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MEDIA RELEASE

Ontarian activist to host national FASD conference

(March 12, 2025) A national conference on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is coming to Toronto this October, featuring Ontario activist, RJ Formanek, as the conference's Master of Ceremonies. The Canada FASD Conference brings together individuals with lived experience, researchers, and practitioners to explore a wide range of topics related to FASD.

RJ is a renowned advocate for people with FASD. Diagnosed with FASD in his late forties, RJ Formanek was startled to find how many of the strategies he had used throughout life were shaped by his disability. While studying FASD at the Anishinabek Educational Institute in North Bay, Ontario, he discovered that sharing his experiences helped others better understand the condition - an insight that propelled him into advocacy.

RJ is the co-founder of Red Shoes Rocks, an advocacy group raising global awareness of FASD. The red shoes represent standing out and embracing individuality. His advocacy work highlights the potential, resilience, and unique strengths of individuals with FASD. For RJ, red shoes symbolize the power of being true to oneself.

FASD is a lifelong, often underrecognized disability affecting an estimated 4% of Canadians - more than Autism, Cerebral Palsy, and Down syndrome combined. The Canada FASD Conference will bring together people from across the country and internationally to network, learn, and advocate for increased awareness and support.

The conference will cover a range of topics, including FASD prevention, diagnosis and assessment, child welfare, wellness, housing, justice, and supporting at-risk populations.

Quotes

RJ Formanek said: "The Canada FASD Conference is crucial to enabling a greater understanding of FASD and how it impacts so many people in so many different ways. I look forward to meeting not only friends I know, but people who are also on the same path, looking to expand not only our knowledge base, but also our personal connections. Those come best from face-to-face meetings such as the Canada FASD Conference, and those connections can save lives in the long run. Being a part of this conference is a huge honour, as an advocate and a person living on the FASD spectrum, and I look forward to seeing the cutting-edge research that once again shows how Canada leads the world in FASD understanding."

Audrey McFarlane, B.CR, MBA, Executive Director, the Canada FASD Research Network said:

"We are thrilled to have RJ as our Master of Ceremonies for this year's Canada FASD Conference. His advocacy work speaks for itself, and his passion and enthusiasm will be an invaluable asset to this event. RJ's role reflects the very heart of this conference, where individuals with lived experience of FASD are not just included but are central to every session."

About CanFASD:

CanFASD is Canada's first national Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder research network. CanFASD works collaboratively with researchers and partners across the nation to address complexities of FASD. Our mission is to produce and maintain national, collaborative research for all Canadians, leading to prevention strategies and improved support services for people affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

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For more information on the Canada FASD Conference, please visit: <https://canfasd.ca/canada-fasd-conference/>