

Pregnancy Resource Centres: Places of Help and Hope

GOAL

To learn more about the ministry of pregnancy resource centres, specifically the Pregnancy Resource Centre of Saint John and to pray for them.

PREPARATION

Two people are needed for this interview: an interviewer and Anna. Print copies of the interview for each person.

INTERVIEW

Interviewer: Atlantic Baptist Women supports 7 pregnancy resource centres in the Home Mission portion of our annual budget. Today we have with us, Anna Steeves, who serves on the Board of Directors for the Pregnancy Resource Centre of Saint John. Since 1989, this ministry has offered free services and a safe, compassionate space in Saint John and surrounding areas. Welcome Anna.

Anna: Thank you for having me here.

Interviewer: First of all, who does the Pregnancy Resource Centre of Saint John serve?

Anna: The Pregnancy Resource Center of Saint John (PRC) is a Christian faith-based organization dedicated to providing support, hope, and encouragement to anyone experiencing pregnancy-related challenges. While it is impossible to give you a complete picture of our “average” client—they are all so different—there are two broad categories into which they typically fall.

Interviewer: What is the first category of clients?

Anna: The woman for whom pregnancy represents a change of her plans: These clients currently perceive their life circumstances as positive. They might be in school or working at a job they enjoy. Life isn't perfect, but overall, it's currently going according to plan. An unexpected pregnancy will drastically change or prevent these clients' plans, hopes, and dreams.

Interviewer: What is the second category of clients?

Anna: The woman for whom life is already very difficult: Many clients who visit the Center come from backgrounds of childhood abuse, trauma, and adversity. Because their families of origin are not usually healthy and/or supportive, they are often still “stuck” in poverty, abuse and adversity. Pregnancy for women in these very difficult circumstances often feels like the final straw that shifts life from being hard to being unbearable. They are often very alone.

Interviewer: Why is pregnancy centre work so important?

Anna: Pregnancy centre work is important because laws governing abortion have changed drastically in the last hundred years. Abortion went from being a punishable crime around 1900 to being completely unregulated by law after the Supreme Court of Canada struck down Canada's abortion law in 1988. Many pregnancy centres (including the PRC) were created in response to this ruling in an effort to make parenting and adoption as viable for an unexpected pregnancy as abortion. Not long afterward, Pregnancy Care Canada (PCC)—the umbrella organization with which the PRC is affiliated—was established in order to unite Canadian pregnancy centres and to provide oversight and support. Though not all pregnancy centres choose to be affiliated with PCC, our partnership with PCC is crucial. We are held accountable by PCC and we get to share organizational support with more than 70 centres across Canada who share our mission and vision.

Interviewer: Is there another reason why the work is important?

Anna: Yes. Pregnancy centre work is important because societal norms and values around sexuality continue to shift rapidly. Sexual activity is now generally initiated before commitment is established. As a result, many Center clients are not in stable, committed relationships. Moreover, an unexpected pregnancy threatens the stability of a relationship. Sex without commitment is no longer accompanied by societal stigma or pressure and is no longer seen as a negative choice. Getting pregnant without commitment however, is accompanied by stigma and pressure and is seen as a negative choice. Abortion, therefore, is seen as an acceptable and even preferable decision. This cultural shift has been accompanied by an increasing ease of access to abortion.

Interviewer: What does the pregnancy resource centre do?

Anna: Practically speaking, the PRC provides pregnancy options mentoring to support clients during the decision-making process. Once a decision has been made, a client may receive ongoing prenatal/parenting lessons, support for adoption placement, post-abortion, pregnancy/infant loss, or healthy sexuality/relationships. These services are available to men as well, whether they are alone or come with their partner.

Interviewer: Can you explain how abortion is a social justice issue?

Anna: From a biblical perspective, we can understand that every social injustice is the result of humans "serving the creature (ourselves) rather than the Creator" (Romans 1:28-31). In this way, abortion is one of many social injustices in a broken world to which Christ's followers are compelled to respond. The lack of abortion laws in Canada contributes to this injustice, as does the larger picture of the laws and systems that sometimes cause women to believe that abortion is their only feasible option. For example, a woman can unilaterally make a decision to abort her pregnancy. By contrast however, the father's signature is required in order for the woman to place for adoption. Similarly, a woman is often required to first seek financial support from the father before applying for government financial assistance. Though these requirements make sense, they can serve to make adoption and parenting seemingly impossible in cases where the relationship with the father is unhealthy, dangerous, or lacks commitment.

Interviewer: What is the role of listening in the ministry of the pregnancy resource centre?

Anna: As we provide support to women and men facing difficult pregnancy situations, it is incredibly important for us to listen to their stories and understand who they are. It is important for us to consider and respond not only to the “justice issue” of whether a woman continues her pregnancy, but also to be aware of the injustices she herself might be facing and respond compassionately to those needs. Many clients have experienced abuse or some other sort of injustice against them, usually resulting from someone else’s self-interest. For example, a woman who is pressured by her boyfriend or parents to have an abortion may feel like she has been used or that she is suffering the injustice of abandonment from the person or people who she hoped would be there to support her. If we focus on her actions—whether or not she continues her pregnancy—yet fail to listen to her as she shares about her feelings or the injustice that has been done to her, our ministry will be defective.

Interviewer: Where does the hope of Christ fit in?

Anna: Ultimately, souls are at stake. We care best for the life of the unborn child by first caring well for the life and soul of the mother/father. It is the love of Christ and the power of the gospel that equip us to serve clients’ spiritual needs, in addition to their practical needs. That gospel hope empowers us to persevere in the face of abortions, heartbreaking background stories, and clients whose story endings we don’t know. On our own, this ministry would be impossible, but with God all things are possible!

Interviewer: How can we help?

Anna: You can pray! Pray for individuals making decisions about their pregnancy; for parents attempting to raise their children in challenging circumstances; for people placing for adoption to have courage and strength as they try to do the right thing for their child; for women hurting after an abortion; for God to soften hearts to the truth of the gospel; and the list goes on... A great way to get specifics is to connect with a local pregnancy centre to see if they send out prayer requests.

Interviewer: How else can we help?

Anna: Learn, care, and be ready to have conversations! Many clients who come to the PRC wouldn’t need our services if they had a better support system. You can educate yourself about these issues, develop relationships with individuals in your own community, and demonstrate compassion and empathy. In this way, you can help to provide the ongoing, grassroots-level support that a small organization like the PRC simply isn’t equipped to provide.

Get involved! Find out how your local pregnancy centre needs help—you might volunteer, donate items, serve on the board of directors, etc.

Interviewer: Thank you Anna for sharing with us today.

Anna: Thank YOU to Atlantic Baptist Women for supporting us and for having me with you today.

PRAY

Have a prayer time for the 7 Pregnancy Resource Centres in the Atlantic area supported by ABW using the requests that Anna mentioned. Pray specifically for each centre, its staff and clients. Links to the websites of each centre can be found on the ABW website:

<https://www.atlanticbaptistwomen.ca/impactinglocally>

Pregnancy and Wellness Centre of Moncton

Sussex Pregnancy Care Centre

Pregnancy Resource Centre of Saint John

Island Pregnancy Centre, Charlottetown and Summerside

Open Door Healthy Life Choices Centre, Halifax

Valley Care Pregnancy Centre, Kentville

Tri-County Pregnancy Care Centre, Yarmouth

Atlantic Baptist Women extends our thanks to Anna Steeves for providing the information for this program.