

Barb's Story: 24 years old, is presently living on her own.

Education:

In the elementary school years, it was very hard for me to grasp things. I had a hard time remembering what I needed to learn. I needed time, patience, and understanding at that time in my life. And it wasn't easy because the people I was around had no clue I had FASD. Because of all the facts and things I had to learn, I didn't enjoy school. So all the good I got out of school was the recess time.

Growing Up:

When I was growing up, people never thought of me as anything much. I didn't get the encouragement I needed. Their favourite term for me was 'mentally retarded'. It was always, "She'll never do this or that. She'll never be normal." I was teased and, a lot of times, people put me down. Everyone believed I'd amount to nothing. I went through a lot of pain and hurt. I was lonely and I, basically, had no self-esteem in me. I never felt confident. I had no clue why I felt the way I did. I wasn't young and happy. I was young and troubled. I was always thought of as different and dumb. As a young child I felt confused and afraid. I felt hopeless and I felt very sad. I shed many tears at night praying and hoping the next day would be good and that I'd feel better. When I look back on this time, I realize people didn't know I had FASD - and neither did I. I felt very lost and for me the world felt big and mean.

Life Skills:

I have a hard time keeping track of my belongings...like my bankcard and my keys and even my beloved walkman.

- ◆ When I picked up my prescription from the drugstore, I left my walkman and coke. The manager called me and asked if I had forgotten them.
- ◆ On coffee break from work I left my keys at the 7-11. Next time I went in, the 7-11 had my keys for me.
- ◆ One day I went to the bank and left my bankcard. The next time I went back, they had my bankcard for me.

It's good to live in a small town. If I were to live in a big city, my belongings would have been gone. I find I can get very frustrated easily. That happens to me when there's too much going on in my life. When things change, I don't like it at all. For example, the Focus class just moved and I'm finding the new classroom is hard to get used to. If people are upset or hurting, I get upset, too. I'm very, very sensitive. Often I don't know why I feel the way I do or why I am the way I am. I have no answers as to why I do what I do. I can get very impatient. Often I can't express myself very good. I can't say what's going on. How people present themselves is a big thing for me.

The things I like to do to feel better are listening to music and talking to people about what is wrong or what happened.

Employment:

I found it hard to find a job suited to me. With my job, one of the things I find hard is getting up and getting there on time. And something I find very helpful is for my boss to write down how things are to be done. For example, she has the telephone instructions written down. The best thing is to have a good understanding boss who knows about FASD.

I've had a lot of help from Anne at my Supported Work Placement in helping me find my job.

Focus Class:

The Focus class is a very special class with VERY SPECIAL people in it. We are very close and it's because we are surviving life together as people with FASD. It is very hard for all of us to live with it 24/7. We help each other out and we give each other support. We have formed a very strong bond. But our lives have been helped for the better by coming to the Focus class. We've learned lots of things on how to cope with FASD. The teachers help us to understand about FASD, about behaviours and characteristics. We've learned to help ourselves so it's easier for us. The Focus class has taught me how to be committed and dedicated to the class and to my work.

How it was for me when I found out I had FASD.

When I found out I had FASD, I felt sad and was wishing that my brain was in good working order. Sometimes I feel like I'm a scratched-up CD or a messed-up tape or like a guitar out of tune. I feel like a singer trying to sing but the drummer is not in time with me. I'm OK but the drummer isn't OK. It's not me, but it's him. I'm OK but my brain is not OK.

We are normal and can still do lots of things. We want to be treated nice and not that we are nothing or that we are no counts. We are real people with a real heart and real feelings. More programs and more support are needed for people with FASD.

After my elementary years, I lived with my family for a while. Then I lived with some friends and later I lived on my own. Then I lived in proprietary care. That is when caregivers help out adults in their homes. Now I live on my own.

I like living on my own because I can do what I want. I have my own money and I can visit more easily. I can have my own life. That is very important to me. I like to decide where I am going and what I will be doing. I can decide for myself.

But I can get lonely too. My schedule can get mixed up and I might not eat or sleep. I also have a hard time doing my laundry and I have lots of problems managing my money. These are things I deal with daily.

Senses:

I am very sensitive to noise, light, smells and the way things feel for me.

- ◆ When someone taps on the table it sounds like boom, boom, boom◆
- ◆ When sunlight comes through the window, it is extremely bright for me
- ◆ When someone wears strong perfume it bothers me
- ◆ If a chair has wheels, I feel dizzy and sick
- ◆ When I use slippery sheets on my bed I feel seasick

Barb