



CRISIS PREGNANCY CENTER PROFILES

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Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPCs) are anti-abortion organizations that falsely convey the impression that they are actual abortion clinics while in fact they do not provide abortion services at all. Rather than providing women with honest information and services, these anti-abortion centers use misinformation, shame and scare tactics to dissuade women who face unintended pregnancies from choosing abortion. Though CPCs were initially an ad-hoc and scattered anti-abortion response to the legalization of abortion following *Roe v. Wade*, these centers are now highly organized, heavily funded, and outnumber actual abortion clinics. Currently, there are an estimated 2,300 to 3,500 CPCs currently operating in the US, while there are only 1,800 abortion clinics.¹

Worse yet, these centers are increasingly funded by both the federal and numerous state governments. Millions of dollars of federal and state-level abstinence-only funding is granted to CPCs each year. CPCs are also being granted government funding to purchase ultrasound machines and even to provide pregnancy support and reproductive health services, despite the fact they do not offer contraceptive services and the vast majority of CPCs are not medical clinics at all.

Legal Momentum examines the origins and activities of four of the most well established networks of crisis pregnancy centers operating in the United States and internationally.

BIRTHRIGHT

Founded: 1968

Religious Affiliation: Unclear

Number of Affiliates: 400

Motto: *It is the right of every pregnant woman to give birth, and the right of every child to be born.*

Birthright was established in Toronto in 1968 by self-described “busy housewife” Louise Summerhill with the motto: “It is the right of every pregnant woman to give birth, and the right of every child to be born.”³ In 1972, Birthright opened an administrative office in Atlanta and its first US crisis pregnancy center in Chicago.⁴ In 2003, the group claimed to have over 400 chapters across the US and Canada as well as in South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria and Colombia.⁵ Like many CPC networks, tracing Birthright affiliates is difficult because each affiliate has its own funding sources, grants, fundraising activities and annual budget. Additionally, some affiliates may be difficult to identify, because they do not bear the Birthright name and Birthright does not publicly identify its members.

More than other CPCs, Birthright’s carefully cultivated image depicts an organization that loves and cares for all women and their babies, not one that virulently hates abortion and will go to any lengths to save “unborn lives.” For example, Summerhill’s daughter, Louise R. Summerhill, plays up the claim that when Birthright established its first South African chapter in the 1970s it was “one of the only volunteer organizations in South Africa which helped whites, coloureds and blacks indiscriminately.”⁶ Unlike many other CPCs, Birthright denies associations with any religious or political groups.

Birthright also claims not to take political measures to limit abortion, including lobbying or picketing abortion clinics.⁷

Though this image of a kindler, gentler CPC is well crafted, it is far from accurate. In 2002, a Birthright chapter in Victor, New York agreed to stricter advertising and operating restrictions to avoid legal action threatened by the New York State Attorney General's office for its allegedly deceptive practices.⁸

Birthright has also used controversial publicity tactics to further its anti-abortion cause. During the 2005 holiday season, the Lawrenceville, Kansas chapter aroused public disgust when it displayed a Christmas tree decorated with fake fetus ornaments in a local women's health club.⁹ Located adjacent to the health club's childcare center, the tree's fetal ornaments came complete with little labels displaying the fetal "age" in weeks and were available for purchase in exchange for a \$5 donation to Birthright.¹⁰

CARE NET

Founded: 1975

Religious Affiliation: Protestant evangelical

Number of Affiliates: 972¹¹

Previously Known As: Christian Action Council

Motto: *Changing Hearts. Saving Lives.*

Care Net, formerly known as the Christian Action Council (CAC), was started by Dr. Harold O.J. Brown in 1975 in response to *Roe v. Wade*. In Care Net's early years, Brown reportedly received support and advice from former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, Reverend Billy Graham and Christian evangelical theologian and anti-abortion activist Francis Schaefer.¹² Initially, the organization focused on grassroots organizing, mainly educating churches about its anti-abortion views.¹³ In 1980, Care Net opened its first CPC in Baltimore, marking a significant change in the mission and structure of the organization in an effort to expand and gain mainstream acceptability. None of its original founders or benefactors appears to still be involved with Care Net. The current president of Care Net is Kurt Entsminger, an Assistant US Attorney during the Reagan administration.¹⁴

Care Net claims to have over 950 affiliated "evangelical pregnancy centers"¹⁵ across North America that "remain committed to marketing positive pregnancy options and the compassion of Christ more effectively than Planned Parenthood markets death."¹⁶ While Care Net had only 450 CPCs in 1999, a small part of this exponential growth is a result of a 2005 merger with Sav-A-Life, a network of roughly 70 CPCs throughout the southeast.¹⁷ Though Care Net has recently tried to persuade more affiliated CPCs to re-brand themselves with some variation on the "Care Net" name, most do not bear the Care Net name and are thus hard to identify as affiliates.

Like many CPCs, Care Net is increasingly receiving state and federal funding. For example, in 2006, Care Net received a \$2 million grant from Florida to jointly operate a pregnancy help "Option Line" toll-free telephone number with Heartbeat International.¹⁸ Care Net and Heartbeat International also jointly operate two websites (<http://www.pregnancycenters.org> and <http://www.optionline.org>) that allow the user to simply instant message pregnancy-related questions to Option Line volunteers.

Care Net is branching out into research and publications, recently launched a quarterly crisis pregnancy journal for CPC's, called "Center of Tomorrow" (available online at <http://www.care-net.org/publications/memcot>), as well as a bimonthly magazine called "The Care Net Report." Like

many other CPC networks, Care Net encourages its affiliates to invest in ultrasound machines. Care Net states that as of 2004, 29 percent, or approximately 250, of Care Net affiliates had ultrasound machines in their facilities.¹⁹

Care Net has also pushed for its affiliates to provide abstinence-only education. Care Net estimates that over 70 percent of its affiliates offer abstinence-only programs.²⁰ Care Net believes that this is simply a logical progression from its mission and encouragingly points out that “many of those recipients who have won federal grants for abstinence programs are pregnancy centers or programs that began at a pregnancy center.”²¹ At least one Care Net affiliate, Care Net Pregnancy Services of DuPage, Illinois, receives \$295,422 annually through the federal Community-Based Abstinence Education (CBAE) Program. Care Net also benefits from corporate alliances, including a profit-sharing partnership with Interstate Batteries featuring a NASCAR racing car branded with Care Net’s logo.²²

HEARTBEAT INTERNATIONAL

Founded: 1971

Religious Affiliation: Protestant Evangelical/Catholic

Number of Affiliates: 880

Previously Known As: Alternatives to Abortion International

Motto: *Reach, Rescue, Renew.*

Heartbeat International was established in 1971 in Toledo, Ohio by obstetrician-gynecologist Dr. John Hillabrand under the name Alternatives to Abortion and, later, Alternatives to Abortion International. In 1993, the organization underwent a substantial makeover and expansion. It was renamed Heartbeat International and hired its first paid staff, current president Peggy Hartshorn.²³ Its current board includes conservative Christian marriage guru Gary Chapman as well as members of Coral Ridge Ministries, National Institutes of Family Life Advocates (NIFLA) and Priests for Life.²⁴ Heartbeat claims that its nearly 900 affiliates “are instruments that the Lord uses to save 2,000 babies per week in the United States.”²⁵

Heartbeat’s motto is, “Reach, Rescue, Renew.” “Reach” is achieved through its “Option Line”, a toll-free pregnancy help hotline run in collaboration with Birthright and partially funded by the state of Florida.²⁶ The partnership also includes two websites (<http://www.optionline.org> and <http://www.pregnancycenters.org>) through which the user can instant message pregnancy questions to Option Line volunteers. “Rescue” is accomplished through its through its deceptive crisis pregnancy centers.²⁷ Heartbeat advises its affiliates that one of the most effective ways to reach women considering abortion is to open a CPC next to or across from an abortion clinic. Heartbeat most recently utilized this tactic with the opening of a new Pregnancy Decision Health Center in Columbus, Ohio, that is located just yards away from an actual abortion provider.²⁸ “Renew” refers to its focus on crisis pregnancy outreach in urban areas, the “darkest areas” of America, where Heartbeat claims abortion clinics can outnumber CPCs by 10 or 20 to one.²⁹

The misinformation on Heartbeat’s website and in its publications casts serious doubt about the accuracy of the information that it provides to its “clients.” For example, Heartbeat falsely claims that “the rate of attempted suicide increased ten-fold for teenagers who had abortions in the previous six months.”³⁰ Heartbeat responds to such criticism by claiming that it is “under attack because we are doing the Lord’s work. He told us that as His followers we would be attacked as He was. So we are

not surprised. Like Jesus, we speak the truth, and we try to share the Good News through our loving actions.”³¹

Heartbeat also suggests that family planning organizations and reproductive rights groups are “angered” by crisis pregnancy centers’ newly granted access to federal funds.³² Massachusetts recently awarded a contract to manage the state’s middle school abstinence-only program to Healthy Futures, developed by A Woman’s Concern, a Heartbeat affiliate in Boston that also receives just under a half a million dollars annually in federal abstinence-only funding.³³

Heartbeat International is now exporting its deceptive tactics and propaganda to the developing world, where honest and accessible reproductive healthcare is often desperately in demand. The Pregnancy Health Decision Center, a Zambian affiliate established in 2002, eerily warns that post-abortion syndrome is a very real risk to Zambian women and states its mission as to open a CPC everywhere in the country that there is a Planned Parenthood.³⁴ The subtly racist rhetoric that Heartbeat uses to describe their domestic “urban outreach” is also used to describe their international affiliates, which they falsely state as being “in the war zones where the number of abortions each year far surpasses the number of new births.”³⁵

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FAMILY LIFE ADVOCATES (NIFLA)

Founded: 1993

Religious Affiliation: Unclear

Number of Affiliates: 3,000

Founded in 1993, NIFLA currently claims to have over 3,000 affiliated CPCs in its network.³⁶ NIFLA’s 2004 budget was just under half a million dollars, with no government funding and most of its income is derived from fee-based training and program services.³⁷ Through its technical support and capacity building services, NIFLA has positioned itself as something of an industry leader. For example, its mission statement states the organization’s goal as: “To empower women to choose life by: equipping Pregnancy Help Centers with legal counsel and support; enabling Pregnancy Help Centers to convert to medical clinic status; and energizing Pregnancy Help Centers with a renewed vision for the future.”³⁸ NIFLA’s advisory board includes Beverly LaHaye and Michael Schwartz of Concerned Women for America as well as members of the Christian Legal Society, Patrick Henry College, and several anti-abortion groups and CPCs, including Heartbeat International.³⁹ NIFLA President Thomas J. Glessner also has links to Care Net (then known as the Christian Action Council), where he was the CEO from 1987 until 1992.⁴⁰

NIFLA provides legal assistance, “research,” ultrasound training and other services. Currently, the key initiative is the Life Choice Project (run in collaboration with ultra-conservative group Focus on the Family), which helps CPCs gain official status as medical clinics. NIFLA President Thomas J. Glessner frequently voices public support for various state and federal initiatives to provide funding for CPCs to obtain ultrasound machines.⁴¹ While “going medical” offers the promise of greater mainstream legitimacy for CPCs, it also exposes them to greater legal and public scrutiny. In 2002, one of NIFLA’s affiliated CPCs was investigated by the New York State Attorney General’s office over its allegedly deceptive practices.⁴²

NIFLA’s makeover is representative of the ways in which many CPCs have used “medical” or “scientific” technology and re-branding in their quest for mainstream legitimacy. In addition to pushing ultrasounds, NIFLA has adopted quasi-feminist language with its rhetoric of “empowering

women” to “choose” and is careful to use “pregnancy help center” instead of “crisis pregnancy center” as well as “sidewalk counseling” rather than “picketing.” However, this recent emphasis on the appearance of legitimacy has not diminished NIFLA’s core values, including its evangelical mission: “the Gospel is the Truth, and, combined with the truth about unborn life and visual truth from an ultrasound exam, it is truth that empowers abortion at-risk patients to choose life.”⁴³

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