I am a proud abortion care provider. My first day at Hope Clinic for Women, I knew it was where I wanted to be. All the employees introduced themselves, smiled, and asked about my family. I felt truly welcomed. I observed as patients came in, sometimes physically shaking, crying, angry, or agitated from the judgmental nonsense being screamed at them by protesters. My new co-workers calmed those patients with kindness and reason. I knew this was different and more important than any other job I have ever had.

Anti-choice activists try to say that abortion providers don’t care about women, babies, or families. The truth is, my co-workers are some of the most caring, compassionate people I know; I consider them an extended family. When so many Americans dislike their jobs, I love going to work with these helpful, fun, and loving people. We work together—not just in the same place, but collaboratively and with the greater purpose of helping women who need us.

I have been empowered by so many people in this movement, especially my colleagues who are a part of Abortion Care Network. I was chosen for a program called Uniting Our Voices, which helps train abortion care providers—including frontline staff—to communicate with the public through the media. This program has given me the tools and courage to step out of my box, though I was skeptical at first. I knew no one at the training, and I was very much out of my comfort zone.

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I remember telling two other people in the program that “I am just a medical assistant, I think they chose the wrong person.” I didn’t realize they were ACN board members. They stopped me right there and said, “No, we chose you because you are a medical assistant.” Uniting Our Voices helped me realize I am not just a medical assistant—I am also an
advocate for all women. Not only can I help our patients every week, but I can also use my voice to make a difference for others and for our movement.

Our patients endure a tremendous amount of stress just to walk in our door. They are targeted by awful, mean anti-choice protesters. When they come into our clinic, we understand what they are going through—and respect the choice they’ve made with family, friends, genetic counselors, physicians, or just by themselves.

I share words of support, love, and laughter with our clients—and now, I can share the truth about being an independent abortion care provider with the public.

I come to work knowing that abortion providers do amazing work. We don’t just perform medical services. We help many people achieve goals, follow dreams, and stay true to self. I can’t imagine doing anything else.

This article is adapted from a piece originally published in Rewire, a non-profit daily publication. Rewire is an Abortion Care Network ally member.

At Abortion Care Network, our mission is to support the sustainability of independent abortion care providers and to support them in providing the best care possible to their patients. We know that every single staff member—no matter their job description—plays an essential role in delivering patient-centered, quality abortion care. When you support Abortion Care Network, you help provide support, professional development, and networking opportunities for independent abortion care providers—from doctors and nurses to medical assistants, like Danielle, and frontline staff.

PROVIDER SPOTLIGHT: CHAD JACKSON, OFFICE MANAGER, WEST ALABAMA WOMEN’S CENTER

That’s also the most challenging aspect of our work. Our patients know that they will be in good hands at our clinic—we provide the kind of care that each of us would want if we were in their place. Our director fights every single day to provide a safe environment for us as employees and for our patients. If clinics like ours closed, where would women go for services? Where would they find the care they need?

How do your loved ones feel about your work?

My whole family is very supportive. My parents are happy knowing that I’m happy with my work. My grandmother didn’t know about my job at the clinic before she passed away, but I have to think that if she were still living, she’d support her grandson as long as I was doing my best at my job and that I was happy. Even though she may not have been pro-choice, she has always been Pro-Chad.

In your opinion, what is something unique about working in an abortion clinic in Alabama?

Many people refer to Alabama as “God’s Country.” I can truly say that the providers at West Alabama Women’s Center do God’s Work. I can go to lunch with my pastor and talk about my day at the clinic, the challenges we see, and the struggles our patients face—and in the same conversation, he can tell me about his mother having an abortion. Something my pastor and I both want patients to know is that they are loved and that they’ll be okay.

In Alabama, we have some deep differences. That’s what I find unique: we can all have different opinions and celebrate our own religions, but we all want to be treated fairly, we want to know that we’re loved and cared for, and we need to know that someone has our backs.

Often, people think of abortion providers as physicians, but the reality is that so many people and positions work to make abortion care possible. What is something special about your position in your clinic?

Our clinic is special because we are a family. We are a team, providing a service that is greatly needed. There are no qualms about pitching in and helping if someone is overwhelmed, running behind, or having a difficult day emotionally. Physicians are integral to the care we provide, but you can not work with just a physician. We work as a team to take care of patients from the minute they pick up the phone until they walk out of the clinic—from the people who answer the phones, to medical assistants, to our doctors, to our director.
Abortion clinic staff are on the frontlines every day protecting our human rights—walking through protesters, advocating against anti-choice politicians trying to close clinic doors, combating online harassment as well as professional isolation. Despite these realities, our network of courageous and compassionate individuals continues to provide necessary health care services to our communities. Prioritizing professional supports that combat these daily attacks and that focus on self-care and well-being are essential to the health of staff, clinic sustainability, the well-being of patients, and the success of our collective movement.

That is why we are excited to announce our new Provider Resilience Initiative—the first formal program focused on supporting the health and well-being of providers, and therefore the sustainability of their important work. In collaboration with Social Workers for Reproductive Justice (SWRJ), social workers from throughout the United States will begin providing crisis support and self-care training to staff who work at ACN member clinics this spring.

Over the past few months, 10 social workers from around the country were selected based on their background in supporting sexual and reproductive health efforts, work in abortion and reproductive health clinics, and crisis response and intervention experience.

Social workers like Jordan and Stephanie:

“I was 24 when I had my own experience with abortion. The amazing clinic and staff that helped guide me through that process were true lights amidst dark days. I’m thrilled to now be a part of the Provider Resilience Initiative, because for me it’s an opportunity to pay back some of that support and to return the light to community-based abortion care providers, without whom I would not be where I am today.” - Jordan

“I have been a trained abortion clinic escort since May 2015. This work has been some of the most humbling work I have done. Having such a clear connection with what providers experience day in and day out while doing their work is one of the many reasons why I’m excited to be a part of the Provider Resilience Initiative.” - Stephanie

To prepare the Provider Resilience Initiative social workers to provide this support, they attended the recent ACN Annual Conference, during which they received an intensive training from licensed social worker and co-founder of SWRJ, Katherine Bisanz, as well as ACN’s Member Services Manager, Rebecca Willman.

Over the next few months, these long-term volunteer social workers will facilitate their first in-services at ACN member clinics with support from ACN and SWRJ staff. The in-services will offer discussion-based trainings to help staff create personal and work-related self-care practices, equip staff with resources and methods of handling stress and challenges that come with being a provider, and provide group and individual exercises that can be used beyond the initial training to increase resilience and well-being.

We are so grateful to our volunteer social workers and our supporters for making this program possible.
Last spring we shared with you data compiled by Abortion Care Network and Bloomberg News regarding the rapid and unprecedented closure of community-based abortion clinics throughout the U.S.

Since our report last year, Abortion Care Network has confirmed an additional 22 closures, bringing the total to 147 clinics or approximately 30% of all independent abortion care providers in the U.S. Laws designed with the intent to close abortion care providers’ doors and insurance reimbursement rates that do not reimburse clinics fairly continue to be driving factors.

On a bright note, we are happy to report that thanks to last year’s historic Supreme Court win in Whole Woman’s Health v. Hellerstedt, Whole Woman’s Health has reopened its flagship clinic in Austin that was forced to close in 2014.

“Despite opposition, our community has rallied with us to restore quality care and serve Central Texas.” - Amy Hagstrom Miller, CEO and Founder of Whole Woman’s Health

Abortion Care Network member clinics are committed to providing and restoring care to communities where and when others will not. Your support helps us keep that promise.

30% of independent abortion care clinics in the U.S. have closed their doors since 2012.