

Offering a Real Alternative

“Pregnant? Worried? 1-888-LIFE AID.” For a pregnant 16-year old, that simple television ad may be the link between the desperation she feels and the support she needs in order to choose life for her baby.

The last decade has brought unprecedented growth in the number of Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPCs) across Pennsylvania—centers that provide the counseling, shelter, food, clothing, adoption information and listening ear that give young women a viable alternative to abortion. And women are responding. During this past decade, the number of pregnant women in Pennsylvania who chose life over abortion has risen 5 percent—that’s roughly 70,000 more babies and children who are living and breathing today.

Amazingly, that’s not good news to everyone. Some in the pro-abortion movement cannot believe that a young woman, faced with the option to abort or give life to her child, would carry her baby to term unless she was duped or coerced into doing so. To explain away this growing success story, the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League (NARAL) has embarked on a major campaign to convince lawmakers, judges, the media and the public that CPCs “intimidate women into carrying pregnancies to term.”

NARAL’S Candid Agenda

Their attack, which began with pooling the strategic efforts and ideas of state pro-abortion chapters, has resulted in a handbook with no hidden agenda--*A Step by Step Guide: Unmasking Fake Clinics*. In it, they accuse that CPCs, which they term “fake” clinics, “lure women to their facilities under false pretenses, deprive them of accurate information needed to make a fully informed choice, and use fear tactics to dissuade them from choosing legal abortion. They are anti-abortion and anti-choice.”

Kurt Entsminger, general counsel for CareNet, a national network of CPCs and other pro-life groups, explained, “NARAL is very explicit about its ultimate goals... It intends to publicize, legislate and litigate against pregnancy centers in any way it can.”

NARAL exposes its detailed strategy in the guide: instructing volunteers to (1) pose as fake clients at CPCs in order to harass and gather information against them, (2) investigate CPCs’ advertising practices, (3) research the center’s finances through 990 requests (tax forms CPCs are required to make available), and (4) cultivate stories about client mistreatment. With the information they gather and

propaganda provided by NATRAL, local volunteers are charged to wage an offensive battle against CPCs through their legislators, newspapers, public-awareness campaigns and potentially, lawsuits. The guide provides such resources as sample letters to the editor, phone scripts, petitions, and anti-CPC posters.

Confronted with such a blatant attack on their life-affirming efforts, representatives from CareNet, pro-life groups, and pregnancy centers across the nation met this summer to develop a mutual response strategy. They confronted the challenge with a detailed defense plan, *Serving Clients with Care and Integrity: A Step-by-Step Campaign*, a handbook to quip pregnancy centers to ward off pro-abortionists’ legal and political attacks while improving their client service, covering their efforts with prayer, strategically placing their centers and fine-tuning marketing practices to reach more women in need.

“CPCs are growing in strength and influence, and they are effective,” noted Entsminger. “They’re making a difference. If they weren’t, NARAL wouldn’t be putting forth its best effort to shut them down.”

THE CPC Success Story

Clearly, the success of efforts that provide women viable alternatives to abortion is behind the pro-abortion assault. NARAL’s own guide notes that not only are CPCs “growing in number and visibility,” they are outpacing the abortion industry. “Nationwide, CPCs far outnumber abortion providers... [In] Pennsylvania, there are over three times as many CPCs as abortion providers.”

That Pennsylvania was singled out in NARAL’s national strategic guide speaks to the unique success of efforts in our Commonwealth to help women in need. Since the 1970s, a number of private pregnancy centers, operated and funded by caring individuals, have offered the support services young women needed in order to carry their babies to term instead of aborting them. Under Gov. Robert Casey’s administration, he and pro-life legislative leaders designated funding for “alternatives to abortion” in the state budget to counterbalance the “family planning” monies given to Planned Parenthood and other pro-abortion groups. As the late Casey described the mission of compassion for young women, “Our business is to fight the poison of hopelessness with love.”

“It’s a social-service success story,” remarked Kevin Bagatta, Esq., President and CEO of Real

Source: Citizen Magazine, PA Family Institute, November 2001

Alternatives, which since 1997 has administered the “alternatives to abortion” funding through Project Women In Need (WIN). Comparing it to the state-funded social services we now have for domestic violence and rape victims, Bagatta explained that the CPC movement began when compassionate citizen groups reached out to uniquely vulnerable people (women facing unplanned pregnancy) to offer counseling and support. The state then recognized the social service need being met by these groups and provided funding to help them grow. Now the 110 centers which accept state funding are closely monitored to ensure compliance with the Department of Public Welfare’s client service and advertising standards; there’s nothing “fake” about CPCs.

A Model of Compassion

The success of Pennsylvania’s pregnancy centers is due to the compassionate willingness of counselors to understand the woman who feels trapped into choosing abortion and to meet her where she is. “This is America at its best,” notes Bagatta. “This is a woman taking the time to love another woman who is a stranger and offering to struggle with her. It doesn’t get more compassionate than this.

Most teenage girls have aspirations that include college and a rewarding career, dreams of a husband and a family. Met with an unintended pregnancy at age 17, however, they fear the more likely possibility of being forced into early single motherhood and poverty--without prospects for a career and without a husband--if they choose life for their infant. It is the goal of CPCs to show young women that an unintended pregnancy need only be a detour, not a dead-end, in her path to reaching her goals. The center then provides the practical tools, counseling, resources and aid that empower her to carry her baby to term, supports her through the decision to either parent or place the child for adoption, and extends its services to mother and child for 12 months after the baby’s birth.

The very personal nature of the support CPCs offer is especially significant in light of a study published in David C. Reardon’s *Aborted Women: Silent No More*, which reported that a full 83 percent of women who chose abortion wouldn’t have if one person--a boyfriend, parent, doctor, social worker, friend or counselor--had encouraged them to carry the baby.

Perhaps that’s why Real Alternatives is winning the fight to save babies. Pennsylvania now has 213 centers to serve women facing unintended pregnancies, 110 of which are funded by the state through Real Alternative’s Project WIN program. The number of women served in these centers has doubled since 1996 to well over 13,000 per year.

“If you offer women alternatives to abortion, they choose them,” Bagatta explains. “We are proud of what we do, but we want to do more. There are 34,000 women still having abortions in Pennsylvania each year.”

Crisis pregnancy centers across Pennsylvania rely on the support of local caring citizens who volunteer in their efforts, uphold them in prayer and contribute financially. You can find your local crisis pregnancy center by visiting www.realalternatives.org/pacenter.htm or www.pregnancycenters.org/pa.html or by looking in the local yellow pages.

“We talk a lot about “What Would Jesus Do?” Bagatta reflects. “I believe if Jesus were here He’d be moving furniture in crisis pregnancy centers.”