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October shines light on pregnancy and infant loss awareness

02:04 / 02:04

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Updated Oct. 21, 2021 6:26 p.m. PDT
Published Oct. 21, 2021 2:42 p.m. PDT

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CALGARY - When Stephanie and Paul Aitken found out in October 2019 they were going to be parents, they shared the news right away with family and friends.

“We didn’t hold back telling people we were pretty excited,” said Stephanie Aitken.

Stephanie said the whole pregnancy was healthy and she went into natural labour at full term.

But there were complications during labour.

Their daughter Leia died one day after she was born.

“It was the worst imaginable thing you could experience. It was devastating beyond belief,” Stephanie said. “Coming home and seeing the nursery or seeing her cradle, things like that were excruciating.”

“Nothing prepares you for that sort of event,” said Paul Aitken.

“Even myself working as a funeral director, I had no preparation for

that actually being a reality even though I work every day in the death profession,” said Paul.

The Strathmore couple is sharing their story as part of pregnancy and infant loss awareness month.

“This month is so important because it starts to have this conversation that pregnancy and infant loss happens. It’s far more common than anyone realizes and the impact of these losses are profound,” said Aditi Loveridge, founder and CEO of the pregnancy and infant loss support centre.

Approximately one in four pregnancies end in loss.

According to the government of Alberta, in 2020, 418 stillbirths were recorded.

There were 394 stillbirths in 2019, 412 in 2018.

Loveridge said while there’s no direct link between an increase in stillbirths and COVID-19, she said one reason may be because pregnant women may be holding off some doctors appointments and feel nervous about going into health care clinics.

Loveridge said the reality is many families grieve in silence because so many don’t reveal they are pregnant before the 12 week mark.

“It’s such a stigmatized and quiet issue.”

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But Loveridge says that needs to change.

Loveridge has gone through her own pregnancy loss journey and now lends her support to other families.

The pregnancy and infant loss support centre offers a helpline that immediately connects someone to peer volunteers. There are also support groups and counselling.

“People are not talking about the actual impacts that often has on a person’s mental, spiritual, emotional well-being and it’s deeply impactful,” said Loveridge.

Stephanie Aitken said she reached out because she needed help finding a way to cope.

“I knew I needed help because it’s just your whole world has

exploded. You don't know who you are anymore. You don't know how to function. You don't know how to move on," she said.

"It's important for guys to talk about their loss journey or even their fatherhood journey as well because their input and their part of the process is important...their loss is real as well," said Paul.

Stephanie said it's been beneficial for her to have access to support after learning she was pregnant again to help process the grief and anxiety.

The couple welcomed a baby girl three months ago.

You can find more information about the [Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support Centre online](#).