

# NATIONAL ABSTINENCE CLEARINGHOUSE

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“The male and female body are not anatomically suited to accommodate sexual relations with members of the same sex. Sexual practices in the homosexual lifestyle are considered very dangerous for disease, infection, etc. This lifestyle should not be encouraged as healthy or as an equal alternative to marriage.”

- *Abstinence 101*<sup>1</sup>

The National Abstinence Clearinghouse is the leading provider of technical assistance and curricula for abstinence-only educators and federal grantees. With offices in South Dakota and Washington, D.C., the Clearinghouse receives federal funding to promote the abstinence-only message with publications, merchandise and an annual abstinence-only conference. Unfortunately, the Clearinghouse’s material contains gender stereotypes, homophobic sentiments and misleading information. Its key staff members are no less controversial. Founder Leslee Unruh is not only a media-savvy abstinence activist, but also a crisis pregnancy center proprietor and an outspoken proponent of the South Dakota abortion ban.

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## *What You Should Know – Overview*

**Founded:** 1998

**Budget:** \$1,096,269<sup>2</sup>

**Government Grants:** \$86,161<sup>3</sup>

**Estimated Government Contracts:**  
\$553,682<sup>4</sup>

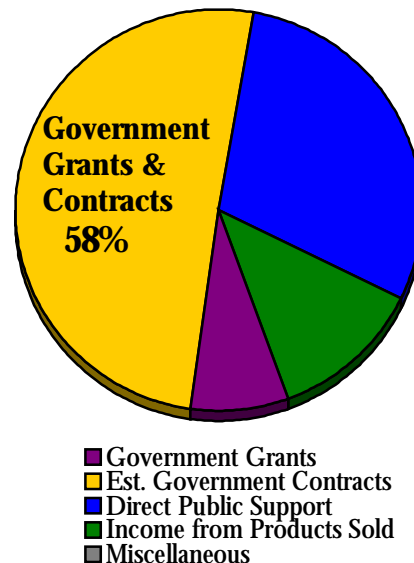
**Websites:** <http://www.abstinence.net>  
<http://www.abstinenceafrica.com>  
<http://www.truth4youth.com>

**Religious Affiliation:** None avowed, but a 2004 IRS 990 form makes religious references, stating that “god is the curegiver.”<sup>5</sup>

## *History*

The National Abstinence Clearinghouse describes its mission as to “to provide a central location where materials and training to effectively convey the abstinence-until-marriage message could be provided.”<sup>6</sup> The Clearinghouse is a fee-based membership organization, which collects and makes available to its members abstinence-only education materials and technical assistance through its multiple websites. The technical assistance the Clearinghouse has provided its members has been crucial in helping many of its members to secure federal abstinence-only grants. Its annual conference has featured high profile speakers such as Administration for Children and Families

**National Abstinence Clearinghouse  
2004 Budget**



Assistant Secretary Wade Horn, Health and Human Services Program Manager for Abstinence Michelle Lawler and the Heritage Foundation's Robert Rector. It is also infamous enough to have attracted the attention of publications as diverse as Playboy and Ms. Magazine, both of which published scathing reports from journalists who infiltrated the annual conference.<sup>7</sup> Finally, the Clearinghouse also publishes its own abstinence education materials and sells abstinence-themed merchandise including stickers, key chains, jewelry and posters.

The Clearinghouse's central role in national abstinence-only education has attracted intense scrutiny from government watchdogs and comprehensive sexuality education advocates. In October 2005, Rep. Henry A. Waxman (D-CA) requested that the Government Accountability Office launch investigate a \$2.7 million federal abstinence-only education evaluation grant the Clearinghouse received beginning in 2002. Waxman's chief concern was that there was a conflict of interest, since the grant funded the Clearinghouse to evaluate curricula of its federal abstinence-only grantees, many of which are fee-paying members of the Clearinghouse.<sup>8</sup> The Clearinghouse indirectly responded by stating that one of its long-term goals was to "dismantle abstinence education and sexual health myths perpetuated by the far left, and Rep. Waxman."<sup>9</sup>

The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) reports that Clearinghouse staff and directors are required to share similar values about abstinence, abortion and contraception. Physicians who serve on the Clearinghouse's Medical Abstinence Board must "not only support abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, but must also not 'counsel, prescribe, or distribute condoms or contraceptives to youth.'"<sup>10</sup> SIECUS further reveals that the National Advisory Council for the Clearinghouse includes members from Focus on the Family, the Heritage Foundation, the A.C. Green Youth Foundation, Coral Ridge Ministries, Heartbeat International and several other crisis pregnancy centers.<sup>11</sup>

Another source of concern is the Clearinghouse's close links with the Alpha Center, a federally funded abstinence-only grantee crisis pregnancy center. Leslee Unruh founded and serves as president of both organizations and they share the same address and board of directors.<sup>12</sup> The building that Unruh purchased as the headquarters of both of her organizations was previously a Planned Parenthood that had been the only facility in South Dakota that performed abortions. In July 2006, the Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington filed a complaint with the IRS against both the Clearinghouse and the Alpha Center alleging that they violated federal law by not disclosing lobbying activities, including advocating against abortion, lobbying for increased abstinence funding and publicly endorsing the school board candidacy of a Clearinghouse and Alpha Center board member.<sup>13</sup>

Unruh is also involved in South Dakota anti-abortion politics. Unruh heads Vote Yes for Life, an organization that campaigns in support of the state abortion ban.<sup>14</sup> Her husband Alan, who is also a director of both the Clearinghouse and the Alpha Center, served on the controversial South Dakota legislative task force that preceded the ban.

## ***Key Staff***

### **Leslee Unruh, Founder and President**

Prior to starting the Clearinghouse, Unruh founded the Alpha Center, a crisis pregnancy center, which is currently the recipient of a 3-year, \$294,962 federal abstinence-only grant. The Alpha

Center was fined after pleading no contest to misdemeanor charges of unlicensed adoption and foster care practices in 1987. Allegedly, Unruh was offering money to women who agreed to carry their pregnancies to term and then put their children up for adoption instead of having an abortion.<sup>15</sup>

Unruh remains active in anti-abortion politics, most recently playing a key role in the South Dakota abortion ban as head of Vote Yes for Life, which campaigns in favor of the ban.<sup>16</sup> According to Unruh, her passion for abstinence grew out of her personal experience with and subsequent opposition to abortion.<sup>17</sup> Since founding the Clearinghouse in 1998, Unruh has become an abstinence “expert,” appearing on the Oprah Winfrey show as well as numerous other radio and television shows.<sup>18</sup>

### **Alan Unruh, Director**

Chiropractor and husband of Clearinghouse Founder and President Leslee Unruh and serves as a Director for both the Clearinghouse and the Alpha Center. Like his wife, Dr. Unruh is a staunch anti-abortion activist, who was a member of a South Dakota legislative task force that laid the groundwork for the state’s abortion ban.<sup>19</sup>

### ***In Their Own Words***

#### **Anti-Abortion Bias**

"Abortion hurts women, abortion denies us our relationship with our child. All of us have a reason for being born."

- Leslee Unruh, Founder and President of the National Abstinence Clearinghouse<sup>20</sup>

#### **Curriculum Guidelines**

“Diagrams of internal organs are acceptable, but images or pictures of external genitalia in any form, whether diseased or healthy, can be detrimental to the health of young men and women’s minds.”

- *Abstinence 101*<sup>21</sup>

#### **HPV Vaccine**

"I personally object to vaccinating children when they don't need vaccinations, particularly against a disease that is one hundred per cent preventable with proper sexual behavior... Premarital sex is dangerous, even deadly. Let's not encourage it by vaccinating ten-year-olds so they think they're safe."

- Leslee Unruh, on the “risks” of the HPV vaccine<sup>22</sup>

#### **Masturbation**

“Sex therapists consider masturbation the first stage of sexual addiction for sex addicts. This practice should not be encouraged as a ‘safe’ sexual practice.”

- *Abstinence 101*<sup>23</sup>

## SOURCES

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<sup>1</sup> National Abstinence Clearinghouse, *Abstinence 101*, 88-90 (2005) cited via Letter from Rep. Henry A. Waxman to The Honorable David M. Walker (Oct. 6, 2005), *available at* <http://reform.democrats.house.gov/Documents/20051006114033-87692.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> *IRS 990 Form, FY 2004: National Abstinence Clearinghouse*, *available at* <http://www.guidestar.org/FinDocuments/2004/742/627/2004-742627071-01d25ea7-9.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* Note that this figure represents a significant decrease from government contributions for the previous year. In 2003, the Abstinence Clearinghouse received \$625,357 in government support or just over half of their entire annual budget. For the Annual budget for 2003, see *IRS 990 Form, FY 2003: National Abstinence Clearinghouse*, *available at* <http://www.guidestar.org/FinDocuments/2003/460/446/2003-460446416-1-9.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> *Supra* note 2. However, note that this figure is categorized as an estimate due to inconsistencies in the source referenced.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> *About Us*, National Abstinence Clearinghouse Website, *available at* <http://www.abstinence.net/about>.

<sup>7</sup> Christina Larson, *Pork for Prudes*, Washington Monthly, Sept. 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Rep. Henry A. Waxman to The Honorable David M. Walker (Oct. 6, 2005), *available at* <http://reform.democrats.house.gov/Documents/20051006114033-87692.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> *Supra* note 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Abstinence Clearinghouse Targets States to Push Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Agenda*, SIECUS Policy Update, May 2003, *available at* <http://www.siecus.org/policy/Pupdates/arch03/arch030059.html>.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> *Supra* note 2; *IRS 990 Form, FY 2004: Alpha Center*, *available at* <http://www.guidestar.org/FinDocuments/2004/363/347/2004-363347022-01c67843-9.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> *CREW Files IRS Complaint Against Anti-Choice, Abstinence-Only Orgs – Alpha Center and National Abstinence Clearinghouse*, Citizens for Ethics and Responsibility in Washington (CREW) Website, July 26, 2006, *available at* <http://www.citizensforethics.org/press/newsrelease.php?view=141>.

<sup>14</sup> Scott Waltman, *Rally Discusses Abortion Ban Effort of S.D. Legislature*, Aberdeen News, July 14, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> David Krantz, *Abstinence Powerhouse*, Argus Leader, July 20, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> *Supra* note 14.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> *Supra* note 15.

<sup>19</sup> Lauren Bans, *Anatomy of a Bad Law*, Nation (online only), Mar. 30, 2006, *available at* <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20060417/bans>.

<sup>20</sup> *Campaign Begins in S. Dakota Abortion Vote*, Reuters, July 12, 2006.

<sup>21</sup> *Supra* note 1.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Specter, *Political Science*, New Yorker, Mar. 13, 2006.

<sup>23</sup> *Supra* note 1.