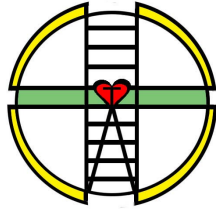


Club COSTA



Circle of Support for Teens and Adults
with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

The acronym COSTA stands for Circle of Support for Teens and Adults. Club COSTA is a group in Southern Arizona made up of self-advocates who have Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) and their support persons. Most teens and adults with FASDs need support persons, who might be parents or guardians or mentors, who help guide them through life. The group is an outgrowth of the Fetal Alcohol Resource Center, part of the Division of Developmental Disabilities in Southern Arizona. Teresa Kellerman, director of the Center, is a member of The Arc and is a certified trainer with the SAMHSA FASD Center for Excellence.

The idea of a self-advocates group for young adults with FASD began with the formation of SAFA – Self Advocates with FASD in Action, a national group started with a partnership between The Arc and the SAMHSA FASD Center for Excellence about a year ago. Teresa Kellerman and her son John have been integrally involved with the SAFA project from the beginning. John is one of ten self-advocates who were invited to national organizational meetings. The Kellermans had been thinking about starting a local support group for youth and adults with FASD to help them learn about their disability and to guide them and their families in finding needed services and support. The SAFA project motivated the Kellermans to follow through with their dream to start a local self-advocates group.

As part of her job, Kellerman provides trainings to the general public and conducts screenings for FASD on children and adults of all ages. With no budget, she manages to host two monthly support groups for families raising children with FASDs, and conducts events for FASD Awareness Day each year. The more awareness she raises, the more requests she receives to do trainings. The more trainings she does, the more referrals she gets for screenings. There are more and more young people being identified as having FASDs who do not qualify for or do not receive appropriate support services. They are at risk of failing in school, getting in trouble with the law, having substance abuse problems, and mental health issues. The more support services they receive, the better their chances of avoiding these outcomes.

In an effort to keep these teens and young adults from falling through the cracks of the health and disability service systems, Kellerman formed the local group Club COSTA to provide a venue for individuals with FASD and their mentors to meet. With no funding, she sought help in the community. A local church, St. Paul's United Methodist Church, offered to host the group's meetings. Donations from a few caring individuals provide funds to cover expenses. Not only do these families receive support and information, they also have a place to socialize and have fun in a safe environment. They have discussions and group exercises to increase understanding about the nature of FASD. Serious issues can be identified and resolved, fun games and magic tricks lighten the mood. And everyone enjoys lunch together. The joy everyone feels from being accepted and understood is heartwarming.

The group is open to teens and adults with FASD who are already connected to the Fetal Alcohol Resource Center and have been through the screening process with their parents/mentors. If you know someone who might be interested in Club COSTA, have them call Teresa Kellerman at the Fetal Alcohol Resource Center (520) 638-2625 or email tkellerman@azdes.gov.

A flyer for Club COSTA is attached. For more info on the Fetal Alcohol Resource Center, visit www.fasarizona.com.