



True Women's Empowerment: The Positive Impact of Pregnancy Resource Centers

Surprise! You just found out that you're pregnant, and this was not a part of your plan. Based on statistics from the Guttmacher Institute, you are probably between the ages of 18 and 24, have low income, didn't finish high school, and aren't married. The thought of figuring out medical appointments, 2 a.m. feedings, and childcare is overwhelming, and so you research your options.

Option 1: Abortion

A lot of people tell you that this is the easy answer. Just go into a clinic, get a prescription, take some pills, and life can continue as usual. Depending on what state you live in, you might even be able to do all of this from the "comfort" of your own home. You're barely making ends meet on your own, much less with a baby depending on you. This option would let you go back to school or work like you've been planning, so that you can get a better job and be prepared for when you are ready to have kids. You can't do both. Or can you?

Option 2: Keep the Baby or Place it for Adoption

You might not be able to do all of this on your own, but there are resources available to you that will help you and your baby live healthy lives, including pregnancy resource centers (PRCs). You're intrigued by this possibility, but you might be wondering if it is a good idea to reach out to them. Maybe you have seen that Pro-Choice America claims that PRCs, "Intentionally misinform and mislead women seeking pregnancy-related information." Maybe you heard Senator Elizabeth Warren accuse them of fooling and torturing women. Or maybe you were doing some research and read claims on Verywell Health's website that PRCs will lure and mislead and show you "scary movies of dismembered fetuses."

But maybe abortion doesn't feel like the right option. Maybe you've heard about the dangerous side effects that can come with it, or maybe the thought of aborting the life inside you just feels wrong. What would it really look like to visit one of these PRCs?

Meet Some Pregnancy Resource Centers



Hand of Hope Pregnancy Centers

Locations: Fuquay-Varina, Raleigh, and Fayetteville

Services: Pregnancy tests, ultrasounds, life skills classes, baby boutique, STD/STI testing, abortion pill reversal, baby showers, sidewalk ministry, abortion recovery Bible studies

Established: 2004

Founder & CEO: Tonya Nelson

When you walk in the front door of one of Hand of Hope's centers, you are immediately welcomed by smiling faces, comfortable waiting areas, and maybe even freshly baked treats. This organization came about after Tonya Nelson, the Founder and CEO, experienced her own unplanned pregnancy. Having been a single mom and experienced the challenges they face, Tonya felt God calling her to start Hand of Hope so that she could help women in similar situations. Now the organization has three locations, one across the street from a Planned Parenthood clinic, and another next door to the largest privately owned abortion clinic in Raleigh. Tonya and her team actively love every person who walks through their doors, because as she said, "You are welcome here regardless of the choice you make, because that's who Jesus is."



Salem Pregnancy Care Center

Location: Winston-Salem

Services: Pregnancy tests, options counseling, ultrasounds, life coaching, baby boutique, and parenting classes

Established: 1985

Executive Director: Kimberly Jorgensen

This PRC got its start when a gentleman named Stuart Epperson ran for the United States House of Representatives. He ran on a pro-life platform, but ultimately lost the election. On the way to his consolation party, he realized that just because he didn't win the election didn't mean that he couldn't still help the pro-life movement. The consolation party became a launch party for what would become Salem Pregnancy Care Center, and many members of his campaign staff joined the new PRC as members of the staff or board. Since then, this center has served more than 22,000 families and has recently moved locations so that it is directly across the street from the biggest abortion clinic in Forsyth County. They work hard to meet the needs of the women who come to them, striving to do everything with excellence. They have also invested in educating youth to help them avoid facing a crisis pregnancy situation. (Incidentally, Mr. Epperson went on to grow Salem Media Group into the nation's leading media company specializing in Christian and conservative content.)



Photo by Laura Sydney Photography

Gateway Women's Care

Locations: Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill

Services: Pregnancy tests, ultrasounds, STI/STD testing, options counseling, and abortion education

Established: 1984

Executive Director: Wendy Bonano

One of the first PRCs in the Raleigh area, Gateway Women's Care started when three students at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary felt the call to do something to support women facing an unplanned pregnancy. Along with their wives, they connected with some large churches in the area and started a ministry that has since expanded to Durham and Chapel Hill. Jim Skelton, one of the founding students and the first Executive Director, is still involved in the ministry, even though he has since moved to Texas. The staff and volunteers work with each woman who comes in to create a customized care plan that best meets her needs, walking with her every step of the way. They are conveniently located close to several large colleges and universities, allowing them to reach students who may be facing an unplanned pregnancy.



Helping Women Across the Country

The love and compassion that each of these PRC directors feel for women facing an unplanned pregnancy is abundantly apparent as they explain the work they do, and these are just a few examples of the PRCs that can be found across this state and the country. In 2019, the Charlotte Lozier Institute identified approximately 2,700 pregnancy centers across America that served almost two million people at an estimated value of nearly \$270 million.

According to the Charlotte Lozier Institute, some of the ways PRCs have served women (at little to no charge) include:

- Almost **732,000** pregnancy tests
- More than **486,000** free ultrasounds
- **160,200** STI/STD tests
- More than **291,000** clients attended parenting and prenatal education programs
- More than **21,000** clients received after-abortion support
- More than **881,000** students attended sexual risk avoidance education presentations
- Nearly **1.3 million** packs of diapers
- More than **2 million** baby outfits

Disproving the claim that PRCs offer fake medicine, over 10,000 licensed medical workers provided care as both staff and volunteers at PRCs across the US.

While all of these PRCs look a little bit different, there are some common services that many of them offer. Of the 2,700 PRCs:

- **94%** offer material items like clothing, diapers, etc.
- **86%** offer parenting/prenatal education
- **79%** offer ultrasounds
- **72%** offer after-abortion recovery
- **36%** offer sexual risk avoidance presentations to youth
- **30%** offer STI/STD testing
- **21%** offer STI/STD treatment
- **27%** offer childbirth classes
- **19%** offer breastfeeding consultations

These organizations play such a vital role in their communities that a national survey found that people’s responses to PRCs were “overwhelmingly positive,” whether they identified as pro-life or pro-choice.

In North Carolina, there are more than 80 PRCs spread out over 57 of the 100 counties. Each of these look a little bit different, but they are committed to serving women who are experiencing an unplanned pregnancy. While interviewing the women who lead the three PRCs highlighted in this article, it was easy to tell that they genuinely care about the women who come through their doors regardless of what decisions they had

made or would make. There is no judgment, no scary movie, and no misinformation. They want to support the women who come to them and show them the love of Jesus.

Another valuable resource across North Carolina and the United States is the Human Coalition. This organization implements a variety of digital marketing strategies to reach women who are abortion-determined. They have a call center with trained agents to counsel women and connect them with local resources. Finally, they assist these women with their long-term needs either through their own PRCs or by connecting them with an independent PRC. Their efforts have saved thousands of lives across the country.

Abortion Clinics



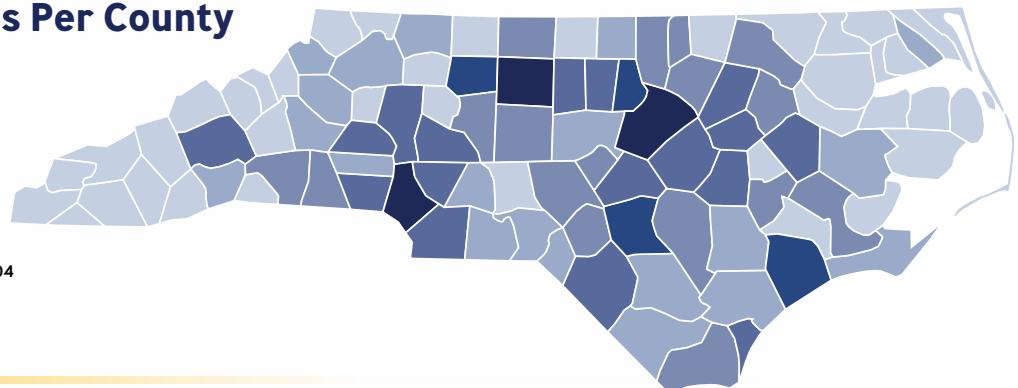
Pregnancy Resource Centers



Number of Abortions Per County

4,600 - 2,000	(39.35%, 3)
1,500 - 500	(18.74%, 5)
499 - 200	(23.13%, 17)
199 - 100	(9.85%, 17)
99 - 50	(5.68%, 20)
49 - 1	(3.25%, 38)

Total Number of Abortions in NC in 2020: 30,004
(% of total, # of counties)



The Impact of PRCs

The impact these organizations are having is critical. Studies have shown the most common reasons that women pursue an abortion include:

- Interference with work, education, or ability to care for dependents
- An inability to afford a baby
- Not desiring to be a single mother or having relationship issues

Notice that all of these are circumstantial. The decision to pursue abortion generally does not stem from just not wanting the baby, but rather the challenges that having a baby would bring. The services that PRCs provide enable a woman to keep her baby despite the circumstances. Many of the PRCs will help women figure out how they can continue their work or education with a baby. Almost all of them help with material resources, including things like diapers, baby clothes, maternity clothes, strollers, and even gas cards. A majority of PRCs offer parenting classes to help equip women for motherhood, even if they are single. Because PRCs are addressing the real circumstances that women face, they are effective in protecting life. Another study by the Charlotte Lozier Institute found that more than 800,000 lives have been saved through the pro-life PRC network since 2016.

Comparing the Options

PRCs are clearly supporting women facing a crisis pregnancy, whether that means providing her with the resources she needs to keep the baby, connecting her with an adoption agency, or supporting her after she pursues abortion.

On the other side of the picture, we have organizations like Planned Parenthood. In their 2020-2021 Annual Report, they report 383,460 abortion procedures in the United States. Their services reveal that they don't really care about the women or their babies, because none of their services focus on supporting women during or after they make their decision. Their website encourages women to pursue abortion if they don't think they are ready for a baby, they aren't in a positive relationship, or they don't want any interference with their education or career. Planned Parenthood tells women that they can't overcome the challenges. And while they offer adoption referrals (reporting 1,940 in the report mentioned above), their abortion rate is almost 200 times that of their adoption referral rate.

True Women's Empowerment

This information begs the question: Which group truly empowers women? One group tells you that the best answer for a crisis pregnancy is a medical or chemical procedure, which kills your baby and can cause severe health problems for you (they don't want you to think about that!), because you can't handle a baby right now. The other group tells you that you can overcome the challenges in your life and walks alongside you, helping you however they can.

Even this simple message of 'you can' versus 'you can't' makes a drastic difference. In education, researchers have found that a high level of self-efficacy – a belief in one's ability to accomplish something – has a significant impact on the educational outcomes of students. One of the largest findings in this regard is the impact that a teacher can have merely by communicating that every student is capable of success. Just having someone tell you that you are able to do something difficult increases your ability to actually accomplish it. It is just as critical for women to know that they are capable of overcoming the challenges set before them, not just in terms of pregnancy but for every aspect of their lives.

The Future of Pregnancy Resource Centers

The *Dobbs* decision, which overturned *Roe v. Wade* and returned the decision about abortion to elected representatives, was an amazing step in the right direction, but there is now an even greater need for PRCs. The PRCs mentioned above commented on the increase in the number of women they have seen in recent months, along with an increase in women seeking abortions via telemedicine. They shared that North Carolina has seen a significant rise in women coming from out of state seeking an abortion due to the increased restrictions in surrounding states.

In response to this, each PRC has plans to continue to grow and meet the needs of women facing unplanned pregnancies. Tonya mentioned that she would love to open a Hand of Hope boutique that could offer employment to some of the women and generate income that would enable the ministry to help more women. Kimberly shared about plans to expand Salem Pregnancy Care Center's current services, including increasing their capacity to serve families, offering services in Spanish, and making sure that their services adapt as the needs of women change. Finally, Wendy shared that Gateway Women's Care was increasing their focus on online services and telemedicine so that they can reach women before they make a decision, along with continuing to strengthen their partnerships with local organizations.

They Need You

Pregnancy resource centers are doing amazing work, but there is still a lot more to be done. Tonya, Kimberly, and Wendy shared some of the best ways that you can make a difference in the fight for life, including volunteering at a PRC near you, praying regularly for the centers and the work they do, and being willing to have conversations about abortion and take a stand for life.

Will you choose life? 🙏



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