

Award-Winning



FOOTPRINTS INFERTILITY & PREGNANCY LOSS SUPPORT SOCIETY

For Immediate Release

Local Nonprofit Society Raising Awareness for National Fertility Week

(April 24, 2023 Nanaimo, BC) This year's Canadian Fertility Awareness Week is April 23-29 and the theme is Redefining (In)Fertility. The Footprints: Infertility & Pregnancy Loss Support Society is on a mission to normalize these conversations and help educate and support Nanaimo citizens regarding reproductive health matters.

It is a significant observance that aims to raise awareness about infertility, the non-existent support structures, and the challenge those encountering fertility face. Infertility doesn't discriminate, affecting anyone regardless of race, religion, sexuality, or economic status. The initiative encourages sharing of infertility stories or reproductive issues to change the narrative and get the necessary support to make the journey easier. People yearning to be parents should not be left alone in the struggle. This week is a period of time to have meaningful conversations around infertility—when you're not able to get pregnant after at least one year of trying. It's meant to raise awareness about a devastating issue that 1 in 6 Canadians struggle with. Infertility isn't just a medical issue; it's also a mental health one.



“ *There are still silence barriers surrounding infertility. It's taboo and there is a level of shame and isolation regarding reproductive health. Footprints was established in 2018 to help normalize these conversations and move the needle on awareness and support.* Blaise Hunter – Founder of Footprints

Blaise Hunter founded this registered nonprofit organization after experiencing secondary infertility and three miscarriages of her own. She experienced a lack of empathy from the system and the depression the struggle brings. Determined to heal her heart and ensure no other person goes what she went through, Blaise became the change. Footprints was born and Blaise created regular peer support group meetings which transitioned to online during the pandemic and continues today with her Facebook group. A partnership with various groups and local businesses allowed for handmade support bags to be given out on the frontlines and mailed all over the world free of charge. These bags include mental health resource tools, a certificate of life, a Footprints bracelet, a copy of Blaise's book *Heroine*, and helpful information for men and women to assist them in this process. These packages are distributed throughout Nanaimo, Vancouver Island, and across northern Alberta.

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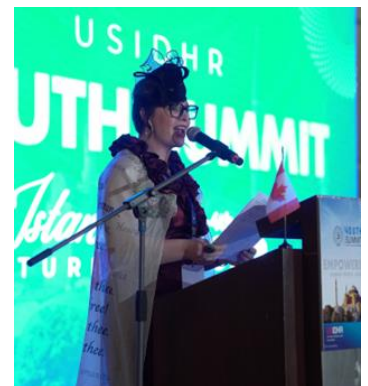
Blaise also erected a standing memorial for parents to honour the memory or dream of their babies. For the last six years, Footprints has been leading the charge when it comes to impactful, inclusive, and inspiring change for reproductive health education and support. In current times, there are limited conversations, policies, or resources that bring awareness to this vital topic. Blaise is a best-selling author and a certified reproductive health rights advocate. Instead of being a silent stat, she became a trailblazer for social justice. She is the go-to expert in her field and was selected to represent Canada at an International Human Rights Summit in Istanbul, Turkey in 2022 to speak about her work.

The Footprints team is developing new workplace reproductive health guidelines to change the status quo. There is insufficient language that addresses how a company handles reproductive health and pregnancy loss. With the relentless work Blaise has accomplished in BC and across Canada, she is normalizing reproductive health and championing a culture of health, safety, and equity for all. Footprints is fostering relationships with politicians, employers, funeral homes, healthcare facilities, and industry leaders to establish a human rights culture and improve fertility care in our communities. Most people don't know what reproductive health is. Most of us don't even know much about our own bodies and therefore cannot advocate for humane treatment or bodily autonomy. The Footprints initiative fights to protect parents' rights and makes our angel babies count. Blaise is on a crusade to improve the systems on the frontlines in BC ensuring parents get the proper fertility care, information, and emotional support. Footprints provides an inclusive platform that addresses all matters of reproductive health.



www.blaisehunter.com/footprints greets people with comprehensive support and assistance on how to navigate various reproductive health issues. Nowhere else does this kind of complete online resource exist. The ingenuity of Footprints has opened the door to partnerships with various stakeholders. Blaise won the Women of Influence Award, Canadian Women of Inspiration Award, and the Global Women's Champion Award for her philanthropic efforts. Footprints is a safe place to learn about reproductive health rights as well as heal, share, and gather information on how to navigate through this journey. No longer do we need to feel ashamed or sit alone with our pain.

The purpose of Footprints is to promote health, the advancement of education, and provide public amenities to increase the understanding of reproductive health rights and the importance of upholding them. *"Find Your Voice,"* states Footprints Chair, Blaise Hunter. "This is a challenge for everyone. We need people going through infertility to discover safety and courage to speak up and we also require society to engage in the conversation and not shy away from the awkwardness of it. We all need to lean in. Let's have an open-ended conversation with family, friends, and co-workers and put it at the forefront of the discussion in a loving, non-threatening, and supportive way. What people usually need is for someone to listen and acknowledge their feelings. To support a friend with infertility, educate yourself, and remember, it's more helpful to hold space and listen than to try and say the perfect words."



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Here are some tips for sensitive and supportive communication with someone facing infertility:

1. Validate their feelings.

A study suggests most people with infertility do not share their struggles with family or friends. This secrecy increases their feelings of depression, anxiety, or low self-esteem. Asking open-ended questions like, "How can I best support you?" or "What can I do for you during this time?" shows that you want to understand their situation and can open the door to a helpful dialogue.

2. Show up for them.

Give them grace and space and allow them to share at the pace that they feel comfortable sharing. Say, "Maybe I can't fully understand or relate to your experience, but I can sit in the mess with you, and you can lean on me."

3. Don't minimize their condition.

Don't minimize the pain and sorrow a couple may be experiencing. Being overly positive about a situation does not help either. There's no certainty when facing infertility and just saying, "I'm sorry you are going through this hardship," is a soft landing for someone suffering.

4. Don't compare.

Every person's journey with infertility is different. Comparing someone's situation with someone else's can create stress and make them feel as if they're doing something wrong.

Let's start the conversation and amplify the voices of people across Canada dealing with infertility. This week is about allowing safety and room to talk about the issues too many of us face, and ensure we continue supporting those most in need. If anyone is looking for resources or wants a free support bag, please contact the Footprints team.

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