

EO Client Story 2017 Banquet – Diane Braun

Good evening. My name is Diane Braun and I am the Director of Embracing Options Pregnancy Center here in Rochester. I am delighted to be here with you this evening.

I would like to take a brief moment to introduce you to our new Webster Center Director, Crystal Cutting. Crystal joined Embracing Options in July of last year and lives in Irondequoit with her husband Doug and their five children. In addition to running the center and being a very busy mom, she is also the Worship Leader at her church. When Crystal started at Embracing Options she discovered a passion to bring a Sexual Risk Avoidance program with a focus on abstinence to the classes we offer. And I'm excited to tell you that she launched a program last month and currently has two church youth groups participating in this 8-week program. We are blessed to have her as part of the His Branches family. Crystal, would you please stand so everyone can see who you are?

At Embracing Options Pregnancy Center we see clients anywhere from age 14 to 81. We have helped support families in our neighborhood with much needed diapers, formula and even Christmas presents for their children. We have counseled young girls in high school that had sex for the very first time and were scared they might be pregnant. Through our Abortion Recovery Bible Studies we have helped men and women heal from the pain of a pregnancy that was terminated. And we've seen couples, heartbroken after discovering they've contracted an STD from a partner who was unfaithful. We see a lot at Embracing Options and no two days are alike.

Tonight I want to share a story about a couple that touched the hearts of many at Embracing Options and His Branches Health Services. This young couple first came to our center in July of last year after being referred to us from Grace Family Medicine downstairs. They just found out she was pregnant and were still trying to let that news settle in and sort out their feelings. They only knew each other for a month or two and were talking about getting married. During our first encounter with this couple we discovered that they were homeless, looking for work and hungry - unsure of where their next meal would come from. On top of that, neither of them had a driver's license so they had to walk everywhere they needed to go.

A couple of our female counselors were able to give them referrals for food, housing and medical care. We gave her a baby blanket, prenatal vitamins and information about pregnancy and fetal development. They expressed an interest in attending our parenting classes and made an appointment to return for an ultrasound.

They came back the following week for an ultrasound, which was inconclusive this early in her pregnancy. They were still without a home and their greatest need that day was for food, so we called some local food pantries and directed them to where they could get something to eat.

Now they both had family in the area where they could stay, but not together. And, of course, they wanted to be together. We encouraged each of them to move in with their respective families so they could have a place to sleep and food in their bellies instead of wandering the streets day after day. And ultimately, they decided to do just that. Now that their most basic needs for food and housing were met, we could focus on some of their other needs.

They started to come together week after week for parenting classes, even walking several miles in the rain one day. The parenting classes consist of a series of DVD's based on the trimesters of pregnancy. Our sessions started with reading scripture together and discussing how God's word applies to life and what they were experiencing. This allowed them to open up and share their life story and helped lay a foundation of trust. We learned that both of them were brought up in the church and had more than a basic knowledge of God's word. Our peer counselors listened in love, counseled and offered education. They, in turn, shared their fears and sometimes even their tears.

Often this young man would sit for part of the parenting class and then meet with one of our male counselors. One counselor recalled an early conversation when the young man admitted to walking away from a full time job a few years earlier. He said it happened gradually. Missing a day one week, two another, three another until finally, one day he just turned the other way and started living on the streets. But when he found out that his girlfriend was pregnant with his child, a desire was stirred in his heart to provide for them. The male counselors spent several weeks helping him find work, and even walking him through the process of being in an

interview and learning necessary skills to stand out from the other candidates. Eventually, he did get a full time job.

Another day our male counselor could actually see a spiritual battle going on in this young man's life. On one hand he saw a young man whose heart's desire was to do what was right for his girlfriend and his child. And on the other side, the enemy was trying to pull him back into a life of crime & drugs. Normally, this man struggled to even make eye contact with the counselors and carry on a conversation. But this day he was very aggressive. Fortunately, the Lord prevailed in his heart and when he returned the following week he was apologetic and had a renewed desire to do what was right.

We continued to meet with them regularly and by the end of August, a month after their initial visit, they returned for another ultrasound. Once again, the sonographer had a hard time seeing an image of the baby or hearing a heartbeat. The young woman then told us she had been experiencing some physical symptoms and, after several doctor visits, the couple learned that they were having a miscarriage. As you can imagine, they were both devastated. We came alongside of them to listen, offer comfort, and help them process through their grief and the loss of their baby. We offered prayer, support, and encouragement.

Sometimes our focus with a client is on the needs of their unborn child. Other times, it's on sharing the gospel of Christ. And then sometimes it's the very basics of life – food, clothing, shelter, and work. We are thankful for our financial supporters who make it possible for us to offer our free services and support the families in our community.

These were just two out of the 140 clients we saw at Embracing Options last year. So often we don't know the outcome of our client's stories. But this was one of those unique situations where we were able to spend weeks helping this precious couple as they struggled through life. They touched the hearts of many at Embracing Options and Grace Family Medicine who spent time sowing into their lives. We are thankful for the season that we were able to walk with them and do what the Lord requires of us - as our banquet scripture verse tells us "To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8

Recently, I ran into the mother of this young woman and she told me that this couple was still seeing each other and were now living together with his family. I learned that he only held down that job for about a month and now they are both looking for work. We desire that our clients live a lifestyle that is God's best for them, but that's not always the case. So we continue to try to reach out to them offering help, hope and healing.

It can be very difficult to stay in touch with our clients because their phone numbers often change or they simply don't respond to our requests to reach them. Please pray for our clients, that they would be responsive to our attempts to help them. And pray for our volunteers, that the Lord would give them unique ways and the right words to draw our clients back to the pregnancy center.

Prayer is such a vital part of our ministry. After each client visit we email prayer requests specifically for that client. If you are one of our prayer partners, THANK YOU. Thank you for standing in the gap with us. Your prayers and words of encouragement sustain us.

Our staff consists of two part-time directors – Crystal and me. The rest are all volunteers, dedicated men and women. Your financial help enables us to support the staff but there is so much more we would like to do. If you would like to join our prayer list or be a part of the work we're doing at Embracing Options, Crystal and I would be happy to talk to you at the Embracing Options table in the back of the room at the end of our program.

Working together, the gifts and prayers of people like you enable this ministry to carry out the tasks that God has given us. We are deeply grateful for your support. Thank you!

Dianne Braun