

Real Alternatives sees big success in Pennsylvania

Since Pennsylvania established the Pennsylvania Alternative to Abortion Services Program 13 years ago, the company that administrates the program, Real Alternatives, Inc., has enjoyed some major successes.

The number of new clients assisted has jumped from 1,266 in the 1995-96 fiscal year to more than 13,400 in the 2005-06 fiscal year. More than 135,000 women have received support services through the program. Today, there are more than 121 provider sites in 49 counties, and the state has dedicated \$6.5 million annually to the program.

Kevin I. Bagatta, president and CEO of Real Alternatives, said the secret to the program's success is that it's "based on love."

"What makes this work is that an alternative to abortion is not a pamphlet or a 1-800 number, it's another person who will be there to help a woman in crisis from the moment of conception to 12 months after the birth of a child," said Mr. Bagatta.

The director said the program reflects America at its best.

"You've got girls from all races and ethnic backgrounds being helped from women of all other races and ethnic backgrounds," he said. "Women are telling us they are alone and they need help. This is a program to meet a woman where she is."

Early after it was introduced by former Pennsylvania Gov. Robert P. Casey, the program enjoyed rapid growth. A statewide toll-free hotline was launched in 1997, which led to the establishment of 18 new pregnancy centers and an average of 620 new women being served each month.

"We have a center within 45 minutes of every woman in Pennsylvania," said Mr. Bagatta.

The director noted that service providers are not awarded grants. They earn their

pay and are reimbursed for specific services they deliver based on a fee-for-services contract. Real Alternatives only pays for actual time spent delivering services, he said.

“It’s a performance-driven program,” he said.

Some of the services that are reimbursed include counseling, parenting classes, abstinence classes, mentoring efforts and assistance with food, shelter and health care.

Mr. Bagatta said he is extremely proud that Real Alternatives has been recognized for running a highly effective and efficient program. Real Alternatives received the Pennsylvania Association of Nonprofit Organizations’ Seal of Excellence for its exemplary management.

Real Alternatives is assisting Texas in establishing a similar program in that state and legislation will be introduced to start a similar program in Maryland.

Since the Alternative to Abortion Services Program was launched, the number of abortions has steadily declined in Pennsylvania, according to Mr. Bagatta. In 2005 alone, there was a 3 percent drop in abortions, with 33,468 abortions performed in Pennsylvania that year.

For more information, visit www.realalternatives.org.