

The History of Pregnancy Help Centers in the United States

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1960's

- Entrepreneurial groups (often led by Roman Catholic physicians, nurses, social workers, and mothers) spring up to offer women alternatives to abortion in response to efforts to change state laws that protected unborn babies and women from abortion.
- Original centers offered hotlines, crisis intervention counseling, pregnancy tests, connection to community social services, housing in private homes. Small maternity homes also forming (as an alternative to large, institutional-type homes run by professional social service agencies).

1970's

- Affiliation organizations (with standards, training, and other resources) are formed. Birthright, founded in Canada, and Alternatives to Abortion International (now **Heartbeat International**) form in the USA.
- After Roe v. Wade, centers develop quickly in all 50 states.
- Centers stress care for women so they have the resources and support to have their babies. Small, faith-based maternity homes also grow in numbers.

1980's

- Evangelical pro-life group Christian Action Council (now **Care Net**) starts centers in North America.
- As needs of clients become greater, following a decade of abortion on demand, centers expand original "crisis intervention" model to include broader range of services: maternity support, classes, post-abortion support groups and Bible studies, abstinence counseling, and educational programs (to prevent the "need" for abortion).
- Centers come under scrutiny and charges against them by NARAL, Planned Parenthood, and others. Hearings held by Congressman Ron Wyden, but centers are prohibited from testifying in their defense.
- Additional organizations start, strengthen, and network centers: International Life Services, Baptists for Life, Sav-A-Life, Christian Life Resources, North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

1990's

- "Industry Standards" called "Our Commitment of Care" (over) adopted.
- **National Institute of Family and Life Advocates (NIFLA)** forms to provide legal education and training to centers; mission expands to help centers add medical services under licensed Medical Directors.
- Some centers become clinics and add pregnancy diagnosis through ultrasound; medical services expand to include STD testing and even prenatal care at some centers.
- Number of pregnancy centers, clinics, and maternity homes continues to grow.
- Centers undergo charges of false advertising and illegal practice of medicine, especially in New York. Unfounded charges eventually dropped by the New York Attorney General.

2000's

- Currently, 2300 pregnancy centers in the USA (with a wide range of educational and support services), including 620 with ultrasound and other medical services; 350 small maternity homes, and about 350 maternity support centers (offering primarily clothing and baby items). The vast majority are faith-based; all are non-profit, 501(c)(3) organizations, supported almost entirely by private donations.
- **Heartbeat** and **Care Net** found Option Line,[®] a professionally staffed, bi-lingual call center, operating 24/7. Receives about 20,000 phone calls, e-mails, and IM's per month. Connects those in need to centers, clinics, maternity homes, post-abortion programs. www.OptionLine.org or www.PregnancyCenters.org
- Charges against centers continue, led by NARAL, National Abortion Federation, Planned Parenthood; the Waxman Report and a Congressional bill (Maloney) introduced (2006) to regulate center advertising.
- Approximately 2 million Americans are served yearly, by professional staff and thousands of trained volunteers, providing confidential medical services, education, material aid, and a wide variety of care and support services, all at no cost to clients.