

On Air With Amber Lehman



Amber Lehman is CEO of First Choice Pregnancy Solutions in Wake Forest, North Carolina. The organization's mission is to communicate accurate and truthful information to women and men who are affected by unplanned pregnancy, and to provide them with spiritual, emotional and physical support. Amber holds a BA in Biblical Studies, and a certification in Nonprofit Management from Duke University. She is currently completing her MA in Christian Ethics, which is focused on Nonprofit

Management Best Practices for Pregnancy Center Ministries. Her academic training, spiritual and professional mentorship, and her personal experience with abortion contribute to her passion and desire to equip and empower women to choose life through strong and sustainable pregnancy center ministries.

The following is an edited transcript of an interview with Amber Lehman that was conducted by John Rustin, president of the North Carolina Family Policy Council. An edited version of this interview aired in January 2014 on the Council's weekly radio program, "Family Policy Matters." Amber discussed her personal history with unplanned pregnancy and abortion, and the life-saving work of pregnancy resource centers. This interview can be heard at <http://www.ncfamily.org/radioshowarchives2014.html>.

John Rustin: Amber, you really bring a unique perspective to your work at the pregnancy resource center. And so I want to start with your personal testimony, which includes a history with both unplanned pregnancy and abortion. Share with us your personal experience with abortion, if you will.

Amber Lehman: Well John, it's been a long time, but I was a 15 year-old girl when I found myself pregnant—it was just before my 16th birthday, and I went home to my mother, who was a church-goer, and I expected her to tell me I had to have the baby. And she ... told me that whatever I chose, she would support me. And so at that time, living with her as a single mom and just kind of barely keeping the lights on, I made the decision to abort. And so just after my 16th birthday, my mother drops me off at the abortion clinic, my boyfriend's mother picked me up, picked up my prescriptions, and dropped me off at home, and I sat there, and I thought, "wow this feels pretty yucky." And so I consciously hardened my heart—that is how I can describe it now that I am a believer and know what to call it. I consciously hardened my heart to those feelings until about eight years later, when Christ got a hold of me, and my eyes were opened to the fact that I had not just had an abortion procedure, but I had taken the life of my baby [who] had organs and a heartbeat. And so that began my

journey with Christ in becoming healed through Him. And then, through the years, He grew my compassion and passion for both the mothers and the unborn in this issue.

JR: Wow, well I appreciate you sharing that with us. I am sure it must be something that has really impacted your life in very significant ways, and I imagine that having gone through that yourself enables you to really communicate and to reach out with a real, as you say, compassion to young women who are going through similar circumstances.

AL: Yeah. I think that I'm able to lead my staff in seeing the merciful side of it. You know, when you look at somebody's situation, you can see why they are leaning toward abortion. Without a conviction for life, an abortion is so readily on demand and really promoted. I even heard a radio commercial this week for an abortion clinic. So you can see why they would run towards abortion as a solution. And so there's been the ability for me to put my staff in the shoes of an abortion-minded woman, and they all come to me with compassion already, and they are just big hearts on my staff, but it helps us really promote a judgment-free zone, and a zone where girls can come in, and have the room and the space to really figure out what they want to do. And one of the things we say to them is, "Before you come in here, everybody in your life has an opinion of what you should do, and they're happy to tell it to you. And here, we're not going to share our opinion, [but] we're going to lead you to a process where you figure out what you really want to do, and get the resources available to you."

JR: Let's switch gears now, and talk more about the ministry of First Choice Pregnancy Solutions. As you know, abortion advocates often accuse pro-lifers of being solely focused on stopping abortion, and then sort of leaving women behind to figure out what to do next. But pregnancy resource centers are about so much more than just saving the lives of unborn children. Tell us about the services you offer that help address the real needs of women and men who are facing an unplanned pregnancy.

AL: Over the last few years, we've been shifting our gears just a little bit to really let the churches take back a key role in the process of ending abortion. As a pregnancy center, we want to serve as kind of a hub and spoke type model, where we can intercept girls, help them choose life, stabilize their crisis, and figure out where they need to go next. And so we have an in-house program called "Next Steps," and that program puts them with a weekly mentor and some classes. But what we've seen

through the years is that there's a program on every corner, and they don't need another program. They really need the body of believers to come around them and support them day-to-day. A woman with an unplanned pregnancy has some level of worry and crisis every day, and no organization can support that in the way that she needs, so she needs people in her life. So, for the past few years, we've been creating what we call the "Next Steps Community," and when people join, they can go through some training and learn how to be ministry-minded, and how to meet day-to-day needs in a woman's life. And then [they are] connected to women, usually in the middle or late part of their pregnancy, and they host a baby shower, and they take meals when the baby comes, and they just become a community around her of cheerleaders. And it's been amazing to see the success of people who have engaged with those trained individuals from the church. And so we have been transitioning that Next Steps Community out into the church community, and we're kind of in the middle of that, so it's a little bit messy ... and we want to empower the church to take back the abortion issue by loving the mothers day to day.

JR: Well that's great, and it seems like [your work] is so much about relationships and about meeting practical needs beyond just the spiritual side of things, would you agree with that?

AL: Absolutely, absolutely! And, you know, we are in the South; we are in the Bible-belt. So most of the girls who come in know something about the gospel or church, and they're turned off by it, quite honestly. But when they are genuinely loved and people just relate to them and meet needs, they're happy to go to church. And they go there, and they're greeted, and people are nice to them, and it starts breaking down some of those walls that were put up, by maybe a bad evangelistic experience or a bad experience as a child feeling judged, or something like that.

JR: One of the most exciting and important services you offer at First Choice Pregnancy Solutions is a Mobile Clinic. Tell us more about this powerful outreach, and how it's helping to transform and save lives across North Carolina.

AL: Well, John, it's a 31-foot mobile medical clinic manufactured for that reason. We take this mobile clinic out into neighborhoods, and shopping centers. We basically insert our services into the day-to-day activities of women, who would likely be considering abortion. We determine where to take the mobile clinic by looking at some data points. The first one is the county abortions by residence, so we can look at the state statistics, and look at where they're coming from, and so where they're coming from last year is where they'll likely

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come from this year. So we can zero down into a zip code area of a high need area ... The other thing that we can do is apply what is called an abortion algorithm on the female population of an area, and from doing that, we can estimate how many abortions are coming from that area, whether that's a county, a city, a school, things like that. And so it's pretty neat, it's very strategic, and our plan is to have three mobile units for Wake County. I know that PRC Charlotte is just launching their first mobile clinic as well. It's really the age of tomorrow, and a delivery-service mentality of the age group that we're primarily serving, and they would respond well to this. It does not replace pregnancy centers. It is just a frontline, strategic way to intercept people who otherwise would not come into our brick and mortar pregnancy centers.

JR: Well it sounds like a great tool to have at your disposal and with the targeting that you are doing, and the knowledge that you have and really the heart to reach out, I'm certain that it is serving tremendous needs. Now Amber, I know that ultrasound technology is an integral part of what you do at First Choice. How has ultrasound technology really transformed the work of pregnancy resource centers, and how important is this technology to those centers?

AL: Well, the first step for a mother in crisis to make her decision is to first confirm that she really is pregnant, and to understand how far along she is. What ultrasound technology allows us to do is to put nurses on the frontline, providing professional services. What they're trying to do is to confirm that the pregnancy is in the uterus, then confirm how far along the pregnancy is, and confirm that there is a fetal heart rate that we would see consistent with that gestational age. And that is the first step for any woman to make an informed decision. From that information, the nurse is going to be able to educate the mother on the fetal development of her baby; she's going to be able to let her know what abortion procedure she would be looking at, what risk goes along with that, and honestly how long she has before that procedure changes. And that allows the nurse to pull the mother out of crisis. The byproduct of pregnancy

centers doing ultrasounds is that you know... we have the liberty to show her the baby and ... that is obviously life-changing for the mom. In fact, last week, we had a girl onboard the mobile clinic, and she was there with her mother, and the nurse said, "I am measuring from the top of your baby's head to your baby's bottom," and the girl said, "Oh! My baby has a bottom and a head!" And she did not realize that this wasn't just a blob, but there was a formation of a baby at the stage that she was at. At the same time, her mother looked and said, "Oh my gosh, I had an abortion at three months, and I had no idea!" And so there were two generations of women, who had their eyes opened to the truth of what is happening in the womb in a pregnancy.

JR: Are there other personal stories you could share with us, that really stand out to you of women you have helped at First Choice just to demonstrate how important the ministry is to our listeners?

AL: There are a lot of great stories, but there's one girl named Lakizzy, and she's given us permission to use her name, and we just love her story, and we just love her—she is just a joy to be around. But she was brought in by somebody who's an occupational therapist, and she was out working out in Lakizzy's home with her special needs son, and she found out that Lakizzy had an abortion scheduled for the next day. And so she called around, she knew that her small group leader was involved with First Choice. [Just as an aside], this is really, John, a demonstration of how the church has to be mobilized in the community. Women are not necessarily seeking us out; they're brought to us most likely by a co-worker, a friend, a fellow student who finds out that we're there—we don't have a huge marketing budget, we're not on every billboard, and so the church needs to be mobilized to be able to have these conversations to be able to know what to do in the first 24-48 hours when they find out. On average, it's only nine days from a pregnancy test to a woman obtaining her abortion, so the fact that this woman was in Lakizzy's house the day before she had an abortion scheduled was the only way this mother would have come to us. So she brought Lakizzy in, and the baby's father came as well. And what we found out was that she was 19-and-a-half weeks pregnant with the abortion the next day, so she was literally on her last legal day to begin the multiple day procedure! And so we found out that she was behind about \$3,000 in bills and staying at her mom's house, and they were sleeping on the floor, [with their] two year-old special needs child, and they just felt trapped into this. And so we paid her rent up-to-date, got them back into their own house, turned on their utilities—all of those things—and small groups came around them, brought them food, threw a birthday party for her, and they did Christmas last year. In fact, I actually had her and her husband over for Christmas last Christmas Eve, and then again this year. We've kind of made it a tradition. And she did end up having the baby, she delivered him at 24 weeks, so he was at the NICU for a long time, and it just presented another opportunity for the Bride of Christ to shine in our community and particularly in her life. All the cards are stacked against her, but the church keeps rallying around her, and around her husband to help them stay on their feet, and to keep moving forward.

To learn more about the story Amber shared in the interview, you can watch Lakizzy's story in a video produced (at no cost) for First Choice Pregnancy Solutions by Horizon Productions here: http://m.youtube.com/watch?v=mqmeQP_vhzM&feature=youtu.be ♦

Radio Stations Airing Family Policy Matters

Belmont/Gastonia	WCGC 1270 AM	Sunday, 11:45 PM
Charlotte	WHVN 104.3 FM/ 1240 AM	Sunday, 11:45 PM Sunday, 11:45 PM
Charlotte/Salisbury/ Harrisburg	WOGR 93.3 FM/ 1540 AM	Saturday, 3:45 PM Saturday, 3:45 PM
Charlotte/ Dallas	WCRU 105.7 FM/ 960 AM	Saturday, 6:00 AM Saturday, 6:00 AM
Fayetteville	WCLN 107.3 FM WGQR 105.7 FM	Saturday, 7:00 AM Saturday, 7:00 AM
Forest City	WWOL 780 AM	Wednesday, 8:45 AM
Gastonia	WGAS 1420 AM	Saturday, 3:45 PM
Greensboro	WKEW 1400 AM/ 96.3 FM	Sunday, 6:00 AM Sunday, 6:00 AM
Greensboro/ Winston-Salem	WTRU 830 AM/ 97.7 FM	Saturday, 6:00 AM Saturday, 6:00 AM
Greenville	WLQC 103.1 FM	Sunday, 11:06 PM
New Bern	WSTK 104.5 FM	Saturday 3:15 PM
Newland	WECR 1130 AM	Saturday, 9:06 AM
Raleigh	WDRU 1030 AM/ 105.7 FM	Sunday, 6:00 AM Sunday, 6:00 AM
Raleigh/Durham	WDRU 105.5 FM	Sunday, 6:00 AM
Sanford	WLHC 103.1 FM	Sunday, 11:00 PM
Troy	WJRM 1390 AM	Sunday, 7:30 AM
Wilmington	WZDG 88.5 FM	Sunday, 5:30 AM Sunday, 6:00 PM
Winston-Salem	WBFJ 1550 AM WPOL 1340 AM/ 103.5 FM WPIP 880 AM	Saturday, 6:15 PM Sunday, 6:00 AM Sunday, 6:00 AM Sunday, 5:00 PM