Watson says, even surpassing Downs Syndrome. Group members suspect the rise in numbers is mainly due to a better ability to diagnose the condition rather than any actual increase in occurrence.

"FAS is completely preventable," Watson says. "You don't have to be an alcoholic or even a heavy drinker to cause this damage to your child. Even one evening having a couple of drinks with friends could be enough to cause it. It could happen before you even know you were pregnant so

any woman who might be pregnant needs to know to be really careful if she has a drink."

The Watsons knew when they adopted Mikey that he suffered from FAS. Others may not be so lucky. Birth mothers can have a terrible time coping with the realization their child is damaged and it's their fault, she says. Other adoptive parents too, may not realize the root of their child's problem.

"They may think they're taking in a kid with behaviour problems and attribute it to the abusive situation in his home or the constant upset of shifting from foster home to foster home," she says. "But they expect after a year or two of stable, loving care the kid will get over it. When he doesn't, they're devastated. Or they may even have taken a whole family who all suffer from FAS. They may not be able to cope and have to give them up."

FAS youngsters are usually identified by their special facial features. Their head is smaller than normal; their eyes are very widely spaced; their eyes have epicanthel folds (like aboriginals); they have very small, snub noses and almost no philtrum (depression between the nose and upper lip).

They learn differently, show poor judgement, have arrested social and emotional

development, often can't learn cause and effect, and don't learn from experience, Watson explains.

"They are impulsive. They don't mean to cause problems and are very sorry for what they did, but that won't stop them doing it again and again," she says. "They have no idea of danger and are often small for their age."

Her son appears and acts like he was two rather than four years old, she says. He is deaf, has had open heart surgery, has fused kidneys and scoliosis which requires him to wear a back brace.

Less severely damaged children may suffer from Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAE). These youngsters don't show the facial marks but they are often hyperactive, have short attentions spans, poor memory skills, and frequently do poorly in school because of poor language skills. Some may hear everything you say and not understand a word of it. These are often the youngsters whose teachers say they are lazy. While they may be intelligent enough to appear "normal" they can't seem to apply that intelligence.

Watson says research shows the medical problems and distinctive facial features usually result from drinking during the first trimester of the pregnancy while FAE results from alcohol use in the last two trimesters.

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