

## Decision-making power. That's what the feminist clinic in Yakima stood for.

### *Historic Yakima clinic ends health care services:*

### *Three decades of care for women by women leaves a lasting legacy*

**YAKIMA, WA.** November 15, 2010 is the last day of health care services at Cedar River Clinics in Yakima. The organization's Administrative Office will remain open in Yakima, and the in Renton and Tacoma remain open and continue providing abortion care.

For over 30 years, Cedar River Clinics has made reproductive freedom and health accessible to women in Eastern Washington through client-focused abortion care. The organization, originally named the Feminist Women's Health Center (FWHC), was founded in 1979 by two local Yakima women, Beverly Whipple and Deborah Lazaldi. Their vision was to empower and trust individual women to make their own decisions about pregnancy care, prevention and termination; to promote informed decision-making; and to ensure that the option of safe abortion was locally accessible. It was a clinic "for women by women," embedded within the community and vitally important throughout a large geographic region.

The founders understood that **without accessible safe abortion, women do not have control over their lives.** They believed that **for equality to exist, each woman must have decision-making power over her reproduction, her sexuality and her body, regardless of her status or income.**

By 2004, Feminist Women's Health Center had changed its name and grown to three locations, adding health centers in Renton and Tacoma when private practice physicians retired.

When they stop providing abortion care, women of Central and Eastern Washington will lose something valuable. It will be the end of an era, but not the end of abortion services. Cedar River Clinics will continue to provide uniquely personal respectful and supportive first and second trimester abortion care and empowering birth control and well-woman care for women who live in or travel to Renton and Tacoma. And, women in Yakima will still have a local place to go to get an abortion; they will be able to get one at Planned Parenthood.

Over the years, Cedar River Clinics' staff, volunteers, and physicians endured violent attacks, blockades and death threats, **as they worked to make abortion accessible in the Yakima community.**

"We blazed the trails and provided care to 38,130 women in 30 years. We took the risks and countered the attacks from anti-abortion people, and made it safe to be an abortion provider in Yakima. With the expansion of Planned Parenthood's abortion services in Yakima in recent years, the region was over-served. Maintaining two main abortion-providing facilities in this community is just not sustainable,"

explains Executive Director and Co-Founder Beverly Whipple. “We would not be closing today if Planned Parenthood (of Greater Washington and North Idaho) had not started providing abortion services in the same town where we have been providing abortion care for 30 years. In starting to provide abortion, they were NOT responding to a local need. Their actions did NOT expand access. We made a difficult decision, but one that is responsible.”

Thousands of small health practices have been eaten up by the larger brand-name health organizations over the past twenty years. Private physicians and family practices found that it was too complicated to keep up with insurance billing, too costly to rely on Medicaid payments, and too burdensome to have to constantly advocate for their clients when insurance denied their claims. They became part of larger institutions in order to survive. The ones who resisted megamedicine were often the feminists, the midwives, the independent practitioners where “client-focus” was not just a fad, and the independent abortion providers who were ostracized and marginalized from mainstream medicine.

**Beverly Whipple urges: “It is too late for our clinic in Yakima, but it is not too late for the other nonprofit feminist health centers across the country. I urge you to go to [feministabortionnetwork.org](http://feministabortionnetwork.org) to find out who they are. They need and deserve your support.”**

### ***Feminist Abortion Network (FAN) health centers Carry the Torch and Pave the Way***

In the 1970’s and 1980’s, feminist activists tackled issues and laws that stood in the way of social, political and economic equality for women. An integral part of this struggle was the women’s health movement, which swept the nation in the years immediately before and after *Roe v Wade* made abortion legal nationwide. Local women wanted something different from the sexist practices they saw in many doctors’ offices, so they established woman-run health care centers, where they decided the policies, practices and protocols for client-centered care. Licensed practitioners performed abortion procedures and did diagnosis and treatments, while feminist activists ensured that clients were treated with respect and given control over their own bodies. They were the first to practice informed consent. Clients received information about all options, benefits and risks. The clinic sought to put the power of health information - information clients could use beyond that one day’s appointment - directly into women’s hands.

The women’s health movement has left a powerful legacy. You have the women’s health movement to thank if:

- You participated in informed consent,
- You read a package insert on the risks and benefits associated with oral contraceptives, hormone replacement therapy, or another pharmaceutical. Such inserts are now required on all medications,
- Your partner or support person attended your medical appointment with you as your advocate,

- You purchased an over-the-counter vaginal remedy or pregnancy test,
- You were offered the opportunity to look at your cervix with a mirror during a gynecological exam.

Of the 50-plus feminist health centers created during that era, only 14 remain. Nonprofit feminist abortion providers exist today in NH, GA, CO, ME, WV, OH, CA, IA, MN, MT, TN as well as WA and collectively serve more than 120,000 clients annually.

Five years ago, these independent feminist clinics banded together to share expertise, respond to changing political and medical landscapes, swap fundraising ideas, and make themselves more visible. They created FAN, the Feminist Abortion Network ([FeministAbortionNetwork.org](http://FeministAbortionNetwork.org)), a network of community based feminist health centers that have and will continue to have national impact on abortion access and care.

***About the Feminist Abortion Network and its members ([FeministAbortionNetwork.org](http://FeministAbortionNetwork.org)):***

FAN clinics are **independent** because they are locally governed and health care practices are not directed by corporate mandates or driven by opinion polls. This independence allows FAN members to respond to emerging or immediate needs.

FAN clinics are **nonprofit** because it enables them to recruit donor support to provide care and services to vulnerable and historically marginalized communities.

FAN clinics are **feminist** because they believe that individuals are capable of making informed decisions about their health care with information about all options and support from those *they* choose, and that they deserve to do so in an atmosphere of dignity and respect with active participation.

FAN clinics are **proud to be abortion providers** and are part of a broader **reproductive justice** movement that advocates for a woman's right to determine whether and when to have children, to become a parent and to parent with dignity, to have a healthy and safe pregnancy, and to have healthy and safe families and relationships.

FAN is a **network** because we are stronger together. FAN members work collaboratively to inform public policy, challenge legislative and regulatory attacks, educate and influence the work of allies, and to raise and amplify the voices and experiences of the women served.

In the Yakima clinic's story, FAN sees a familiar theme: small local grassroots clinic closes when the national chain Wal-Mart-like giant, Planned Parenthood, starts offering the same type of services in the same community. FAN worries about the consolidation of health care. Just as ecosystems require bio-

diversity to thrive, FAN leaders believe diversity is required for health care ecosystems to be healthy. The loss of the 30 year old Yakima clinic is a “canary-in-the-coal-mine” warning.

### ***Call to Action***

“The Yakima clinic closing is a wake-up call to all who support access to choice and access to health care. Feminist Abortion Network believes in the value of locally-based locally-responsive clinics, and in the strength of diversity in the health care ecosystem. Now is a critically important time to support your local feminist clinic,” says Anita Kuennen, Executive Director of Blue Mountain Clinic and President of the Feminist Abortion Network. “We urge you to go to the FAN website ([feministabortionnetwork.org](http://feministabortionnetwork.org)), find the feminist clinic nearest you, and send them a check for your support.”

Although the clinic in Yakima will close its doors, it will not close its eyes. With its administrative office still in the city, Cedar River Clinics will continue working on access: after they laid the ground work by providing abortion for over 30 years, they want to make sure it lasts. Should Planned Parenthood walk away from their obligation to provide abortion, the feminists will be back, **“because abortion is a vital tool for women’s freedom and self-determination. We are proud to provide it,”** says Beverly Whipple.

## Yakima staff member reflections:

### **Beverly Whipple, Executive Director and Co-Founder:**

**“We trust women. Women notice the difference here.”**

**Becky Cavender, Clinic Manager in Yakima today:** “The women we served are from all walks of life. They are mothers, sisters, nieces, cousins. They are teachers, students, ministers, doctors, lawyers, farm workers, and home-makers. In fact, **one in three** women has an abortion in her lifetime. Women often traveled many hours to get to the clinic. They overcame significant obstacles including lack of money, finding someone to care for their children, making plans to sleep overnight in their cars... Far too often they were also dealing with the trauma of sexual assault or domestic violence or living in poverty or not having legal documents. **If a woman wanted an abortion, we did our utmost to help her reach the clinic.** All those women out there who received abortion care at our Yakima health center over the last 30 years know what it meant in their lives: their decision was honored; they felt respected and trusted. They came to the clinic scared and worried; they had a positive experience surrounded by people who supported their choice, whatever their choice was, and they walked out feeling strong.”

**Connie Cantrell who was the Yakima Clinic manager for 13 years and then moved up 5 years ago to be the current Director of Operations:** “For the current and former employees, working in a feminist clinic was a springboard to discovering themselves. Working in our clinics grounds future leaders of the reproductive justice and health movements in women’s real-life challenges. Furthermore, by keeping the Business Office located in Yakima to support the thriving clinics in Renton and Tacoma, Cedar River Clinics is keeping jobs in Yakima and preserving the knowledge and expertise of the skilled administrators who currently work here.”

A timeline, history and accomplishments can be found at [www.fwhc.org/herstory.htm](http://www.fwhc.org/herstory.htm)

and [http://www.cedarriverclinics.org/pdfs/yakima\\_herstory.pdf](http://www.cedarriverclinics.org/pdfs/yakima_herstory.pdf)

## Reflections from Allies:

“Cedar River Clinics is demonstrating high adaptive capacity. They are resilient, realistic, and staying mission driven.”

Kudra MacCaillech, [Concord Feminist Health Center](#), Concord, NH

“In Yakima, Cedar River Clinics have left a mark on the provision of abortion care in rural communities where women must travel long distances and overcome many obstacles. Their staff has been amazing. Through their Women in Need fund (supported in part by staff donations from their paychecks) they have reduced the fee for abortion, helped women find financial assistance to pay for care, and provided practical assistance such as food to eat with medications or reduced prices at nearby motels.”

Stephanie Poggi, [National Network of Abortion Funds](#), Boston, MA

"Eighty-seven percent of counties in the US have no known abortion provider, according to a study done in 2005. It would be wonderful if Planned Parenthood would increase access by going into these areas. Instead it appears they have strategically chosen to go into areas with active abortion providers, which in effect decreases access by making services either more expensive or less sustainable. I support Planned Parenthood for all the good things they have done, but I am confused by this action I have seen repeated in many other communities."

Linda Griebisch, [The Feminist Health Center of Portsmouth](#), Greenland, NH

“Your clinic saved my future. I found it listed in the yellow pages. Just knowing that the Yakima clinic existed helped me feel strong knowing that if I ever needed a choice, you would be there. And I have never even had an unplanned pregnancy.”

community member

Coverage of this news can be found in the [Yakima Herald Republic](#) and [RH Reality Check](#).

[Abortion Gang](#) and [Abortioners](#)