

History of Living Hope

Living Hope Pregnancy Support Services began as A Woman's Choices Crisis Pregnancy Center. The ministry was established in 1989 by a group of Columbus County citizens who desired to help women in "crisis" pregnancies make choices other than abortion. Free pregnancy tests were offered (at a time when one could not buy a pregnancy test at the Dollar Store!) and women who were considering abortion were given accurate information about all of their choices – hence, the name A Woman's Choices. Those clients who chose to carry to term were assisted with the decision of whether to parent or make an adoption plan. A Mother's Helper program assisted women with practical needs and education on topics such as healthy pregnancy, labor and birth, and infant care. The Center was granted tax-exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service and celebrated the arrival of its "first baby" in 1990.

Over the next several years the ministry struggled to gain support and publicity. After initially opening in the Powell Building, it moved several times. Despite the faithful financial support of Grace Bible Church and Piney Forest Baptist Church, the budget was extremely tight. Without the generosity of several landlords who provided free or reduced rent, A Woman's Choices would have folded. The Board eventually stopped meeting, no newsletters were published, there were very few active volunteers and no regular office hours were offered. By 2000, A Woman's Choices was seeing fewer than two dozen clients each year and the two active volunteers – Pam Merritt and Janet McPherson – knew that something had to be done. They prayed that the Lord would show them whether the ministry should disband or if an attempt should be made to take it to a higher level.

The Lord clearly impressed upon both women that He still had plans for the ministry. A new Board of Directors was recruited and met for the first time in November of 2000. One of their first decisions was to change the name of the ministry to A Woman's Choices Pregnancy Care Center. The Center moved to a very visible location at 327 Jefferson Street in January of 2001. Volunteers were recruited and trained, regular office hours were established, monthly newsletters were mailed, and things really started to take off. The Center went from 15 client visits in 2000 to 193 visits in 2001. (Growth has continued steadily, with 683 visits in 2020 in spite of a world-wide pandemic.)

In 2003, Dr. Randy Matthews opened his pediatric practice in Whiteville. He had a long history of involvement with various pregnancy centers and was soon recruited to join the Board. Dr. Matthews encouraged the ministry to affiliate with Care Net, a network of pregnancy centers across North America. Mimi Every, Care Net Regional Consultant, came to Whiteville in October of 2005 and conducted an extensive training program for the Board, volunteers, and potential volunteers. Since Care Net requires its pregnancy center directors to be paid, Janet McPherson began receiving a modest salary at the end of 2005.

In 2006, A Woman's Choices inaugurated its Earn While You Learn incentive program and started giving a "hand-up" instead of a "hand-out." Client advocates began meeting with expectant mothers for a series of classes. As the clients took these classes, they earned "baby bucks" which could then be exchanged for a car seat, portable crib, or other baby items. Our first EWYL graduate completed the program in April of 2006.

In the fall of 2007, the ministry moved to its current location at 116 Premiere Plaza in Whiteville. The availability of a second classroom allowed us to offer two EWYL classes at the same time. In the spring of 2009, A Woman's Choices marked its 20th anniversary with an open house and reception.

In April of 2010 and we went from being open 8 hours/week to being open 12 hours/week. Our current hours are Mondays from 3 – 7 and Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12 – 4.

In March of 2012, the ministry officially changed its name to Living Hope Pregnancy Support Services. The Board and staff felt that this name better reflected the services offered and the spirit in which they are presented.

In April of 2014, Julia Wayne, who had volunteered for several years, joined the staff as Client Services Director.

Although many changes have occurred over the years, the mission of Living Hope remains the same as it has been since the ministry began: to affirm life by sharing the love and truth of Jesus Christ and His plan for sexuality, marriage and the family. To God be the glory!