



Tristan

Directed by Melanie Hogan, produced by Jane Latimer. Lililwan Project, 2012. The film will be shown at the 11th session of the United Nations Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues in New York, USA, May 7–18, 2012

In Brief

Film *Tristan's story*

The dangers of drinking alcohol in pregnancy are often raised by the medical profession and the media, but there is less awareness about the lifelong effects harmful alcohol consumption can have on the neurodevelopment of children exposed to alcohol before birth. *Tristan* aims to highlight this issue by documenting the plight of a 12-year-old Indigenous Australian boy who has a severe form of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD).

Tristan lives in the remote area of Fitzroy Crossing in Western Australia. In many ways, he's just like other boys his age—he loves Australian rules football and runs riot with his younger siblings. But Tristan faces a constant battle with the tasks of daily life. Melanie Hogan's heartbreaking film tells how Tristan's aunt, Marmingee, and her husband, Geoff, had to step in to care for Tristan when his mother, Susan, was struggling with alcoholism. Susan

openly regrets having “taken alcohol while carrying Tristan”, but is able to be an active part of his family life and is working with his carers and other community leaders to raise awareness of FASD.

Marmingee and Geoff's other foster children, Tylon and Quaden, also have a FASD, although they are less severely affected. Tristan struggles the most, with communication and attention problems. He needs regular breaks when asked to focus on a task, and often needs instructions to be repeated. He seems to be at his most relaxed and independent when working as a boundary umpire at local Australian rules football matches, where he gets to earn his own money. But Geoff worries about what will happen to Tristan as he gets older and how he will integrate into society as an adult. He fears that police officers or other figures of authority might not recognise Tristan's inability to communicate or to understand his own actions and their consequences.

Ironically, Tristan thinks he might want to be a policeman in the future, but first and foremost, he says, he just wants to be “normal”.

The film is part of the ongoing advocacy to support FASD-affected children across Australia and arises from the Lililwan Project, a joint community effort initiated by June Oscar from Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre and Maureen Carter from Nidilingarri Cultural Health Services in Fitzroy Crossing with partners at the George Institute for Global Health and the University of Sydney's Discipline of Paediatrics and Child Health. Australia still has to formally recognise FASD as a disability, so funds have yet to start reaching affected children across the country. *Tristan* concludes with a simple message from June Oscar: the attitude of society towards FASD must change, since the children with the condition can't.

Tony Kirby