

My name is Mary and I am a 31-year-old woman living with FASD.

When I was little in school I remember that I could do one thing one day and then the next day I couldn't remember how to do it, or that I did it at all. This used to make my teachers upset with me. I saw a speech therapist because I had trouble pronouncing some words.

When I was little they put me in a booth setting in my classroom. This was helpful because I couldn't see outside or anything else around the classroom, but I could still hear all the noises, like the birds outside, or cars squeaking. I was able to focus on my schoolwork a little better.

I got suspended a lot for fighting because I would defend the other kids who didn't know how to fight. I was confused because my grandma said that girls shouldn't fight, but my grandpa said I was good. So I didn't know which one was right

When I was little the teachers were good, but when I got to middle school it was more difficult. The teachers didn't have any patience. They would say "I just told you what to do, weren't you paying attention"? They thought I wasn't listening, but I was. I would pay attention and then something else would catch my eye and I would focus on that instead.

It wasn't only at school, it was at home as well. They would give me instructions for a list of chores, but it was too much information at once so I would get confused on what I was supposed to be doing. If they told me one at a time, I could do it.

I found out I had FASD when I was 28 years old. My sister saw a newspaper clipping from the Cowichan Valley FAS Society, and thought that it sounded a little like me. She read it to me, and then we called the Society and made an appointment to come in. I asked my Grandma and my two aunts about when my mom was pregnant with me. They confirmed that my mom consumed alcohol while she was pregnant with me. I started to learn more about FASD and how it related to me.

When I found out that I had FASD I felt better because then I knew why I was the way I was. It felt nice to have an answer to what was going on. About a month or two later, I felt sad and mad because I knew that I'm not going to get better. This is a lifelong disability. I felt angry and asked myself why did my mom drink when she was pregnant? She knew she was pregnant but drank anyways. I don't think she knew it could hurt me.

I have lived on my own but I am staying with my family right now. I sometimes have trouble remembering things like to take my laundry out of the dryer or to

turn off burners on the stove. It's helpful to have people remind me, and repeat the directions. When I have a place of my own again, I will be putting up signs around my home to help remind me.

I sometimes get confused about people's feelings. If someone is angry I often think, they're mad at me, even if they're not.

I don't remember street names, but I can remember landmarks. So when giving me directions it's easier to say that the FAS office is across the street from the movie theatre, instead of saying it's in the Canada building on Canada Ave.

Something that I have difficulty with on a daily basis is noise. Noises sound louder in my head than they really are and I sometimes get headaches from it. I can hear the noises from the fans in stores and offices, and the computers make a buzzing sound. When the cars have squeaky breaks and make high pitch noises it's hard to concentrate on my biking. I listen to music on my headphones so that I can focus on that instead of the other noises around me.

I volunteer at the Society and help them with workshops, FASD Inclusion Walkabouts, stamping the bags for the local beer and wine stores, and anything else that they ask of me.

I used to volunteer at the Elder's Building for Cowichan Tribes. I helped set the tables, serve the food and beverages, and cleanup afterwards

I've worked in a few different places. I worked at Field's and helped them stock shelves and tidy the store. I used to work at the Native Gym doing some janitorial work for them. At Duncan Electronics, I learned how to clean the game decks and helped with store maintenance. I have trouble counting money. I can count the little amounts but when we start getting into the larger amounts, I have some trouble.

In my spare time, I love to read true stories about people and the things that happened to them. I love to ride my bike, this is how I get wherever I need to go. Each year I go on a big bike ride and try to see how far I can go. Last year I made it as far as Westhome and back to Duncan. This year I'm hoping to make it to Chemainus and back. I love to draw and give people samples of my artwork. I like to watch movies and spend time with people who have a good sense of humour, like my friends at the Cowichan Valley FAS Society.