

# Pro-Woman and Pro-Life in South Dakota

## Care Net Pregnancy Resource Centers offer life-affirming choices

By Michael Barrick

*“This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. So choose life, so that you and your children may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19).*

Recently, The Washington Post – in a news report and in a nationally syndicated column – has lamented the lack of choices afforded to women seeking abortions in South Dakota. The newspaper makes this claim because there is only one day a week that an abortion clinic operates in South Dakota, in the state’s largest city, Sioux Falls.

What the newspaper has not reported is that women in South Dakota do have choices. That is because no less than four Care Net Pregnancy Resource Centers, located on both ends of the sparsely populated state, ensure that women are given choices – and accurate information about the effects of abortion – daily.

In Sioux Falls, there is the Alpha Center and the New Haven Pregnancy Care Center. Across the state, in Spearfish, is the Northern Hills Pregnancy Care Center. And, about 45 miles to the southeast of that center, in Rapid City, is the Care Net Pregnancy Resource Center.

Stacey Wollman, the executive director of the Rapid City PRC, rattles off the many services offered to women, babies – and yes, men – by their center.

Like most pregnancy care or resource centers, the Rapid City PRC provides women access to self-administered pregnancy tests. Wollman explained that if a woman discovers she is pregnant, the center will discuss pregnancy planning and also adoption options. She added, “If they ask about abortion, we give them accurate information about abortion and explain that this is a life.”

The parenting program is 11 weeks long, with one-on-one peer counseling. Those women that successfully complete the program earn a new crib and mattress for their newborn. The ministry also includes ongoing support and encouragement throughout and following the pregnancy. Wollman said, “Everything is about establishing relationships so that we can share relevant, accurate information about pregnancy, and also earn the right to be heard so that we can share the hope that we know – our faith in the Lord.”

The ministry also has an abstinence program called “Stop and Think,” which was developed by a pregnancy care center in Oregon. It is available for youths in schools and churches. She explained, “It helps them to think about the consequences of their actions. It helps them come to the right conclusion, to see that they don’t have to be under the influence of emotion. The emotion around sexual activity is very intense.”

Wollman acknowledged that some of the women that visit them may choose abortion. Obviously, many already have. So, the ministry also provides an Abortion Recovery Assistance program, based on Bible study and called, "Forgiven and Set Free." It too, is 11 weeks long, or can be covered during a weekend workshop. She explained, "It is designed to offer a support-group setting to help women having difficulty with their abortion experience."

As do most centers, the ministry also provides for material needs, such as maternity clothes, diapers, formula and other essential needs. Wollman explained that the ministry believes Scripture requires that Christians meet the physical needs of those to which they minister. It goes beyond that however, "These women are here for a reason. We want to know the nature of the crisis, to help them get connected to the right resources. So, it is a little bit of case management. We meet real needs, but also continue to build on those relationships."

This year, the ministry is developing a mentoring ministry for men. "We want to help with the guys, the boyfriends, the husbands that want encouragement," explained Wollman.

Also, within the next two to three years, the ministry hopes to add ultrasound. Staff will receive training through Focus on the Family. As Wollman noted, research has demonstrated that when women see the fetus through ultrasound, they are more likely to recognize that they are carrying a live person and hence, less likely to choose abortion. In fact, according to Focus on the Family, while only 30-percent of abortion-minded women that receive just counseling from a PCC will change their mind, 80 percent will reverse course if they see their child on an ultrasound.

The center also has a training and equipping ministry for local Christians. Wollman explained, "One of the things we've really been impressing upon local Christians is that this is a mission field. Regardless of where a woman is at, we welcome them. We're truly in a time in our nation that individuals have no point of reference for church or God. So, we really are on the front lines. We have an opportunity to share the love of Christ with individuals. That's exciting. That's a part of the ministry that is overlooked. Churches seem to miss that. We have an opportunity locally to have people trained for that one-on-one experience. There is so much growth that happens within us as we share the mercy and grace of God. It's just an awesome, awesome place to be."

Prayer is a critical part of the ministry as well. In fact, Wollman noted that concerted, concentrated and ongoing prayer has led the ministry to grow significantly in its nearly 21 years of existence. The ministry was established in 1985 in a small room on the third floor of an office building. "A group of parents and community members concerned that there was not anyplace for folks in crisis pregnancies to go to get accurate information established it," she explained.

Now the ministry is on the main drag of Rapid City, on Mt. Rushmore Drive. While Wollman is the only full-time staff member, there are two part-time workers, one who serves as the client services coordinator, another as the office manager. There are about 35 volunteers that put in 9,000 hours of service in 2005. They served 454 clients for a total of 877 visits in a city of about 60,000. South Dakota has about 750,000 residents.

All of the staff and volunteers, including the six board members, go through extensive Care Net training and certification, depending upon their roles. It is opened each weekday from 9 to 5, serves clients through appointments and walk-ins, and has a 24-hour hotline.

Wollman said, "Our goal is to fulfill the Great commission. We love the person where they are at. We are pro life and a life-affirming organization. But we are not just focused on that child. We are focused on the women. If she chooses abortion, she knows we'll be there for her. If she chose that, it would break our heart, but we will be here."

She added, "We're compassionate. We're caring. We're in the trenches. We work one person at a time doing all we can for that person as the Lord would want us to. We don't let our own fears and inadequacies stand in the way. We share our own experiences. We need to allow the Lord to use those to instruct others. We as believers must be active and light the world. We can't hide our light under the bushel. We need to get out of our holy huddles."

She continued, "We are pro-woman. We are pro-life."

Wollman offered, "I also experienced an unplanned pregnancy. I was engaged. I knew the Lord. I can relate. The Lord has used that vulnerability to relate to people. We all have issues in our life. We sin. But God is a god of grace. He will use our experiences to share that grace."

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