

S0449 Reproductive Health Services, Incorporated Records, 1971-1983 33 Folders

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Reproductive Health Services, Inc., donated its records on November 11, 1974. Sylvia Hampton, Director of Public Affairs, donated an addenda to the collection on April 14, 1982.

Reproductive Health Services, Inc., was founded as the Pregnancy Consultation Services in 1970. It incorporated as Reproductive Health Services, a not-for-profit corporation, in April, 1973, a month after the U.S. Supreme Court legalized medical abortions during the first six months of pregnancy.

RHS organized to provide counseling, information, and other services to women who have undesired or problem pregnancies. Its goals have included educating women about adoption, single parenthood and abortion. RHS has worked to inform women about their legal right to medically safe abortions and where to obtain them, providing out-patient services for abortions performed within the first twelve weeks of pregnancy. RHS' services have also included providing women with information on contraceptives, pelvic screenings, pregnancy testing, sonograms, community education, a resource library, and crisis-oriented counseling for women under stress because of problem pregnancy.

The Reproductive Health Services, Inc., staff has included trained volunteers and paid counselors. Its administration was organized to include an executive director, clinic administrator and directors of counseling, education, and nursing as well as a complete medical staff. Reproductive Health Services has charged fees for medical services and received gifts and donations from clients and concerned individuals. RHS has not charged for its counseling services and abortion fees have been based on a sliding income scale.

Judith Widdicombe became the agency's first director in 1973. Widdicombe graduated from St. Luke's Hospital School of Nursing with an "Excellence In Pediatric Nursing Award." Recognized as a leader in both pro-choice political activism and abortion clinic services, Widdicombe was appointed Acting Director of the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) in Washington, D.C. in 1981.

In 1977 Reproductive Health Services, in cooperation with the National Abortion Federation, created a pilot program at its facility entitled, "Involving Significant Others." A full time health education specialist worked directly with friends and relatives of patients answering questions on abortion. By providing educational and counseling programs for both the woman seeking an abortion and those who accompany her, RHS sought to create a climate of personal and public acceptance of the validity of abortion as a personal choice. In 1979 RHS published a guide to help other abortion clinics start a program to involve significant others.

RHS also participated in the first St. Louis "Mini-Summit," sponsored by the National Organization for Women in 1979. The mini-summit opened dialogue between pro-choice and

pro-life groups. A paper distributed to all summit participants entitled, "Seeking Common Ground: A Call for Dialogue" was drafted by Sylvia Hampton of RHS; Samuel Lee, a theology student at St. Louis University; Linda Hatch of Feminists For Life; and Maureen McCarthy, Executive Director of Abortion Rights Alliance (see collection S0116). It called for the opposing sides of the abortion issue to engage in dialogue as a means of widening their perspectives. The groups agreed to stop the use of inflammatory rhetoric against each other and to support "capable, sensitive, and honest" candidates, not just those agreeing with their respective stands on abortion.

In 1981 Judith Widdicombe testified before the Senate Judiciary Sub-Committee on the Constitution against the proposed Hatch Amendment which would have reversed the 1973 Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion by giving Congress and the state power to restrict abortions.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Reproductive Health Services, Inc., Records, 1971-1983, document the clinic's efforts to provide comprehensive, high-quality problem pregnancy counseling at a low cost to St. Louis area women. Records include correspondence with clients, a counselor's manual, case histories, visitor opinion polls on ways visitors may wish to spend their time in the clinic, pamphlets, information on Missouri abortion laws, and a resource library.

The collection also documents the political activities of RHS. Records include the legal suits of various pro-choice groups challenging both the 1935 and 1979 anti-abortion laws passed by the Missouri General Assembly, the 1979 St. Louis Mini-Summit paper entitled, "Seeking Common Ground: A Call For Dialogue", press releases on the Hatch Amendment Hearings, and a letter from Circuit Attorney, George Peach, clearing RHS from charges of negligence in the 1981 case of Diane Boyd. Boyd died of cardiac arrest caused by an adverse reaction to the sublimaze used during abortion procedures. Records also include editorials, newsclippings, pro-choice and right-to-life literature, research, and information on starting a program for significant others. Arranged alphabetically.

The collection contains an oral history interview (T-352) with RHS director Judith Widdicombe conducted by Rose Jonos, May 3, 1974.

Reproductive Health Service's newsclippings scrapbooks comprise collection 197.

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1. Abortion Case Histories, 1981
2. Abortion Medical Procedures, n.d.
3. Boyd, Diane, Correspondence, 1981-1982
4. Clients, Correspondence, 1979-1981
5. Counselor's Manual, c. 1970s-1980s
6. Counselor's Manual, c. 1970s-1980s
7. Counselor's Manual, c. 1970s-1980s
8. Counselor's Manual, c. 1970s-1980s
9. Hampton, Sylvia, Correspondence, 1977-1981
10. Hatch Amendment Hearings, Press Release, 1981

11. Media, 1974-1982
12. Missouri Abortion Laws, Challenge of 1835 St. Louis County Circuit Court Anti-Abortion Statute, pp. 1-37, 1971
13. Missouri Abortion Laws, Challenge of 1835 St. Louis County Circuit Court Anti-Abortion Statute, pp. 38-120, 1971
14. Missouri Abortion Laws, Challenge to abortion law passed in 1979 by Missouri General Assembly, 1979
15. Pamphlets, c. 1970s-1980s
16. Pamphlets, c. 1970s-1980s

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17. Political, Correspondence, 1978-1981
18. Potential Counselors, Correspondence, c. 1970s-1980s
19. Pro-Choice Groups, 1978-1983
20. Research, 1973-1981
21. Right-To-Life Groups, 1978-1982
22. St. Louis Mini-Summit on Abortion, 1979
23. Second Trimester Abortions, April-June, 1980
24. Significant Other Program, 1979
25. United Way, 1978
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27. Visitor Opinion Polls, January 1-18, 1978
28. Visitor Opinion Polls, January 19-31, 1978
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31. Visitor Opinion Polls, April-December, 1978
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ORAL HISTORY

T-352 Judith Widdicombe, Director of RHS, interviewed by Rose Jonos, May 3, 1974

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