

By Mary Pierce

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Stara Chandler-Smith understands the struggles parents can face when a baby, unplanned or planned, is born. She also understands the dilemma that some pregnant women face.

Recently named executive director of Ogallala Women's Resource Center, Chandler-Smith said she wants to help women in their times of need, whether facing an unplanned pregnancy or struggling to purchase the needed supplies for a baby.

"I love motherhood," the mother of Ethan, Elijah and Eliana said.

"After I came to Christ, I knew I wanted to work with women."

The opening of the position, vacated by Barb Krajewski, who retired, gave Chandler-Smith the opportunity.

The Ogallala Women's Resource Center, located at 1008 W. First St., provides confidential information, help and emotional support for women who are facing an unplanned pregnancy.

The center also offers free pregnancy tests; confidential consultation; information about abortion, adoption and parenting; physician referrals; and supplies for children up to age 24 months, including free baby clothes, diapers and formula. Maternity clothes to pregnant women also are available.

Educational information, in video and print, is available on the subjects of fetal development, parenting, sexually transmitted diseases, abortion and adoption.

All information, counseling and referral services are free, as is clothing and other supplies.

Chandler-Smith said she also is available to give presentations about the center, as well as abstinence and other educational programs.

In addition to Chandler-Smith, volunteers provide mentoring services, as well as post-abortion and post-miscarriage support.

"We aren't licensed counselors, we're peer counselors," she said. "Our goal is to be a sympathetic ear." Chandler-Smith said the center has a successful Learn-2-Earn program. Parents can watch educational videos and work on parenting skills to earn points to redeem for baby supplies, including cribs, car seats and strollers.

While the center is named Ogallala Women's Resource Center, Chandler-Smith said single fathers and families also are eligible to receive services and supplies. The center is nondenominational and welcomes those of any religious background.

"The whole philosophy here is that famous verse James 1:27. 'Religion that our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after widows and orphans in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world,'" she said.

"That's what we want to do. We want to be the hands and feet of Jesus to hurting or seeking people."

Chandler-Smith said her goal as executive director is to continue to offer services in a compassionate manner.

"I would like to have a larger portion of the community know who we are and what we offer," she said.

The center serves the area from Paxton to Chappell, Valentine to Imperial.

"We want to serve as many people as we can," she said.

Currently, the board is looking for a larger building. Additional volunteers to serve as life

mentors also are needed.

"We're in need of volunteers right now who just have a heart for women and four hours a week to dedicate to serving them," she said.

In the future, Chandler-Smith said they also would like to expand the center's hours. Long-term goals are to continue to grow the client base and if possible in the future, to offer free or low cost ultrasound services and sexually transmitted disease testing.

The center, which is governed by a board of directors, is funded solely by donations.

"We're completely funded by the generosity of the people in the community," she said. "It's awesome to see the support so many are willing to give the center."

The center's largest fund-raisers are the Baby Bottle Boomerang, in which 17 churches participated last year, and the fall fund drive, which kicks off with a donor appreciation banquet.

The center is open from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. Monday, Wednesday and Thursday and from 1 until 7 p.m. Tuesday.

Chandler-Smith said there are no income guidelines or other verification information required except that all clients must be Nebraska residents and all contact is confidential.

"The main thing is they feel safe, respected and cared for. That's our main goal," she said.

Since opening in 2003, the center has served 240 clients.

"We've helped women from 12 to 40, a pretty large demographic," she said.