

# WELCOME EVERYONE TO \*WEEK 8\* OF THE CREATIVE SUBSTITUTE FOR “BUILDING CIRCLES OF SUPPORT!”

*Hello Everyone! Welcome to our final session of this series!*

*Our topic this week is- Learning The Dance: Celebrating FASD*

*Now that our province and our economy is slowly opening up, I am starting to sense some optimism and hope in the community and the people I meet. It seems like social distancing and washing our hands has become a part of our lifestyle, whereas 6 weeks ago it was something new and foreign to us. How quickly we learn. I'm sure many of you have both positive and challenging stories to tell of things that have occurred over the past weeks.*

*As this is our last installment of the Building Circles of Support Series, we thought that we would end on a positive note! Rather than us passing on information on FASD, in this session, we have asked several Individuals living with FASD to be our teachers. After all they are our greatest teachers! We end the session with a powerful teaching given to us by Elder Mary, an Elder and Wisdom Keeper.*

*Usually we end the Telehealth sessions with having Visions and Voices, a group of adults living with FASD, speak to the group about their journey throughout the years living with FASD. As that isn't possible at this time, we have asked 2 participants to write a short narrative of how the events of the COVID-19 pandemic have unfolded for them during this time into something positive. The facilitator of the group, Emma, starts the articles off with a brief introduction to the two women.*

- 1. “This week we are connecting with Lisa Morrisseau and Jessica Siddle, two incredible women who live with FASD. Both these women have been telling their life stories to differing audiences for many years as Visions and Voices presenters. They are exceptional public speakers. They enjoy sharing their unique life's journey. Their stories of struggle, support, laughter and hope have reached many people. Today they have reached out to us through writing. Lisa and Jessica speak on what it is like for them during the COVID pandemic and tips on how to sane”:*

Good day everyone! My name is Lisa as most of you know I have FAS. As this Covid 19 has been taking over this world, I have come to the realization that I have a really good life. I have a partner that supports me and encourages me in everything I do. There as not been a lot of changes since this has all happened only the fact that my children are home all the time. In this time, I have come to be very thankful for where I live and how I live.

My kids this year get to learn more about how life used to be in the olden days. They are learning and working on the garden. My middle child is very excited because he is planting pumpkins. My youngest every day looks at all the plants and see what is growing and how much they are growing. They have helped with the garden last year but this year it has been a true blessing to have them help with the seeds and now understand why we save our seeds from our food.

I know that a lot of people are struggling and having anxiety over this chapter in their lives. They can't leave or go any where, but I am grateful to live in the country and to be able to grow our own food. Chickens and eggs and cows. So much for the kids to learn and so much space. I would not change anything.

Enjoy the sun!  
Lisa Morrisseau,  
Anola, MB

### Jessica's Guide to Staying Sane During Covid

#### 1) Get dressed up!

Pick out dress pants and a nice top you would wear for a special occasion, like Sunday morning! Always start off with a cup of coffee. Every Sunday, I grab my note book and Bible, I go into my favorite place to sit and I go online. I open up to my church's Sunday sermon. I sit on my comfy couch and sip coffee. This routine gives me structure for the week. It gives me something to look forward too. I invite you to dress up, turn on a sermon or your favorite podcast, and enjoy!

#### 2) Go for a Walk!

There are so many ways to go for a walk. When I go for walks and I see nature that inspires me, I like to take a picture of it. For example, when I see beautiful clouds or a branch when the sunlight is shining around it from a nice view, I take a picture.

You can get outside to take your dog or pet for a walk. It is also good for the pet to get out so it does not feel so isolated and held inside the house.

#### 3) Watch a Movie!

For relaxing you can turn on your favorite movie, if nothing is good on TV. I recently watched Bambi with my niece. She watched up to the sad scene at the beginning. So I put on Bambi 2, she then came back to watch with me. When watching a group movie make sure everyone is comfortable!

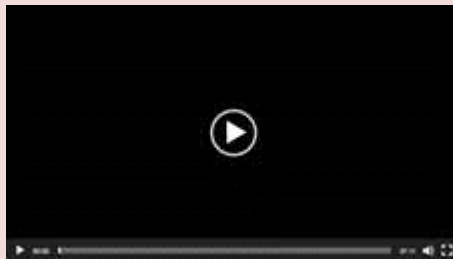
Don't forget the popcorn!

Jessica Siddle  
Winnipeg, MB

*Visions and Voices presenters are adults who live with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Presenters have spoken throughout Manitoba to teachers, families, police officers, caregivers, social workers, and many others. The presenters share their stories and facilitate conversations about FASD. If you are interested in learning more go to the [Visions and Voices website](#). You may also contact Emma Bergen, Visions and Voices Coordinator, at [ebergen.vnv@initiativesjc.org](mailto:ebergen.vnv@initiativesjc.org).*

2. *We would also like to direct you to some videos which involve celebrating the strengths of individuals with FASD found on the Manitoba FASD Coalition website.*

- *This first video, titled [“A Place Where I Belong: Community Making a Difference”](#), is the story of how one community is walking beside Chris, an individual with FASD, on his journey of self-discovery, healing, and belonging. It is a model which many small communities can learn from. Chris is also a part of the Visions and Voices speaking group.*



- *In particular, for the educators (and caregivers) who have been following us over the past weeks, we recommend that you view the 3<sup>rd</sup> video on the page, titled [“Learning the Dance: Community Making a Difference”](#). This video is the story of how 2 schools in Manitoba have focused on relationships, built upon strengths, and reframed behaviours in order to support 2 students with FASD to find success and a sense of belonging within the school community.*



***3. An adoptive mother also shares her story on how the Pandemic has had a positive effect on their family living with an adolescent daughter with FASD. Although there are many struggles in raising an adolescent with FASD, together, the family has moved through this into a more positive light.***

**Who knew that a global pandemic would be the strategy we needed to complete Grade 9.**

The months of January to March are always the hardest for our 15-year-old daughter with an FASD diagnosis (thus, hardest for us as well!!!). It is at this point in the school year that things just seem too heavy and we hit overload with all the very tricky social dynamics of adolescent life at school. We were managing crisis level behaviours, poor mental health (for everyone), and we were not going to achieve half of her credits for grade 9.

This year especially, my spouse and I had been trying to figure out a way to limit her time at school as a way to manage the many triggers. But of course, our daughter, being both 15 and having FASD, isn't very accommodating of our accommodations. If we tried to keep her home, she would walk to school. If we suggested home schooling, she would go to school every day that week just to "prove" to us that, I quote, "I'm just like everyone else and I don't need your help." No matter what we tried, she would just keep walking into that fire and getting burned. Its not surprising that her self-esteem and mental health bottomed out...people can be really mean.

Its so hard watching your child struggle. The vulnerability of FASD certainly extends to the whole family. It's so hard to figure out how to accommodate and make things better for her when we don't have control over the environment or the triggers and she isn't compliant with other options like staying home. I remember thinking in February, how I longed for the summer months, when those triggers are mostly eliminated and she becomes my humorous and loving daughter again. February was especially hard on my own mental health and I really wanted off the roller coaster and for the world to stop spinning for a little while.

Never in a million years would I ever wish the trauma of this pandemic on our world. Like so many people, I'm feeling so many mixed emotions during this time of COVID. I worry about a lot of families and I know how incredibly devastating this time is for so many people. However, for us, there has been one incredible silver lining around this very dark cloud. School is cancelled, eliminating most of those triggers. This was such a welcome and critically necessary break for our whole family. The fact that it was mandated and everyone was required to stay home made it even that much easier for us to navigate her staying home too! Her drive to go to school to see her 'friends' was gone and in its place was time for recovery from the many wounds of the year thus far.

In the FASD world, we often need to live by the motto 'take one day at a time'. In Jan/Feb, we had no good days, and there were some really traumatizing ones. Now, as we begin May, our days look (and feel) monumentally better. Her mental health and self-esteem are much improved. She is engaging in school work every day and is expressing how much better she likes this way of schooling, although she still misses her friends. She is engaged with us in positive ways and more loving and grateful than I've ever seen her. Don't get me wrong, we are still living the roller coaster of FASD, and it takes a lot of one to one support with multiple people to keep this train on its tracks. But we are having fun together as a family and are able to feel a sense of hope, which has balanced our well-being and lightened our load. Hope not only for our success with academics this school year, as we actually have the opportunity to catch up and achieve full credits for her grade 9 year. But also, long-term hope that we might actually be able to complete high school. The long-term benefits of the schools being forced to develop and experiment with this type of learning method may very well be the light for us, an option moving forward, even when the restrictions are lifted and the world starts spinning again.

4. We also wanted to highlight the perspective of an 11-year old student in grade 6, who has FASD and is currently at home during this Pandemic, like many of you and your children. Here are some of the things he has been working on to share how he is feeling, keeping busy, and staying connected to others while staying at home:

### HOW I'M FEELING



WORDS TO DESCRIBE HOW I FEEL:  
Calm, Quiet, Happy.

HOW MY FACE LOOKS  
☺ ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹

I AM MOST THANKFUL FOR  
Food, water and shelter.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNT MOST FROM THIS EXPERIENCE:  
to stay home from school and do homework.

THE 3 THINGS I AM MOST EXCITED TO DO WHEN THIS IS OVER:  
 1 go to the park  
 2 go to school  
 3 walk the puppies  
 go shopping  
 playing with my friends again.

MADE BY KONG CREATIONS

### YOU ARE NOT STUCK AT HOME, YOU ARE SAFE AT HOME!




WHAT I AM DOING TO KEEP BUSY:

- Skipping
- Drawing
- Doing Art
- Playing with the puppy
- Doing homework at home.
- Doing chores
- Reading my books

MADE BY KONG CREATIONS

### MY COMMUNITY



WHERE I AM LIVING DURING THIS TIME:  
in the house.

WHAT THINGS ARE YOU DOING TO HELP FEEL CONNECTED/HAVE FUN OUTSIDE (e.g. hearts in windows, chalk notes on sidewalk, etc):  
were doing art projects for my classmates since I don't see them anymore.

HOW ARE YOU CONNECTING WITH OTHERS?  
by phone

MADE BY KONG CREATIONS

5. *Our next videos are by one of our favorite speakers who is living with FASD. By now you are all familiar with Myles Himmelreich. In this these last 2 videos, Myles impresses upon us that even though having FASD can be a struggle, there are many positive aspects of living with FASD:*

- [\*FASD: I Struggle, But I Also Succeed \(Myles Himmelreich\)\*](#)



- *Finally, in our last [video](#), Myles encourages us to think of the term FASD as a new acronym, that being:*

*F- Faith*

*A- Ability*

*S- Strength*

*D- Determination*





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*Sincerely,*  
*-Manitoba FASD Center and FASD Network*