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# The Middlebury Campus

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## OPINION

# Truth be told

By [Joanie Praamsma](#)

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The Pregnancy Resource Center of Addison County (PRCAC) has been portrayed unfairly on the campus of Middlebury. Three years ago, I took on the position of director of the Pregnancy Resource Center of Addison County and have since seen multiple attempts to present this community resource negatively, without adequate knowledge of facts to verify raised concerns.

At each of the last two Student Activity Fairs, where the PRCAC had tables, a handful of students intercepted attendees with a sheet that contained warnings about our center and crisis pregnancy centers (CPCs) in general. The information included quotes from other CPCs and a link to a John Oliver show about CPCs. None of the accusations were factual about the center in Middlebury. Furthermore, in December 2018, there was a display in the Davis Library lobby about CPCs. That same year, The Campus wrote an article about the PRCAC. A petition was initiated by some students to ban the center from any presence on the campus. Posters were put up on campus warning students to beware of deceptive CPCs. I am afraid that students who may want to access the type of support we offer are being misled.

[pullquote speaker="" photo="" align="center" background="on" border="all" shadow="on"]I am afraid that students who may want to access the type of support we offer are being misled.[/pullquote]

I have always had a passion for helping families in crisis. Before beginning at the PRCAC, I spent 11 years as a caseworker for foster children and families and then 10 years as an adoption worker. What became clear to me from those years of experience (as well as from becoming a mother of four biological children and one adopted child) is the fierce love a parent has for their child. Pregnancy decisions, relationships and parenting all pose challenges and obstacles that can be overwhelming, yet most every parent — or parent-to-be — desires to protect their child. The PRCAC can offer respect and support to those facing relationship, pregnancy and parenting struggles, as we are an organization that values all human life. The PRCAC wants to provide a supportive setting where someone will listen to whatever challenges are faced. Our mission is to offer compassion, hope and the practical help of education, material resources and referrals to community services. There have been numerous allegations, however, that our center offers something very different — that we are deceptive, that we have a political agenda, and that we manipulate women. I believe these are fundamentally wrong.

Recently, a Middlebury College student writing for VTDigger published an article that once again bolstered perspectives that pregnancy centers deceive and try to coerce women out of having abortions. Again, that article settled for non-specific and unfounded accusations against CPCs. A Middlebury professor was consulted for this article, who stated that she is convinced that the pregnancy center would use “deception to further a political position.”

This claim is unsubstantiated in every respect, and no evidence was provided as support. The PRCAC's efforts to offer information and support for alternatives to abortion, parenting education, material resources and healthy relationship classes are neither deceptive nor political. Whatever happened to abortion being "safe, legal and rare"? Abortion *is* legal, and we at the CPC do not prevent anyone from making the decision to have one. We believe every woman deserves to make a well-informed decision that she can look back on and say, "I had all the information to make the most responsible decision and one that I can live with." We offer support to help face the challenges of carrying a pregnancy to term and the results of that — whether parenting or placing for adoption. We do not coerce, but aim instead to empower, through making available accurate information about all options. Clients of the center in Middlebury have attested to the nature of our services. Exit survey comments include: "Everyone is really friendly and never makes you feel out of place. I felt respected and understood." "They don't judge, and everyone is so outgoing." "I would recommend this center to a friend." A Google review from a client attests that "the PRC is seriously a life saver. Everyone who works there is so welcoming and judgment free. This resource is amazing. I recommend it to any woman in need... pregnant or not!" I am not aware of any clients of the PRCAC who have been interviewed who can verify the accusations being made against us.

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The Middlebury professor stated in the VT Digger article that "Even if they're not using false statements or statistics, the implication they make is that abortion is harmful and if they are saying that abortion is harmful to women that is untrue." I can't speak to what occurs at Planned Parenthood or clinics that perform or refer for abortion. But I do not forget the stories of those who have shared their own abortion experiences with me. One story heard recently was from a woman who told me about her abortion during college, where she met the doctor for the first time when she saw him through the stirrups. As he began the procedure, his first words to her were to tell her that she was further along than he had thought. He then proceeded with the abortion while she hyperventilated on the table. A nurse stood by her side and just told her that she would be okay. Another young woman contacted our center recently to seek help after her abortion only a month prior. She stated that she was having nightmares and couldn't sleep because of flashbacks to her abortion procedure. Besides the testimonies I have heard from women who have struggled long and hard with abortion decisions, I can provide research that show negative emotional and psychological effects of abortion. I can only conclude that for some, fierce love for a child begins already in the womb.

Several years ago, I was a presenter for a federal grant program called the "Infant Adoption Awareness Initiative." This was geared to Title X organizations, including Planned Parenthood. In the presentation on understanding infant adoption, a Planned Parenthood employee told me that she would never bring up adoption because she didn't want a woman to think she was trying to talk her out of an abortion. This is not consistent with a commitment to informed choices. At the center we are clear that not all women struggle with an abortion, but some do.

The issue of abortion currently has created deep divides, and at times contempt between those who disagree ideologically on the morality of abortion. There seems to be no room,

for some, to respect the efforts of those with whom they disagree, who provide helpful support and services.

Finally, I would ask that the faculty and students of Middlebury College recognize and acknowledge that those with ideological differences can find things in common and allow each other to provide services that do in fact support those who seek help. A recent New York Times article on CPCs demonstrated that a religious organization offering support to women facing pregnancy challenges was serving a real need. We will never produce a collaborative effort to meet the needs of the vulnerable if we hold contempt for one another. Antagonistic articles and efforts to smear the work of the Pregnancy Center will only shortchange a resource that some may find helpful and supportive.

*Joanie Praamsma is the director of the Pregnancy Resource Center of Addison County.*

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