

a Young

Each life a milestone for pregnancy center

CHILI — About two years ago, Amy Volke, 26, was still involved in a romantic relationship with the father of her first child. However, since she became pregnant a second time by him, she said, the relationship has ended. And while the never-married Volke receives child support, she currently is the primary caregiver for their two children, Kaitlyn, 6, and Emily, 14 months.

She added that although going through an unplanned pregnancy the first time was difficult, doing it again was even harder.

"How do you tell your family you've done it a second time?" she asked rhetorically during an interview in her duplex apartment.

Despite her fears, Volke, who attends Holy Name of Jesus Church in Greece, said her family supported her through the second pregnancy. But various circumstances compelled her to seek aid from Problem Pregnancy Help Center Inc., on Lake Avenue in Rochester, she added. Founded by lay Catholics 10 years ago this coming Nov. 8, the center exists to provide material, emotional and spiritual help to women who face problem pregnancies.

Volke turned to the center because of the financial and emotional stress of her second pregnancy — during it she both lost her job and had medical complications that caused her to gain 160 pounds and threatened both her life and her daughter's life. Both her girls were delivered via Caesarean section, she said, adding that Emily was delivered prematurely because her mother was having heart complications.

Story by Rob Cullivan

Volke credited rediscovering her Catholic faith, which she said she had neglected for years, with helping her to make it through a second unplanned pregnancy. She noted she would never have considered ending it through abortion. However, she admitted that at one point in her second pregnancy, she felt almost suicidal.

"I was driving down the road, and I was so stressed I felt like driving into a brick wall," she said. Then she remembered looking into the eyes of Kaitlyn sitting next to her in the vehicle.

"The only way I can say it is she had Jesus in her eyes," Volke recalled. Kaitlyn, sitting in on the interview, remembered what she then said to her mother: "Don't worry, God will always watch out for us, Mommy."

Volke eventually went to the Problem Pregnancy Center and said she found friendly women there willing to listen to her problems, and ample material aid given freely. She added that the center also hooked her up with a "partner" with whom she still keeps in touch who has provided emotional support. Partners do such things as provide rides for women to medical appointments, and call regularly to check on their status.

Volke supports herself by working at a day-care center. She added that she is currently engaged to a Buffalo-area man she met through a friend, and will be married this October.

"It's kind of crazy how things have happened," she said. "But I believe out of everything bad that happens in your life, something twice as good comes out of it."

Volke's tale is the kind of success story that the Problem Pregnancy Center was founded to create, according to Mary Klebes, assistant director, a member of St. Margaret Mary's Parish, Irondequoit. Most of the private, not-for-profit center's 50 volunteers are Catholics, she said, adding that several Catholic parishes and organizations support the center's work, which is designed to encourage women to choose life for their unborn children.

Women who come to the center can get a free pregnancy test, and receive education on fetal development, she said. She added that the center also offers information on adoption, and its volunteers try to help women deal with whatever issue confronts them that may



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Amy Volke and her children, Kaitlyn, 6, and Emily, 14 months.

tempt them to abort their babies. Counsel is offered in a non-judgmental manner, Klebes said, noting that there's no room for harshness when trying to turn a troubled woman from choosing abortion.

"What we try to do is find out what the fears are, and help her eliminate some of them, to let her know she's not alone," she said.

In addition to helping women in problem pregnancies, the center also promotes chastity through various on- and off-site efforts, and offers spiritual retreats for its clients.

The center also has a "Prayer Partners Program" in which people in the

community are asked to pray for a specific client daily. However, volunteers and staff "never push our religion on any of our clients," Klebes said.

The center has directly worked with about 3,000 women since its founding, Klebes said, and has given free material aid to hundreds of others. Volke noted that she may eventually find herself at the center again for a different reason than being pregnant.

"I hope some day I can volunteer and give back."

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Problem Pregnancy Center can be reached at 716/865-0360.

Events

For information on these upcoming events, call the hotline for Odyssey, the Diocese of Rochester's young adult network, at 716/328-3228, ext. 375, or 1-800-388-7177, ext. 375, or visit the Odyssey Web site at www.ggw.org/odyssey.

● **Thursday, May 4:** Dinner and brainstorming session for future Odyssey events at the Dugan Center, St. Mary's Church, 15 St. Mary's Place, downtown Rochester. \$5. Register by May 2.

● **Saturday, May 13:** Bike ride through Spencerport and Brockport. Meet at Henpeck Park, Route 386 and Elmgrove Road in Greece. 9:30 a.m.

● **Thursday, May 18:** "Soup, Bread and Service": Discussion of social justice issues with representatives of the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Catholic Worker movement. Holy Family Convent, 891 Jay St., Rochester. 6:30 p.m. RSVP by May 9.

● **Sunday, May 21:** 11:30 a.m. Mass at St. Ambrose Church, 25 Empire Blvd., Rochester. Meet in front of the church beforehand. Brunch afterward.

● **Thursday, May 25:** Volunteers needed to help prepare, set up and serve meals at Blessed Sacrament Parish's soup kitchen, 534 Oxford St., Rochester, as well as clean up afterward. 6-8:30 p.m.

● **Thursday, May 25:** Dinner at the Elmwood Inn, 1256 Mt. Hope Ave., Rochester. 7 p.m.

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