



FEDERAL ABSTINENCE-ONLY FUNDING OF CRISIS PREGNANCY CENTERS (CPCs)

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Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPCs) are an increasingly powerful weapon in the arsenal of the anti-abortion movement – and they are being heavily funded with federal abstinence-only education money. Though CPCs often imitate actual abortion clinics, they do not provide abortion services and the majority are not medical clinics at all. CPCs typically use deceptive advertising tactics to mask their true anti-abortion agenda and to bring women into their facilities. Using misinformation, shame and scare tactics, these clinics seek to dissuade women who face unintended pregnancies from choosing abortion.

In recent years, federal and state government funding for CPCs has expanded dramatically. The largest federal funding stream for these centers is abstinence-only money. This funding has brought inexperienced CPC employees and volunteers into schools to teach abstinence-only programs, replacing trained sexual health educators who had provided comprehensive sexual education. Worse yet, this funding has enabled numerous CPCs to produce their own abstinence-only curricula. Many of these curricula have been criticized for being gender-biased, fear-based, scientifically inaccurate, overtly religious and anti-abortion.¹

Recognizing a CPC

CPCs, alternately referred to as Pregnancy Resource Centers, are anti-abortion centers run by groups with the goal of dissuading women from having abortions. CPCs often list themselves under the “abortion” or “abortion alternatives” heading in the telephone book and choose locations near schools, college campuses or in the immediate proximity of actual abortion clinics.² But rather than providing women with honest advice and information, they use propaganda and intimidation to prevent women from accessing or even considering abortion. CPCs create the false impression that they are abortion clinics by providing free pregnancy tests, “counseling” and sometimes ultrasounds, but in fact they never offer abortion services or even referrals to abortion providers.³ One CPC affiliate defends such deception, explaining “we do get people in here that think we do abortions. We don't feel compelled to be so explicit [on the phone] that the majority of women would hang up on us.”⁴

Once a “client” is lured inside with the promise of free health services, she is likely to be shown frightening videos about abortion or pictures of aborted fetuses and lectured about the risks of “post-abortion syndrome,” a condition which is not recognized by either the American Medical Association or the American Psychological Association.⁵ A recent report on CPCs prepared for Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA) found that 20 out of the 23 CPCs surveyed provided false or misleading information about the health risks of abortion, including inaccurate claims that abortion causes breast cancer and exaggerated risks of infertility and depression.⁶ All of the CPCs examined in the report received federal funding.

Sometimes delaying women from accessing abortion services is a tactic in itself. The Causeway Center for Women in New Orleans was sued in 2004 after several women claimed that its proprietor repeatedly promised and failed to provide abortions and lied to clients by telling them that an abortion was no longer legal at their stage in pregnancy.⁷ By the time these women found out the truth, it was too late and they were, in effect, forced to carry their pregnancies to term.

CPCs are often staffed by volunteers with little or no medical training and are completely unregulated by most states. Because of their deceptive appearance, some women may unwittingly believe that they have received unbiased medical advice and forego necessary legitimate medical services. In contrast, legitimate medical clinics that provide abortion services, such as Planned Parenthood, are heavily regulated.⁸

Brief History of CPCs

CPCs first began appearing in the 1970s in the aftermath of *Roe v. Wade* as a new strategy to deter women from abortion. In 1984, Robert Pearson, an anti-abortion activist and early leader of the CPC movement, authored “How to Start and Operate Your Own Pro-Life Outreach Crisis Pregnancy Center.” This widely used manual outlined the deceptive tactics that continue to characterize CPCs, including how to falsely portray a CPC as an abortion provider and how to evade client questions on the telephone.⁹

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, CPCs continued to multiply and gain power with the support of organizations such as Focus on the Family, the Christian Action Council (now known as Care Net) and the National Institute of Family Life Advocates (NIFLA). CPCs have formed tight knowledge sharing and financial support networks through funding and franchise organizations such as Birthright and Heartbeat International.

As a result, CPCs now outnumber abortion clinics. There are an estimated 2,300 to 3,500 CPCs currently operating in the US, while there are only 1,800 abortion clinics.¹⁰ In Texas, CPCs outnumber abortion clinics by four to one.¹¹

True to their origins, many CPCs have an explicitly conservative Christian agenda. For example, Care Net of DuPage, Illinois, a federal abstinence-only grantee, states its mission as “to serve Jesus Christ by working to prevent unplanned pregnancies.”¹² CPC networks are also exporting their deceptive and aggressive anti-abortion strategies internationally. A Heartbeat International affiliate in Zambia warns that post-abortion syndrome is a very real risk to Zambian women and pledges to open a CPC everywhere in the country that there is a branch of Planned Parenthood.¹³

CPCs as Abstinence-Only Educators

Under the Bush administration, federal funding of CPCs has increased dramatically. The largest source of federal funding for CPCs is abstinence-only education money. The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) estimates that over \$130 million in federal abstinence-only education money has gone to CPCs since 1982.¹⁴ Legal Momentum’s own research

confirms this, with over 12% of the largest abstinence-only funding stream dedicated to programs run by or affiliated with CPCs.

Solely because of the influx of government dollars, these small organizations have grown into booming businesses, “educating” thousands, if not millions of American youth either personally or through the independent use of the curricula they produce. All too often, false or misleading abstinence-only curricula are provided to or taught in schools by inexperienced volunteers from CPCs. These inadequate programs are increasingly replacing established, comprehensive sexual education programs taught by trained educators, which are often young people’s only source of accurate and honest contraceptive and sexual health information.

Federally funded abstinence-only programs are required to emphasize that all sex outside of marriage has grave emotional, psychological and economic consequences.¹⁵ In doing so, CPCs frequently rely on scare tactics and shaming as well as deliberately misleading information to scare teenagers away from sex. Such tactics are almost identical to those that they employ in their crisis pregnancy “services.” Their anti-abortion agenda is also often apparent in their abstinence-only curricula, evidenced in the distortion of the psychological and physical risks of abortion.¹⁶

Profiles of CPC-Connected Federal Abstinence-Only Grantees

An up-close look at three of the largest CPC-associated federal abstinence-only grantees provides a sampling of the deceptive and harmful tactics CPCs use nationwide and illustrates how government funding has nurtured their growth.

Why kNOw

Why kNOw was founded in 1991 as an abstinence-only program within AAA Women’s Services, a CPC based in Chattanooga, Tennessee. AAA Women’s Services is perhaps best known for protesting and successfully closing an adjacent abortion clinic and subsequently erecting a memorial to the “unborn” on the site.¹⁷

Thanks in part to generous and consistent federal funding, Why kNOw has since separated from AAA Women’s Services and now produces its own abstinence-only curriculum, which it claims is currently taught in 37 states.¹⁸ Why kNOw received at least \$699,855 in federal abstinence-only funds in 2005 alone, despite the fact that its curriculum has been heavily criticized for its gender bias and scientific inaccuracy.¹⁹ For example, the Why kNOw curriculum states that “women gauge their happiness and judge their success by their relationships. Men’s happiness and success hinge on their accomplishments.”²⁰

The curriculum’s statements on contraception and STDs are even more alarming. When discussing STDs, the textbook states that condoms fail to prevent HIV transmission 31% of the time,²¹ even though this particular finding was rejected by the Department of Health and Human Services and current scientifically accepted effectiveness estimates are closer to 85%.²² At another point, the curriculum asks, “Could condoms be just another stupid idea?”²³

Heritage Community Services

Another long-standing CPC-connected grantee is Heritage Community Services, a South Carolina-based abstinence-only educator and curriculum provider. Heritage's founder and President, Anne Badgley, began the organization as part of the Lowcountry Crisis Pregnancy Center, a CPC that she also founded and continues to run. Though they are ostensibly separate organizations, Heritage and Lowcountry CPC share the same address and key staff.

Heritage produces the "Heritage Keepers" abstinence-only curriculum, which is used in numerous states and the Caribbean, and has affiliated organizations in Maine (Heritage of Maine, formerly known as Character Counts of Maine) and Rhode Island (Heritage of Rhode Island) that also teach the "Heritage Keepers" curriculum. Altogether, Heritage organizations in these three states received an estimated 1.4 million abstinence-only dollars in 2005.²⁴ Despite heavy government support, the Rhode Island Department of Education removed the Heritage curriculum from public schools in reaction to public concerns about its gender bias and religious content.²⁵

National Abstinence Clearinghouse

The CPC connection to abstinence-only programs funded by the federal government extends beyond those simply providing abstinence-only curricula. One of the pioneers of the abstinence-only movement is not only a CPC founder and president, but also a leader in the South Dakota campaign to criminalize abortion. Leslee Unruh is the founder and president of the National Abstinence Clearinghouse, a long-standing federal grantee that provides curricula and capacity-building assistance for abstinence-only educators. This "assistance" includes a pamphlet that states that masturbation is "the first stage of sexual addiction" and that homosexuality is "very dangerous" and "should not be encouraged as healthy or as an equal alternative to marriage."²⁶

Unruh is also the founder and president of the Alpha Center, a South Dakota CPC and federal abstinence-only grantee with the same board of directors as the National Abstinence Clearinghouse.²⁷ The two organizations also share the same address,²⁸ previously home to a Planned Parenthood, which was then the only clinic in the state that publicly offered abortion services.²⁹ Unruh says she bought the property to "send a message to those who lost their children here that this building can be redeemed, and so can they."³⁰

Additionally, Unruh is a prominent supporter of the South Dakota abortion ban. She is the political director of Vote Yes for Life, which campaigns in favor of the South Dakota abortion ban.³¹ Her husband, Alan (a director of the National Abstinence Clearinghouse as well as the Alpha Center), served on the recent controversial legislative task force that laid the groundwork for the abortion ban.³²

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