

State's Funds Offer 'Real Alternatives' to Abortion

Twenty-five years have passed since a 17-year-old Noreen Marusic found herself pregnant and at odds with angry parents.

"My parents were not supportive whatsoever of my pregnancy. Probably more ashamed than anything," Marusic told CBN News. "They were trying to force me to have an **abortion** and I wasn't going to do that."

Her boyfriend didn't want her to have the baby either and threatened to leave her if she wouldn't abort it.

Marusic received no support until she came across Genesis Center in Pittsburgh. The women there gave her a temporary place to live, education so she could support herself, and encouragement that she could be a good mother, even when her own mother said she wouldn't be.

"My mom said that I would end up to be nothing, that I'd end up on the welfare," Marusic recalled.

With financial support, centers like Genesis can help millions of women like Marusic say no to abortion. It's not easy though when pro-choice politicians and abortion providers like Planned Parenthood join forces against that effort.

Some states are so aligned with the abortion industry they're trying to shut down **pro-life** pregnancy centers. But in Pennsylvania, they're using taxpayer dollars to help fund pro-life alternatives.

For 17 years now, the charity Real Alternatives has been directing \$5 million to \$6 million a year to almost 100 pro-life centers across the state. These combined efforts have helped bring Pennsylvania's abortion rate down 7 percent.

For Corbett, It's Personal

One of Real Alternatives' biggest backers is Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Corbett, who describes himself as "pro-baby."

"We've had over 189,000 women go through the program," the Republican governor said of Real Alternatives.

Corbett brings a personal connection to this fight: Once a pregnant woman chose adoption over abortion. His daughter and son-in-law adopted that woman's little boy, Liam.

"When Liam comes to see us, he gets up on my knee, especially when it's nap-time," Corbett shared. "I rub his back; he goes to sleep against me."

"I thank God every day that that young woman who decided to keep the baby and not have the baby aborted did so because I've got this precious little fellow," he said.

Year after year, Real Alternatives has fought for and won the highest seal the state's association of non-profits can award. This is important to Real Alternatives because it shows taxpayers that not a dollar of their money is being mishandled.

"The standards that we have here rise even above the standards required by the law, required by ethics," Tom Lang, Real Alternatives' vice president of operations said.

Those standards and the program's success have led 14 other states to ask for help in setting up similar programs.

Destitute, Fourth Child on the Way

Meanwhile, help for tens of thousands of Pennsylvania women continues, like the help Real Alternatives' funding gave to New Kensington mom Jamie Fair. The unemployed mother became pregnant with her fourth child just as her husband left her.

Her future looked bleak and even doctors recommended she abort.

"I did have a medical issue that they felt it wouldn't be conducive to my life if I went ahead with the pregnancy," she told CBN News.

Short of money, Fair traveled to Tri-City Life Center in New Burrell, a center backed by Real Alternatives. It's loaded with all sorts of free items new mothers need, and it has counselors to help pregnant women learn mothering skills and connect them with the education sources they need to make a life for themselves and their children.

Fair was searching for a free crib but ended up getting much more. The counselors there became the encouragers and family she and her children needed.

"I couldn't afford diapers. I couldn't afford food. I couldn't afford much for my family," Fair recalled. "We would come here, they would get toys, they would get clothes; they would get things that they needed. But most importantly they would get the support and the love that they needed."

"They became family," she said of the counselors.

They gave Fair the help and confidence she needed to get her bachelor's degree. Now she's working on her master's.

"When a mother decides to carry a child, we're there every day—not only through her pregnancy, but we're there for the first five years of that child," Tri-City Life Director Vera Marelli told CBN News.

Nina Martin had her first child at 14. She received all sorts of aid from Tri-City Life; so much in fact, that when she got on her feet she turned around and became a volunteer for the center.

She said it isn't just pro-life for the babies, but for the moms, too.

"All the programs that they have, just the friendships, the

mentoring, the prayer," Martin said. "I don't know how many times I've come in here and one of the women said, 'Let me pray for you. Can I pray for you?'"

Most Women 'Forced' to Abort

"Nobody wakes up wanting to have an abortion," Kevin Bagatta, founder and CEO of Real Alternatives, told CBN News.

He said most abortions happen because women are forced into them and have no one presenting alternatives.

"There were surveys done of women who'd had an abortion," Bagatta stated. "And they said if one person had helped them during the crisis pregnancy, they wouldn't have had the abortion."

Genesis Center Program Director Amanda Newill has aided and counseled hundreds of women in crisis pregnancies.

"Some of the women who choose abortion, they look at it and really have nobody in their corner, nobody who's going to support this life that's growing inside of them," Newill pointed out.

That's why pro-life centers and counselors can make such a difference.

"They love these women as if they were their own daughter," Bagatta said.

"We do really love them," Newill said. "I think if we didn't, that would show."

After they get help from a pro-life center, 87 percent of women say they won't abort even if they're pressured to by boyfriends, parents or others.

Bagatta said that's because now the woman feels she has someone on her side.

"Therefore she's free to make the decision she wants to make and can live with for the rest of her life," Bagatta said.

The Horror That Drove Her

Newill told CBN News about the special horror that drove her in her high school years to want to help women in crisis pregnancies.

"I remember on TV there being somebody who put their baby in a garbage can in an alley," Newill recalled. "And to me, I loved babies so much even then, that was so unfathomable."

"I thought, 'What would drive a person to give birth alone and put their baby in a garbage can? If there's something I can do to stop that from happening, that's what I want to do with my life,'" she said.

Now Newill spends her days doing things like showing pregnant women scale models of what the babies inside them look like during all the various stages of pregnancy.

Newill showed CBN News models of 8- and 12-week-old fetuses whose arms, legs and heads were clearly formed.

"Whenever they do abortions as this point and this point," she said, "you're seeing arms and legs. You're seeing human parts."

She counsels women on how the legal and supposedly safe abortion procedure really isn't all that safe.

"Abortion absolutely does have risks for the woman's health now, for her health in the long-term and for her psychological well-being," Newill pointed out. "But also, geez, it's really not good for the baby at all."

What Could've Been

Jessica Sheldon, the daughter Noreen Masrusic fought so hard to keep 25 years earlier, is now 24 years old and part of a generation where every third person has been killed by

abortion.

"It is kind of scary just to think of all the people who could have been here but are not," Sheldon said.

Sheldon shared advice for pregnant young women wavering about giving their child life.

"It'll probably be really scary and you're probably going to be in shock for a while, but if you'll pull through with it, it's like the best thing ever," she said.

Marusic, when asked if she's glad she gave life to Sheldon, quickly answered, "Oh my God, yes. She's my best friend."

Some states say they're **pro-choice** because they back the abortion industry. But in Pennsylvania they say they're pro-choice because they're offering pregnant women real alternatives.