

My name is Melissa Colbern. I am executive director of Mary's Choices, a pregnancy resource center recently established in Topeka. We are located just a few blocks from here on 3<sup>rd</sup> and Van Buren. Mary's Choices just opened September 10, 2012. Our mission is to serve women and families facing an unplanned pregnancy. We provide help to these women and families before and after delivery of the child.

I am also a Family Practice physician with a practice here in Topeka. I now split my time between my Family Medicine job and volunteering at Mary's Choices. Mary's Choices is staffed 100% by volunteers. We have been fortunate at Mary's Choices to have a volunteer staff of nurses that provide medical counseling for our patients who are early in their pregnancy. We also have many lay volunteers who help with stocking our baby store, providing secretarial assistance, providing for our accounting, bookkeeping, and marketing needs. Our lay volunteers also assist with providing the parenting and educational classes at Mary's Choices.

At the first visit to Mary's Choices, the clients meet with a nurse or physician. Free pregnancy testing is offered in a supportive, nonjudgemental environment. The nurses and physicians provide medical information regarding fetal development and pregnancy and answer any questions the mother or her family have. We also familiarize the mother with services in our community available to support her current and future needs. Our goal is to provide the information she needs to make an informed decision about what is best for her and her baby. Providing informed consent is second nature to our medically trained volunteers as that is what we have been trained to do on a daily basis with our own patients.

Mary's Choices also offer limited ultrasounds by physicians or licensed sonographers for purposes of confirming the pregnancy, detecting fetal cardiac activity, determining estimated gestational age and for familial reasons relating to maternal health. This sonogram machine has been invaluable in providing bonding between the mother and child. This machine also helps us provide good early pregnancy care and enables us to refer for medical care if problems are detected. Mary's Choices also offers limited STD testing. We frequently arrange obstetrical referrals for our clients as well.

Mary's Choices also provides help for our mothers and families after the baby arrives. We provide classes where clients may learn about pregnancy topics, infant and toddler development, discipline, life skills training, and other self-improvement topics. While learning, they can earn points to redeem for baby supplies, diapers, clothes, and hygiene products that we stock in our clinic.

Many need our help. In our first four months of ministry we have served single high school women, single college women, married, employed women who are struggling with their husbands to make ends meet, and have also served homeless pregnant women.

The best part of my job as a Family Medicine doctor is the relationships that develop over time with families I take care of. Likewise at a pregnancy help center, the ongoing relationships you develop with these mothers and families and babies during these follow up visits are very rewarding. Hopefully this ongoing emotional and material support of women and their babies can make a difference in the lives of the women, their babies, and their families.

Our mission at Mary's Choices, at any pregnancy resource center, is supporting LIFE, both inside the womb and out. The LIFE we want to support is the lives of the mothers, the babies, and the families. It is an honor to serve these women and babies.