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Mother’s Hope: A Residential Program Caring for Plain Mothers with Mental Health Challenges

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Abstract: Mother’s Hope is a culturally sensitive residential program of hope and healing for plain Anabaptist mothers struggling with postpartum depression and anxiety. The home is situated in central Ohio and run by paid staff and Amish volunteers. While in residence, mothers get intensive attention from professional counseling and medical staff at nearby SpringHaven Counseling Center. This home is unique in that mothers are permitted to keep their infants with them in the home so that mother-child bonding is not interrupted while they receive mental health treatment. Several women, former residents at Mother’s Hope, shared their stories, which are included in this article. [Abstract by authors.]

Keywords: postpartum depression; anxiety; Amish; residence program; counseling; SpringHaven Counseling Center; Woodside Rest

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INTRODUCTION

An Amish woman came to Mother’s Hope with her baby, on the recommendation of friends who had recognized her mental health struggles. She shares this story in her own words.¹

When I was first asked to consider going for help I thought, “There is no way! I am not that bad off, am I? Surely there is an easier way for me to get better than going for counseling.” I was ashamed that everyone would find out that I was struggling so deeply that I needed help. And the most difficult part of all was that it would mean leaving my husband and small children for what seemed like a long time. Then I learned about Mother’s Hope and a spark of hope ignited. I thought, “Maybe I could do this if I could bring my baby along.” So I finally agreed to go. It was the most difficult, humbling decision I ever made. But I was told something I will always remember and want to pass it on to you. “You are a brave and strong woman if you go for help.” Now I’m so glad I did. Was it easy? No, but [it was] definitely worth it. I now have lots of new skills I learned that I can use for the rest of my life that will help me to stay on top of the raging sea of depression. These tools will help me stay afloat and not sink under again. One important thing I learned is that you need to take care of yourself first so you are able to take care of others, such as your family. So, in reality, I am taking care of my children by coming here and becoming a better mom for them. Hopefully this can be encouraging to anyone who is feeling like they are sinking and don’t know where to turn for help. I found Mother’s Hope a tremendous blessing to me and hope others can too.

BACKGROUND

Mother’s Hope is a unique program for mothers in the plain community. It is a residential home in central Ohio for mothers experiencing mental health problems after the birth of a child. This program was established by SpringHaven Counseling Center and Woodside Rest (WSR). SpringHaven is a professional Christian counseling agency. WSR is an Amish-run program that began partnering with SpringHaven in 2011 and provides a home-like environment for members of the plain community seeking intensive mental health care. The WSR program had previously helped mothers with postpartum issues but, like most treatment facilities, required mothers to separate from their infants to get help. SpringHaven and WSR saw a need to not only care for mothers, but to do so in an environment that fostered bonding with their babies. After careful consideration and much planning, the WSR Board opened the doors to Mother’s Hope in August 2021. It truly was a community effort with many people involved in the process. The passion for this project was evident as community members volunteered many hours and provided needed donations for the house. This unique service has been made possible and supported by the plain people of Wayne and Holmes Counties, Ohio. The house continues to be staffed by local plain Anabaptist women and can have three to four mothers and their babies staying at the same time.

MISSION

The focus of Mother’s Hope is centered in SpringHaven’s mission to “compassionately lead people toward wholeness” (www.springhaven.us). This culturally sensitive residential program is unique in that mothers are permitted to have their babies with them while receiving help from licensed professional therapists and medical professionals. The attention is on mothers struggling with postpartum depression and anxiety.

POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

Postpartum depression and postpartum anxiety can have many overlapping symptoms and occur in about one of every five mothers. Here is a list of signs of postpartum depression and anxiety.

- Persistent sad, depressed or anxious mood.
- Irritability.
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, and hopelessness.
- Loss of interest or pleasure in things you normally enjoy.
- Abnormal appetite, weight changes or both.
- Fatigue or decrease in energy.

¹This story is used with her permission.
• Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much.
• Difficulty concentrating or indecisiveness.
• Trouble bonding or forming an emotional attachment with the baby/children.
• Psychomotor agitation or slowing down physically.
• Thoughts of death or no longer wanting to live.

Here’s another story, shared by a former patient at Mother’s Hope, describing her postpartum depression and the help she received while in residence.²

I was asked to share my journey on postpartum depression (PPD). If it can be of any help to someone, please give God all the glory. Through Him anything is possible. Soon after the birth of our daughter I was in the hospital with some health issues. It seemed after that I just couldn’t get back on top. My sister mentioned PPD and I thought, “No, I don’t think that’s what’s wrong.” Finally, I got to the point where I felt no more joy in living. I couldn’t eat nor sleep. I then felt ready to accept help, but where? I then found out about Mother’s Hope and that I could have my baby with me. It was a hard decision to be away from my family and I also had some doubts about if they could actually help me. But now I can see it was a wise decision, as I was at a place where people understood what I was going through, and were able to help me understand a lot more about myself. The caring staff and volunteers did a wonderful job with helping me care for my baby as well as providing a listening ear and encouragement. They also provided one-on-one counseling with understanding and caring counselors that teach healthy ways to communicate with others and also many tools to use in everyday life. I would encourage anybody that is struggling to find help. If you’re like me and think, “I’m not that bad,” don’t wait until it is that bad. Best Wishes! “And He said unto me, ‘My grace is sufficient for thee, my strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ will rest upon me.” 2 Corinthians 12:9

² Used by writer’s permission.

RESIDENTIAL LIFE

Mother’s Hope borrows the principles of the Woodside Rest’s program including an Amish-run, homelike environment to stay in while receiving intensive professional mental health counseling, and adds to it the intentional design to be accommodating to mothers with their infants. Requests for admission to Mother’s Hope come to the SpringHaven House Staff Team Leader and are discussed for appropriateness of fit with the SpringHaven Therapist Team Leader. Mother’s Hope has the goal to send a mom home able to face the challenges of life with healthy choices and options.

Life at Mother’s Hope is designed to model life at home, with added support to promote healing. A structured environment is provided and a schedule is followed daily. The structure allows mothers to feel safe and secure and it gives them healthy boundaries in which to practice as residents, and continue to do at home as well. On admission, each mother is assigned an individual therapist who works closely with her throughout her stay. They set realistic goals for the mother to work towards while a resident. Mothers attend group therapy sessions twice a day and individual therapy twice a week. They see a psychiatric medical professional each week to monitor medications and are also seen at least once by a medical doctor for any physical needs.

The home is run by paid staff and Amish volunteers, women who are giving their time to invest in these mothers’ lives. The staff’s responsibilities include monitoring medications, getting mothers to their appointments at SpringHaven, keeping the house on schedule, leading devotions every morning and evening as a group, and providing a listening ear to the mothers. The volunteers work alongside the staff as a team, caring for the babies, preparing meals, keeping the house clean, doing laundry, and taking walks or playing games with mothers.

After group therapy, mothers either care for their babies or work in the kitchen on meal preparation or on sewing projects. They may do mindfulness activities such as taking a walk, making cards, or working on puzzles. Mothers may need more rest early in the program and grow to participate more in cooking, cleaning, and childcare as they recover. Mothers are permitted to have 30
minutes of phone time per day. They can choose to spend all that time with their husband or save time to speak with other family members or friends. Mothers can have visits with their loved ones, as approved by the therapist/team leader. Husbands are also welcome to join sessions as needed.

Mothers go home with support and encouragement, feeling equipped and capable to resume home life. Outpatient therapy is offered to mothers as needed once they have returned home. Here’s a testimony of one mother, a former resident of Mother’s Hope.3

Each mother comes with a different situation and has her own personal needs. On an average, most mothers stay six to eight weeks. Their discharge date is planned with their individual therapist once they reach their therapy goals. Each mother takes [life] one day at a time and goes through the program at her own pace. Coming to Mother’s Hope was the scariest, bravest thing that I did in my lifetime. PPD (postpartum depression) was very new to me; actually any form of depression was unheard of for me. I even used to think in the back of my mind, “Could I really not help it a little bit? If it’s just in my head, I should be able to shake it off. Surely I could just get over it.” But I found out differently. PPD is a sickness that needs to be taken care of just like any other part of your body. Think of a broken bone. It needs to be set in order to heal properly. And so does your mind. In order to heal properly it needs to have guided, experienced people helping you, coaching and explaining to you how it works, and that what’s happening is ok. It’s not your fault and it will get better. That’s what Mother’s Hope did for me! The counselors helped me learn to take care of myself, so I can take better care of the people around me. How important it is to take time for ourselves and to just be in the moment, living life one breath at a time; enjoying the little things and living in the here and now. Worrying about the future will not get you anywhere. It will only make you more anxious. [It is important to learn] to guide your thoughts in the right direction, stopping them and redirecting them in the correct way.

The house was a good place to rest while I learned. All the staff and volunteers kept the house clean, caring for my baby, making delicious meals, and offering a listening ear. PPD is an experience that I would not wish on anyone, but Mother’s Hope made it a good experience. I can honestly say I am thankful for it; [for] all the knowledge I gained, the friends I made, and that I can now maybe be a help to someone going through the same journey. I know how it feels to be down in that deep, dark hole but I also know how it feels to rise above again. So to anyone struggling in life with depression or anything else, there is hope!! Don’t go on trying to do it on your own, ask for help, accept help, then you can grow from it. There is something courageous about admitting your weakness. God has a perfect plan for each of you, and no one else can fulfill that plan but you. You are special!

**CONCLUSION**

Mother’s Hope’s is a residential Amish-run, homelike environment in which mothers keep their infants while receiving intensive, professional, mental health counseling. An essential part of a mother’s healing includes being able to bond with her baby while getting help for postpartum depression and anxiety. Mothers live in a structured environment that allows them to feel safe and secure. It also gives them healthy boundaries to follow as residents and when they return home. If you or someone you know is struggling with depression or anxiety after the birth of a child, please call Mother’s Hope at 330-600-4223. Mother’s Hope offers a mother and her family restored hope – making a difference one family at a time.

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3 This former resident at Mother’s Hope gave us permission to include her story.