

# MATTERS

Stories and Facts for Friends of Maine Family Planning



## **Innovative Reproductive Empowerment Project Aimed at Women Struggling With Opioid Abuse**

Maine Family Planning, with the assistance of funds from private donors, has initiated a new program called the **Reproductive Empowerment Project**, or **REP**. The REP addresses the need for women struggling with opioid abuse, together with other high-risk women of reproductive age, to acquire the knowledge and access to reproductive health care, including contraception, that will empower them to maintain control over their fertility.

### **BACKGROUND**

Studies show that unintended pregnancy is significantly higher among opioid-dependent women than in the general population. According to one analysis, published in the June 2011 edition of the *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, the rate of unintended pregnancy among opioid-dependent women of child-bearing age was as high as 86 percent, compared to 51 percent in the general population.

In another investigation in 2013–2014, reported on by the Recovery Research Institute, clients already undergoing substance use disorder treatment were surveyed about their knowledge of contraceptive options. Disturbingly, the study found not only that clients possessed many misunderstandings about contraceptive options, but also that many of their beliefs about contraception were based on the mistaken opinion that they could not become pregnant while using substances.

The nationwide epidemic of opioid abuse has hit Maine hard. There were 418 overdose deaths in 2017, up by 65 deaths from 2016. A 2016 U.S. Centers for Disease Control report, based on 2012 data, showed that Maine had the second-highest rate of babies who displayed symptoms of Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) in the nation, at 30.4 per 1,000 hospital births. After increasing steadily for over 10 years, the number of drug-exposed babies born in Maine peaked at 1,024 in 2016—one in 12 births across the state—before declining to 952 in 2017.

*(story continued on next page)*

*“Research shows that unintended pregnancy is virtually guaranteed to opioid-dependent women whose path to mainstream health care is covered with obstacles. This approach, using telehealth to get oral and injectable contraceptive methods to women of childbearing age on-demand, is a big step forward in helping them control their reproductive lives. Basically, we are combining the most modern technology available with old-fashioned, shirt-sleeve outreach and education.”*

—George Hill, MFP President & CEO



# Innovative *Reproductive Empowerment Project* Aimed at Women Struggling With Opioid Abuse

*Continued from front page*

## TELEHEALTH IS KEY TO THE REP'S SUCCESS

For a woman dealing with substance-use disorder, the fear of being exposed to stigma because of her addiction, making an appointment, and organizing the logistics to keep an appointment, especially in a rural state like Maine, can be overwhelming. This makes the use of telehealth critical to the REP's success. Telehealth has been in place at Maine Family Planning since 2015, and our goal is to provide sexual health education and, if clients choose, immediate access to reproductive health care services, using our telehealth system.

## HOW THE REP WORKS

We have reached out to, and partnered with, organizations that already work with women experiencing substance-use disorder: domestic violence programs, harm-reduction associations, gender-specific Intensive Outpatient Programs, substance abuse treatment programs for mothers who are opioid dependent and receiving court-ordered treatment, needle exchange programs, and pre-release programs for women.

MFP's Education Coordinator works with a partner's staff to develop educational presentations on topics related to reproductive health, including contraceptive methods, sexual health risk avoidance strategies, and sexually transmitted infection (STI) and HIV prevention. Each presentation concludes by informing participants that, if they choose, they can be connected with a MFP Women's

Health Care Nurse Practitioner (WHCNP) via a secure, HIPPA-compliant video platform. The WHCNP provides contraceptive counseling that can lead to prescription for, and immediate provision of, an oral contraceptive or injectable birth control method. If a specific oral contraceptive is not immediately available, the coordinator will arrange to mail it to the client.

If the client discloses any risk for a sexually transmitted infection (STI), the WHCNP encourages her to provide a urine sample for STI testing purposes; results are provided by mail. And, if the client believes she may be pregnant, the coordinator, if asked, can provide a pregnancy test, and, if the test is positive, offer a comprehensive pregnancy options counseling session.

Neither MFP or its partnering agency conveys to clients that participation in the REP is a prerequisite to services already being provided by the partner organization. Participation in the REP and telehealth option is voluntary.

Our organizational mission is to ensure that all Maine people have access to high-quality, affordable reproductive health care, comprehensive sexual health education, and the right to control their reproductive lives. The Reproductive Empowerment Project seeks to provide the kind of reproductive health education and medical care that opioid-dependent women, or women at risk of opioid dependency, need to avoid unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections.

## THIS SPRING, WE UNVEILED OUR BRAND-NEW WEBSITE,

designed and developed by Portland firm Pulp + Wire. The updated site boasts convenient features such as the ability to book an appointment, pay your bill, or chat with an expert—all online. The design is fresh and user-friendly, and the content has been streamlined so visitors—whether they are patients, educators, or prospective donors and advocates—are better able to find what they need. Hoping to make a donation or attend a Maine Family Planning event? Click on the Get Involved tab. And there's more to come: Once our Online Visits portal goes live, patients will be able to access basic services via their smartphone or computer. Talk about making it easy to stay on top of your reproductive health! Visit [mainefamilyplanning.org](http://mainefamilyplanning.org) to see for yourself.



# We're Jazzed About This Year's Successful Spring Soirée!

## 2018 HUBER AWARD PRESENTED TO GRR! AT SPRING SOIRÉE

Highlighting this year's Birds and the Bees Spring Soirée, our annual signature fundraising event, was the presentation of the Sherry and David Huber Award for Outstanding Contributions to Reproductive Health to GRR!—Grandmothers for Reproductive Rights.

The Huber Award was established by MFP's Board of Directors 20 years ago in honor of Sherry and David Huber, whose names, actions, and achievements are intricately linked to two ideals: that all women have the right to control the number of children they have and that all children have the right to be loved and wanted.

GRR! is a group of women who came of age when access to birth control, reproductive health care, and abortions was either severely restricted or simply unavailable in the United States. As organizers, advocates, and crusaders, GRR! members seek to protect rights that already exist and increase access to reproductive health care for all women. Accepting the Huber Award was the founder of GRR!, Julia "Judy" Kahrl.

## OVER \$64,000 RAISED FOR MFP PROGRAMS

Nearly 200 people enjoyed the good food and drink at Portland Country Club, as well as the spectacular silent auction put together by the Soirée Planning Committee. In fact, auction proceeds set a record as the Soirée raised over \$64,000 for MFP's programs. Winners of our fabulous raffle prize—a trip to New Orleans—were Richard and Bridget Whiting of Auburn, Maine.



*(L to R) Judy Kahrl, founder of GRR, accepts the 2018 Sherry and David Huber Award from Sherry Huber, MFP Advisory Board member, and MFP President & CEO George Hill.*



*MFP Board member Rep. Dick Farnsworth and Ellen Farnsworth. Dick enjoyed the State Street Traditional Jazz Band and Ellen was victorious in a silent auction bidding battle!*



*(L to R) Doctors Lucy Amory, Rob Chamberlin, and Gita Rao had a great time helping to raise over \$64,000 for Maine Family Planning.*



*(L to R) Caitlin Bevan, Soirée Planning Committee member; Nathaniel Boehmer; Kathryn Best, Planning Committee member; and Liz Hayes, Chair of the Planning Committee. The Soirée was the culmination of eight months of planning!*



P.O. Box 587 ■ Augusta, ME 04332-0587  
207.622.7524 ■ [mainefamilyplanning.org](http://mainefamilyplanning.org)



**Maine Families** in Hancock County (Office in Ellsworth)  
**WIC Nutrition Program** in Hancock & Washington Counties  
(Offices in Calais, Ellsworth, & Machias)

### 18 Maine Family Planning Health Centers

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| Augusta Family Planning<br>& Harris Institute for<br>Reproductive Health | Fort Kent Family Planning  |
| Bangor Family Planning   | Houlton Family Planning  |
| Belfast Family Planning<br>& Open Door Transgender<br>Health Care        | Lewiston Family Planning<br>& Open Door Transgender<br>Health Care   |
| Calais Family Planning   | Machias Family Planning  |
| Damariscotta Family<br>Planning  | Norway Family Planning   |
| Dexter Family Planning   | Presque Isle Family Planning   |
| Ellsworth Family Planning<br>& Primary Care                              | Rockland Family Planning   |
| Farmington Family Planning   | Rumford Family Planning  |
|  | Skowhegan Family Planning  |
|  | Waterville Family Planning<br>& Open Door Transgender<br>Health Care |

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## Your Gift to Our Annual Fund Supports Groundbreaking Programs Like the *Reproductive Empowerment Project*

If you already have made your charitable gift to our 2017–2018 Annual Fund, **thank you**.

**If you haven't made your gift yet, time is running out!**

Our fiscal year ends June 30, 2018. To make a difference in the lives of over 22,000 Maine women, men, and teens, please make your gift today.

- Your gift ensures reproductive health care for all.
- Your gift ensures sexuality education that works for young people in Maine.
- Your gift ensures advocacy for your rights at all levels of government.

**MAIL** your check to MFP in the enclosed postage-paid envelope.

**MAKE YOUR GIFT ONLINE** at [mainefamilyplanning.org](http://mainefamilyplanning.org) and choose the DONATE button.

**CALL** 207.622.7524 x3930 to make your gift over the phone.

**Thank you!**

