

Pregnancy Matters helps women make informed reproductive decisions

By Jan Staab
For Heartland Women

During the one hour it took for me to interview the staff at Pregnancy Matters in Carbondale, a car seat was delivered to a new mom at Carbondale Memorial Hospital. A single mother was provided with a high chair, a stroller and diapers. A pregnancy test was provided for a married, international SIU student. And another mom stopped in with her four daughters to get a thrift shop voucher.

The staff of Pregnancy Matters assured me that this was a typical day. Women from all walks of life finding themselves pregnant and in need of help regularly show up on their doorstep.

"Our organization helps meet an important need in Southern Illinois," said Executive Director Marsha Perfetti. "We've provided practical and emotional support for families throughout our area since 1980. We are

dedicated to educating, empowering and encouraging women to make healthy choices."

Originally known in the community as Shawnee Crisis Pregnancy Center, Pregnancy Matters has offices located in Carbondale, Marion and Anna. They serve approximately 3,000 individuals and families each year. A fourth office is scheduled to open in Perry County on the third floor of the Pinckneyville Hospital on Aug. 4.

"The new Carbondale facility located on Lewis Lane opened in March of 2008," Marsha said. "It was built by volunteers and took about 18 months. It gave us additional room to expand services."

The organization's name change was a result of a change in the types of services offered. In addition to crisis pregnancy services, pregnancy prevention programs, practical assistance programs and educational

programs for new mothers, Pregnancy Matters is now a medical clinic with limited services available on Tuesdays.

Medical Director Andrea Humphrey oversees all medical and free ultrasound services. Volunteer nurses gather medical histories, provide patient education and answer questions to assist women in maintaining healthy pregnancies.

Assistant Director Cathie Mieldezis is responsible for the pregnancy prevention programs offered in health classes by Pregnancy Matters in 14 area high schools and middle schools. From 2,000 to 2,500 students per year are educated about abstinence, sexually transmitted diseases and the effect a pregnancy will have on teenage life.

"We teach self-sufficiency and help students stay focused on their goals and make better choices," she said. "We teach kids responsibility. Everyone needs to plan for tomorrow and not just what will make them happy now."

The training is not just for the girls. Cathie is just as concerned to help potential teenage dads take responsibility for the choices they make.

"I have teenage boys myself, and I do not want them to suffer the consequences of poor choices," she said. "Teen pregnancy is a very real problem. Teen fathers need to step up to the plate. But it's better if we can keep them grounded."

Over the years, Marsha has seen the difference that Pregnancy Matters volunteers and services have made for individuals in our



Some of the women who devote their time and talents to Pregnancy Matters include Assistant Director Cathie Mieldezis, volunteer Jasmine, Executive Director Marsha Perfetti, and Carterville High School volunteer Hannah Harris.

area. Cards and letters of thanks attest to this. But so does the devotion of the volunteers to the program.

Jasmine is one of these volunteers. She is honored to be able to help women through the emotionally wrenching decisions that surround an untimely pregnancy.

"The hardest cases are the ones where women have had health issues already, and they are torn. They want to have the baby, but fear for their own health if they do," she said.

Summer intern Leah Samples has similar feelings about Pregnancy Matters.

"I have a passion for helping people," she said. "It's really awesome seeing Marsha's devotion to the people we serve. At the end of the day, I have actually done something productive for people, not just made money."

Like many other service organizations, financial woes are taking their toll on Pregnancy Matters. During

2009, they will lose their two largest grants.

"This will have a direct impact on our pregnancy prevention program in area schools and on the number of days our Anna location can be open," Marsha said. "Our agency will rely on community support to continue all of our free and confidential services."

Pregnancy Matters is a non-profit organization. Donations are tax deductible.

Donations of money and volunteer hours are appreciated, but Pregnancy Matters is also in need of new or gently used items for babies, pregnant women and new moms. Baby food and diapers are also needed.

If you are or know of a woman who is faced with an untimely pregnancy, get help at Pregnancy Matters. Call 888-303-8859 or 549-2794, send an e-mail to info@PregnancyMatters.org or log onto PregnancyMatters.org.

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