

Pregnancy & infant loss awareness month

Amanda Brown for The Brunswickan

New life is what it is ultimately all about says Anya Duxfield. Previously employed by the Department of Engineering at the University of New Brunswick, Duxfield now devotes a large portion of her life to creating awareness on pregnancy and infant loss.

Statistics from Canadian Perinatal Health Report (2003) stated that 25 to 50 per cent of all pregnancies “end in miscarriage or loss.” In 2000, 1.5 Canadian infants in 1000 did not survive “their first year of life.” The root of such losses span from miscarriage, neonatal, and infant death to genetic abnormalities, premature birth, SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome), and pregnancy complications

Duxfield experienced a loss in November of 2004. When searching for an organization that would assist her to recover, she discovered that unlike the United States which has various programs available such as March of Dimes, Canada has none. A web search led Duxfield to Terra-Lynn Coggan; together they, with others, have the goal of “raising awareness of the frequency of Pregnancy and Infant loss in our communities and the real grief that mothers and families are suffering. There needs to be more acknowledgement of the issue and more support for the individuals going through it.”

Duxfield feels the situation is misunderstood because there is a lack of knowledge. She explains that the creation of an organization would provide monetary aid for research and support efforts along with awareness in communities. Aftercare for these women is essential and it is not always available. Many believe they need to get on with life and do not acknowledge the impact their loss has made.

Speaking from her experience, Duxfield explained that, “no one can know the grief and confusion of the mother in those first hours and days.” Pregnancy and infant loss addresses a different dimension of grief that is attached with the loss of hopes and dreams. It is unhealthy to ignore this grieving process; doing so creates an underlying thread that will always be present.

Long term depression can evolve from not having grieved properly. Postpartum depression can affect approximately 30 per cent of new mothers. According to Statistics Canada, this common problem attaches itself to roughly 100,000 women yearly. Duxfield commented that this would compound the grief of loss. There would be confusion on the individual’s part over what the exact cause of suffering was.

“It takes a good doctor or counselor to separate grief from postpartum,” says Duxfield.

In 1988, President Ronald Regan declared October to be National Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month. This month is now acknowledged worldwide and October 15 has become Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day. On October 12, the Honorable Elvy Robichaud, Minister of Health and Wellness declared 15 to be officially recognized as Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day. Terra-Lynn Coggan, who is based in

Saint John, had been contacting her MLA to push for this motion since 2003. Robichaud, in the declaration, stated that “New Brunswickers who suffer from pregnancy and infant loss need emotional support from family and friends.” Provincial residents need to be informed and educated in order to respond with compassion to affected families. The declaration made mention that “health care providers and other professionals... can better serve New Brunswick families if they have special training.”

Presently, the DECH offers three services to bereaved mothers: baby memory books dubbed “Little Footprints,” baby photos and memory boxes. In 2000, Lynda Pyne of the Fredericton Decorative Painters Association contacted the Social Work Department at the Chalmers Hospital and offered to donate memory boxes, tole painted and decorated by members of their association, to the regions infant and bereavement program. Since they started painting and distributing the memory boxes in the fall of 2000, between 350 to 400 boxes have gone out to the various birthing units in Region 3.