

## A day in the life of ... a health charity executive director

Susan Fleisher of the National Organisation for Foetal Alcohol Syndrome is inspired by her adopted daughter's health problems

*Susan Fleisher*  
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Susan Fleisher speaks at conferences and delivers training around the UK and overseas to raise awareness of foetal alcohol syndrome

Our charity, the [National Organisation for Foetal Alcohol Syndrome](#), supports people who have foetal alcohol-related disabilities as well as their families, and I'm a pretty hands-on type of person so no two days are the same.

The people that we support have been born with foetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) because their mothers drank during pregnancy. FASD is a spectrum of lifelong conditions and symptoms range from reduced intellectual ability and attention deficit disorder to heart anomalies.

Most women and their partners don't realise the damage that can be done if their babies are exposed to alcohol before birth, and so a large part of my role is spent raising awareness of this fact.

To educate the public and health professionals about the risks of drinking in pregnancy I speak regularly at conferences about the prevention of FASD, and deliver training around the UK and overseas. We also run support groups for families who have children with FASD.

Last week I was up at 3.30am to travel to Wales and do a presentation at a conference for foster carers of children with FASD. The next day I was presenting information to midwives in Newcastle.

My previous experience as a television producer for Oprah Winfrey and Ricki Lake prepared me for a demanding role, but my knowledge of production has also been helpful as we do a lot of work to raise awareness of FASD through film and documentaries.

At the moment I'm busy promoting a new online toolkit for GPs, which uses short films alongside other information to help them advise women to avoid alcohol while pregnant or trying to conceive, as well as providing advice on how to support parents and carers of children affected.

GPs play an important role in the prevention and diagnosis of FASD, so I'm also busy organising free training for GPs with Dr Raja Mukherjee, an internationally acclaimed expert in FASD in London next month.

My own FASD journey began after I got divorced and I adopted my adorable daughter. I knew her parents were alcoholics, but, I had no idea that their drinking would adversely affect the rest of her life. She is now 25 and struggles every day.

It is difficult to watch an intelligent young person struggle with challenges that could have been prevented if her birth mother had known to avoid alcohol while she was pregnant.

Though I am passionate about my work, my real raison d'être is my daughter. She is my first priority. I arrange my work around her as much as possible. My office is a five-minute walk from our house so my daughter can get to the office or I can get home when she needs me. When she is at college or enjoying her activities such as Riding for the Disabled I try to make time to see my friends.

My daughter turned on the light in my life; she was the inspiration for the charity.

When I have time, I enjoy a wonderful varied circle of friends from astrologers to lords, teachers and actors. Two years ago I found a way to better balance my demanding life when I discovered the local Sunday morning Quaker friends meeting.

The quiet meetings help me reflect and make better sense of my life.

I still have many miles to walk and much to do before I sleep. But thanks to my parents I am essentially an optimist and feel confident that I can help make my tiny corner of the world a little bit better.