

*Britt Sloan and her son –  
grateful for the road she chose.*

*photo by Chris Fritchie*



## LifeTalk: Not Just a Pregnancy Center

By Debbie Vallejo

**BRITT SLOAN** was 17-years-old when she dropped out of high school and ran away from home. A few months later amid a fast-moving lifestyle full of drugs and alcohol, she found herself pregnant and terrified. The mother of one of her roommates set up an appointment for her at a clinic that provided abortions at a relatively low, monetary price. Even through the haze of drugs and alcohol, Britt felt the choice weighing heavily on her. “I grew up in an evangelical church,

there was just something about going to get an abortion, I couldn’t make myself do it,” she explains.

Britt was living in Arlington at the time and found a local pregnancy clinic where, at 15 weeks along, she received a free pregnancy test and counseling. She says their kindness and caring attitude had an impact on her.

“Everything I told them was a lie,” says Mrs. Sloan. “I was living so fast and furious, I hadn’t stopped to think about

what I was doing to the baby, or that the baby was even a person.” Center volunteers gave her the facts about the development of the baby at that point in her pregnancy. “They were so loving and nice; they made everything so personal,” says Mrs. Sloan. She decided not to have an abortion, but to figure out a way to have the baby.

Her future was still uncertain; she didn’t know if she was going to parent the baby or give him to a family for adoption.

She moved back in with her parents in her sixth month and began going to a pregnancy center associated with the church her parents attended. Her future was still uncertain; she didn’t know if she was going to parent the baby or give him to a family for adoption. The one certainty in her mind was that she wanted the best possible life for her child.

After talking with an adoption agency and looking at her options, Britt decided to become a parent. She stopped using drugs and found a home where she and her son could make a fresh start. She took advantage of parenting classes and help available from friends and family. The church she attended with her son had a pregnancy center similar to the one that had helped her and they approached her about volunteering her time. “I had made such bad choices, it seemed to me like I was in no position to be able to help others when I had messed up my own life so badly,” says



*Britt Sloan, her husband and their children at the New Hope church where Mr. Sloan pastors.*

*photo by Chris Fritchie*

will only increase in the years to come. The first facility for women and men facing this and other life-altering decisions is coming to Frisco. LifeTalk, a non-profit resource center, will provide medical support, counseling and education for those facing an unexpected pregnancy. It will serve clients from all age groups and every income level. Services are free and money comes through donations and fundraisers.

### BRING A DREAM TO LIFE

The vision for the facility took shape when Frisco residents Drs. Elmarie and Marius Meintjeis felt the need for a pregnancy center in the area. They purchased 15,000 square feet of office space, created a board of directors and began the process of getting the center up and running. The office space at the intersection of Warren Parkway and Parkwood was vacant for more than a year as the couple raised funds to finish out the interior and reached out to volunteers to help run the center.

As the Meintjeis' were trying to pull together the resources to start LifeTalk, a woman named Katharine Hill was working with women in the area who had gone through an abortion. Ms. Hill also felt a strong desire to begin a pregnancy crisis center in Frisco, but knew it would take a lot of time and money. She had no idea the Meintjeis' were already working on the same challenge and needed someone to lead their project. A mutual friend connected the three for what turned out to be a perfect fit. Ms. Hill is now coordinating efforts to open LifeTalk by the end of January. "Soon after I came on board a friend donated all of the finish out and decorating for the building," she says. "It's been truly amazing how everything has come together."

### MORE THAN JUST A PREGNANCY CENTER

"At this time there is no center like LifeTalk in our immediate area," explains Ms. Hill. "There are some facilities in

Mrs. Sloan. Others convinced her that her story was exactly what equipped her to counsel women facing their own unplanned pregnancies. She was 19 when she started volunteering.

Britt went back to high school, earned her GED, and then graduated from college with a B.A. before pursuing a Masters in Theology at Criswell College. It was there she met her husband. She continued working at the pregnancy center, eventually becoming assistant director. Mrs. Sloan and her husband now live in McKinney where they are raising their five children and he pastors a local church. She credits her positive experience with the Arlington pregnancy center for giving life to both her and her now 15-year-old son. "I was using drugs

and drinking alcohol up to when I moved back in with my parents," she says. "He was born healthy and strong. He's my walking miracle."

### TEXAS TEENS AT HIGH RISK

Britt Sloan is by no means alone in her experience. According to the Texas Department of Health Services, a Texas teenager becomes pregnant every ten minutes. In fact Texas has the second highest number of teen pregnancies in the nation. According to Frisco Independent School District statistics, 28 Frisco teens became pregnant during the 2007-2008 school year. With more than 3,000 additional students enrolled in Frisco schools just this fall, it is realistic to assume that the number of pregnancies

Plano, Allen and McKinney, but none in Frisco.”

The center will offer classes to the public on a variety of parenting topics, health and nutrition, decision making, conflict resolution, listening skills and money management. Volunteers and staff will host support groups for those struggling with parenting, addiction, post-abortion and other issues. Specialized counseling in areas such as abuse, difficult relationships, conquering addictions and eating disorders is also provided. The organization believes education is necessary to help prevent many of these problems, and that counseling offers hope for families and individuals in crisis.

Ms. Hill puts a voice to what drives the people at LifeTalk, “We want to impact our community by offering free services and classes to help with life-affirming choices.

Parenting classes at LifeTalk will include topics ranging from baby-proofing a home to what to expect the first week after bringing the baby home from the hospital. Classes on money management and maintaining healthy relationships are aimed at minimizing stress in the family. Clients can also make appointments to spend time one-on-one with trained staff or volunteers. Ms. Hill puts a voice to what drives the people working at LifeTalk, “We want to make a major impact on our community by offering many free services and classes to help with life-affirming choices.”

### COUNSELING THE YOUNG

“There is so much misinformation out there regarding STDs and abortion,” says Ms. Hill, who speaks from experience. She has had three abortions herself. “I didn’t want to have an abortion, but I was talked out of giving my baby up for adoption when I was 16. That decision led me down a personally destructive path and I had two more abortions.”

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*Katharine Hill will direct LifTalk services  
photo by Chris Fritchie*

She believes a crisis pregnancy center would have totally changed her life. "If I had known of a center like LifeTalk at 16 and had been counseled with a parenting choice or adoption, I believe I would have chosen to continue with the pregnancy," she explains.

Some crisis pregnancy centers have come under fire for being secretive, the staff at LifeTalk is upfront about its pro-life philosophy.

Ms. Hill became involved with LifeTalk and post-abortion counseling services to help inform other girls and women that abortion is not the only option available

to them. "I want to help them understand that one decision can cause a lifetime of mental anguish and suffering," she says.

Some crisis pregnancy centers have come under fire for being secretive about their stance on abortion, the staff at LifeTalk is very upfront about its pro-life philosophy. But their goal is not just to prevent an aborted pregnancy, they want to offer hope to the girl who finds herself in uncharted and often-frightening territory.

When an individual walks into LifeTalk, a trained volunteer or staff member will sit down with them and discuss their needs. Pregnancy tests and sonograms provided by a trained technician are offered onsite, as well as counseling, should the pregnancy test be positive. There will also be a hotline for anyone in need of immediate advice or assistance to call.

A confidentiality agreement is in place for every individual utilizing the services of the center. Minors seeking help are provided the same level of discretion as

any other client. Jane Jefferson is involved in training counselors and volunteers working at LifeTalk. "We do not call or notify parents, but highly encourage the young girl to talk with her mom or dad about her situation," explains Ms. Jefferson. "We offer to help her talk to them if she wishes, but our confidentiality policy notifies the client that we don't release any information about her to anyone without her consent."

### OPENING THE DOORS

Centers such as LifeTalk offer hope to women who are feeling scared and helpless. Britt Sloan feels the crisis pregnancy center that she first came in contact with 15 years ago saved her life. "I fully believe without the pregnancy center that I would be dead," says Mrs. Sloan. "I was making such awful choices, if I had had an abortion I think that I would have continued with drugs and alcohol until I killed myself."

As with all non-profit organizations, raising the necessary capital to open the doors and keep everything operational can be a monumental task. A November fundraiser netted more than \$22,000; more fundraisers will be held as LifeTalk's monetary needs increase.

The organization plans to open to the public later this month. In Ms. Hill's mind and the hearts of those involved in LifeTalk, the doors could not open soon enough. "About two months ago I received a phone call from a nurse at a Frisco middle school," says Ms. Hill. "The nurse informed me that she had a 13-year-old girl in her office who thought she was pregnant. We weren't open yet so I had to refer her to another pregnancy center located in Richardson." As it turns out the girl was indeed pregnant and in need of services LifeTalk will provide. Now there will be a center closer to home that can offer care and assistance.

For more information on LifeTalk, call Katharine Hill at 214.618.9352.

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*Debbie Vallejo is a freelance writer who lives in Frisco.*