

Pregnant ...and Distressed?

CALL BIRTHRIGHT OF ROCHESTER 328-8700



Realizing that immediate help is needed, the client first contacts the Birthright office by telephone.

It happens to the girl next door. Or to some girl in their English class. But as nearly 45 girls per month discover, pregnancy can happen to them, too.

When faced with the gnawing fear that pregnancy might be possible or the numbing reality of a positive pregnancy test, what is needed most are friends who care. For solution, aid and most importantly, understanding, Birthright is available.

Birthright is a volunteer, non-denominational counseling agency that offers alternatives to abortion. Located in downtown Rochester (328-8700), it stresses strict confidentiality for its clients, even to the point of assigning a code number to each. While Birthright presents all the options open to pregnant girls, it makes sure the final decision has been made by the girl herself.

It has to be a decision the girl can live with the rest of her life.

The typical girl who uses the services of Birthright is between 16 and 18 years old and lives near the suburbs, according to Barbara Dacey, coordinator of volunteer services. Most of the girls are unmarried, but aid is given also to married women who have problems relating to pregnancy.

Troubled or distraught, the girl usually makes her first contact with Birthright by phone. A pregnancy test can be arranged with a local hospital for \$5. This is the only fee that is charged. Once the pregnancy is confirmed, 75 Birthright volunteers, many of whom are professional social workers, secure whatever kind of help is needed and offer continuing support.

"We tell them that abortion isn't a necessary route; there are other things that the girls can do," Mrs. Dacey said. If an abortion is desired, the client must make her own arrangements. Contraceptives are also not handled at the center.

The girls are urged to think about the alternatives "for a long time." Abortion, especially, is a "bad thing to jump into," she said. Approximately 75 per cent of the girls who come to Birthright decide to keep their babies while 25 per cent give them up for adoption. Contacts are made with local licensed adoption agencies if necessary.

"A great deal of tears" is the initial reaction when the girl discovers that she is pregnant. "They don't seem to associate sex with pregnancy," sighed Kathi Piehler, administrative supervisor of Birthright. The first three months are the most emotional and very chaotic. It's also the

greatest time for physical hormonal changes. Once the decision is made what to do, the pregnancy usually runs quite smooth," she added.

Telling the client's parents and family is one of the most difficult parts of the pregnancy. Birthright volunteers will accompany the client to break the news, although it is usually better just to have family members present, according to Mrs. Piehler. "Initially the parents are hurt and see it as a personal affront. Eventually most are very supportive," she said.

Some girls, however, arrive at the Birthright office with suitcase in hand since they are not able to cope with the home situation. Temporary housing or more permanent arrangements in homes for unwed mothers are also part of Birthright services.

To prevent lapses in education during the pregnancy, special tutoring for girls who live in the suburbs and YWCA courses for city residents can be arranged. No mention of where the classes were taken is made on the client's school record.

An unwanted pregnancy is an overwhelming problem, but Birthright aid is as close as the nearest telephone. The organization is in the midst of a fund drive with supporters sending donations to Box 8473, Rochester.



Sympathy and support are distributed freely by the Birthright workers.



Mrs. Barbara Dacey, coordinator of volunteer services.

As in 50 per cent