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## GRACE CENTER FOR MATERNAL AND WOMEN'S HEALTH A CASE FOR SUPPORT

### WHO WE ARE

Grace Center for Maternal and Women's Health ("GCMWH") is a non-profit organization headquartered in Worcester County, Maryland. The Center serves clients from the Maryland lower Eastern Shore, the Virginia peninsula and southern Delaware. Our mission is simple: **GCMWH is a safe haven dedicated to improving the maternal health and well-being of women in the community.**

Founded in 2010 as a pregnancy resource center, our mission has expanded along with our services and outreach programs to address the unmet needs of pregnant and post-partum mothers in the community. This is accomplished by offering: prenatal and postpartum group and individual classes; parenting and relationship skills; support groups; group meetings which focus on young parents facing addiction issues; a program to help parents earn their GED; and providing post-miscarriage and abortion support for those suffering losses

As a result of the diverse socio-economic environment in our geographic area, our programs are complicated by the present and ever-increasing drug and alcohol addictions that affect our clientele. Recognizing that many young women possess vulnerable deficits, we prepare an individualized care plan for each client which includes coordinating with available community resources.

When faced with an unplanned pregnancy, our goal is to educate and empower women to make an informed choice. Pregnant women have three choices: parenting, adoption, and abortion. GCMWH addresses all three of these options in a warm, non-judgmental environment and without a preplanned agenda.

**All of our services are provided at no charge.**

### WHY THE NEED

Our clients come from multiple socio-economic levels and cultures. Many are from broken homes that lack parental/family structure with generational alcoholism, drug addiction, psychological, physical, and/or sexual abuse. As a result, a high percentage of our clients are living a life of addiction themselves. According to a recent report published by **Maryland's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene**<sup>1</sup>, the average infant mortality rates from 2011 – 2015 have declined in all regions of Maryland except for the Eastern Shore where rates have increased.

### WHAT WE DO

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<sup>1</sup> "Maryland Vital Statistics. Infant Mortality in Maryland, 2015." Maryland Department of Health & Mental Hygiene. Vital Statistics Administration. September, 2016.

All services are individually tailored according to clients' needs and schedules.

### **Hospital grade hCG urine tests**

These tests can detect pregnancy hormones ten days after conception and provide results within 3 to 5 minutes. If the test is positive, a written proof of pregnancy is given to the client and a referral made for further medical care to an appropriate obstetrical office.

### **Limited ultrasound examinations**

Sonograms are performed at **no cost** to the client and provided by an R.N. trained in sonography for purposes of confirming an intrauterine pregnancy, detecting fetal cardiac activity, and estimating gestational age. Our ultrasounds are not for the purposes of diagnosing or detecting any medical problem or condition for the baby or client. All ultrasounds performed are done so under the supervision of a qualified medical provider.

### **Counseling for referral to an adoption agency**

The Center is not affiliated with any adoption agencies but we are often the first to discuss this option with the mother. We present what an adoption plan looks like so the client can make an informed decision. Birth parents are in control of the adoption process. They make and usually choose between three types of adoption: open, partially open, and confidential. Ongoing support is offered for the birth parents before, during and after the adoption as they work with the adoption agency.

### **Counseling the abortion minded client**

If a client reveals that she may desire an abortion, GCMWH will present the most updated and detailed medical information from ACOG (**American Congress of Obstetrics and Gynecology**)<sup>2</sup>. This information will include medical and surgical procedures, what the procedure looks like and risks these procedures may have on their health. This counseling is done in a very loving and nonjudgmental way.

As part of comprehensive counseling, GCMWH also teaches current available information from the **FDA**<sup>3</sup> on the "abortion pill" or "morning after pill" (Mifeprex, RU-486, misoprostol and Cyotec), how these chemicals work in the body, side effects and what possible future fertility issues may arise.

### **Counseling for post abortion recovery**

Many men and women experience unresolved emotions after an abortion. For some, this is right after the abortion and for others these feelings may surface years later. GCMWH is that safe place to talk one-on-one with a trained client advocate or medical professional to promote healing emotionally and spiritually. We offer an eight-week post-abortion individualized program and may refer a client to an intensive weekend retreat called Rachel's Vineyard

### **The L.E.A.P. program**

L.E.A.P. (**L**earning, **E**mpowering, **A**ffirming, and **P**rogressing) is an outreach, teaching and mentoring program which aims to help individuals improve themselves in four basic ways. Individuals who sign up for the L.E.A.P. program will **Learn** valuable parenting skills, feel **Empowered** and **Affirmed** as parents,

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<sup>2</sup> "Abortion: Resource Overview." The American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists, 2017. [www.acog.org](http://www.acog.org)

<sup>3</sup> "Mifeprex (mifepristone) Information." U.S. Food & Drug Administration, 03/30/2016. [www.fda.org](http://www.fda.org)

and will **Progress** to set and achieve their goals in life. Clients schedule classes at **GCMWH** during normal business hours, Monday through Thursday, between 10:00 am to 5:00 pm. These classes average about one hour, depending on subject matter. At present, there are approximately 40 in-house, individualized classes available for any client. Each class is designed to guide participants through a healthy pregnancy, parenting skills, infant care, labor and delivery, breastfeeding, etc. Most importantly, classes continue post-delivery to address relationships, effective discipline, and healthy boundaries. The L.E.A.P. program is continually being evaluated and improved to provide the most up-to-date information.

We encourage clients to participate in our many programs to insure a healthy pregnancy. Clients earn “Points” by attending prenatal classes, OB appointments, support groups, dental appointments or psychological counseling. These points can be used to “purchase” essential baby supplies in Gracie’s Baby Boutique.

### **Postpartum Home Visits**

Following the birth and discharge from the hospital, a Maternal Newborn Specialist will perform a postpartum home visit. This is an ideal environment to have one-on-one contact with clients to observe and evaluate the mother and the baby. The infant will have a limited physical exam to observe skin color, general activity, temperature, breast feeding technique, and cord care status. If warranted, referrals may be made to an appropriate medical professional for further evaluation.

### **Gracie’s Baby Boutique**

Gracie’s Baby Boutique was designed for new moms/dads to “purchase” new baby items such as baby clothes, car seats, pack and plays, diapers, and other maternity/baby items through “Mommy Money”.

### **Support Groups**

Under the L.E.A.P. group, numerous support groups are available. These serve to help educate young parents on basic parenting skills and to develop relationships, network with other moms and dads, interact with role models and learn from individuals trained in each field. These support groups include:

#### **YMLS (Young Moms of the Lower Shore).**

This support group provides guidance to young mothers to help them handle the everyday challenges of motherhood and become strong role models for their children. Dinner, child care and transportation are provided. The program includes a guest speaker, interactive crafts, practical education, and a time for sharing. The YMLS meets on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of each month at Pocomoke High School in southern Worcester County.

#### **D.A.R.E. (Dads Are Real Everyday)**

D.A.R.E. is a support group for young fathers. The mission of D.A.R.E. is to inspire and empower men to honor children by transforming men into dads who are committed to creating and nurturing a healthy family. The leaders of the program act as mentors and role models in this program. They strive to be more transparent about experiences from their own childhood and/or their relationship with their own father. There also may be an added component if any addiction to drugs or alcohol has complicated their own life. The atmosphere of D.A.R.E. is one of openness and trust. Dinner, child care and transportation are provided. D.A.R.E. dads meet every 2nd and 4th Thursday of the month in the Berlin area of northern Worcester County. When dads attend these meetings, show proof of seeking treatment for addictions, sign up for a GED program or attend mental health

appointments, they are eligible to earn D.A.R.E. Dollars. These “Dollars” can also be converted to a gift card which the dads can use to treat their family for a day of activities that encourage family bonding. This program provides a model for young dads to be transformed into the best dads they can be for their families.

### **W.E.W. (Women Empowering Women)**

GCMWH desires to be the link which will connect every mom with any addictions to an appropriate addiction facility and/or program where they will feel valued, safe and loved. Our program provides drug addiction counseling which promotes prevention and empowers these women to break the cycle of addiction and domestic violence which affects them and/or their family unit. Dinner, child care and transportation are provided. Our group counselor/facilitator was invited and now participates in a committee for the **Worcester County Warriors Against Opiate Addictions**. This group meets every other Wednesday at GCMWH.

### **GED testing and classes**

The GED program is offered through the services of one of our board members. Clients interested in obtaining their GED can be tested at GCMWH and take classes on site or at 11 other sites in the County where instruction is offered

### **Case management**

GCMWH provides case management services for clients based upon their needs. Our case managers provide an array of services to help individuals and families cope with complicated situations in the most effective way possible, thereby achieving a better quality of life. They help people to identify their goals, needs, and resources. We provide the following services at **NO COST**:

- Linking clients with the valuable resources within our community
- Transportation to resources
- Material assistance
- Financial planning goal setting
- Parent education
- Court advocate
- Counseling services by a LCPC
- Support groups for young moms and dads
- Individualized nursing care plans. This benefit decreases fragmentation of care and increases improvement in client care

### **ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS FUNDED THROUGH GRANTS (2018)**

#### **Mother’s Circle - Maternal Depression in Pregnant or Post-Partum Women through the 2018 Women’s Fund Grant**

The \$5,000 award through the Community Foundation will fund a new treatment strategy, Project H.O.P.E. (Holistic Opportunities for Prevention and Education) aimed at the pregnant client at high risk for maternal depression or having pre-existing behavioral health issues. The vision of Project H.O.P.E. is to bridge the alarming gap in services available to this vulnerable population. By continuing to communicate and collaborate with the known community resources while adding non-traditional

approaches we will not only enhance our current success but further ensure continuity of care for our clients.

### **Addressing the Physical and Mental Health of “At Risk” Pregnant Women and their Families - Quality Health Foundation/Qlarant Foundation**

The \$35,000 award through Qlarant will provide additional funding for Project H.O.P.E. The participants will include but not be limited to the addicted, the pregnant teenager, those suffering with systematic abuse and trauma or multi-generational dysfunction. By addressing the immediate and physical needs of our clientele, Project [H.O.P.E.](#) will provide the link connecting QHF's mission with the at risk pregnant women and their families on the Lower Eastern Shore. Our goal is to provide a unique approach that will motivate our clients towards improved health and successful families. This is a sound strategic plan built on trust, communication and the building of life long relationships with the families of our community.

### **HOW WE ARE FUNDED**

While GCMWH employs paid staff, it relies heavily on volunteers to serve its clients in the community. The following sources of funding are utilized to fund the operations and outreach for GCMWH:

- Donations from the public through several fund-raising activities
- Donations from businesses in the Community
- Donations from area churches
- Grants
- Proceeds from our thrift store, the Shirley Grace Thrift Shop

### **FUTURE PROGRAMS WHEN FUNDED**

#### **Joint Education Program**

Grace Center for Maternal and Women’s Health, in conjunction with the Worcester County Board of Education, is seeking to develop and implement a program to place a trained counselor from GCMWH in the schools to educate, equip and empower young women and men to make healthy choices. The joint effort is to provide a safe environment within a school setting that provides prevention and critical thinking skills which promote healthy life choices.

The need for this program is based on data collected by GCMWH from our clients which includes the following statistics:

- 71% of our clients have reported they first became sexually active anywhere between 12 to 17 years of age
- An alarming number of women that come to us are on some form of anti-anxiety or depression medicine
- Drug overdoses and deaths are at epidemic proportions
- There is a lack of knowledge in our young clients about their menstrual cycle, reproductive health and what a healthy relationship looks like
- Many are growing up with failed parenting strategies or a lack of parental/family structure
- This is a generation that demands instant gratification in part due to the impact of social media.
- They are weak, at best, in terms of the quality of their relationships in their family and significant others.

- Sexually transmitted diseases such as Chlamydia and Gonorhea are on the rise and will have lasting effects on a young woman's reproductive health if undetected.

### **Testing for Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD)**

STDs, if not treated, can lead to serious health outcomes such as an increased risk of cervical cancer and/or infertility. Many STDs don't cause noticeable symptoms, so the only way to know for sure if an individual has a STD is to get tested.

### **Maternity Home**

GCMWH seeks to be the first maternity home on the Lower Eastern Shore for at-risk pregnant women and their babies at no cost to the client. Dedicated staff at the home will assist residents in developing a personal plan-of-care specifically designed to meet their current and future needs, whether they choose to parent or place their child for adoption. Growth by each resident of the home, through independence and responsibility, will lead the women to become productive members of the community.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

You can learn more about the services we provide by visiting our website at [gracematernalhealth.org](http://gracematernalhealth.org). Alternatively, you can reach us at (443) 513-4124 or via e-mail at [info@gracematernalhealth.org](mailto:info@gracematernalhealth.org).