PUTTING WOMEN INTO OTHER’S CARE:

A White Paper on Host and Shepherding Homes

Due to a large-number of enquiries on the host home model, leaders from various maternity housing programs contributed information on their experiences and policies to share with organizations considering making use of a host home program. The terms “host homes” and “shepherding homes” are used interchangeably and other terms of similar meaning may arise out of the culture and language of a specific program (i.e. nurturing homes, support homes). This White Paper was created out of research and conversations with various organizations and is designed for general informational purposes. It should not be relied upon as a substitute for the direct counsel of an attorney, professional counselor, or medical professional.

Overview:
Maternity homes have long been involved in the service of pregnant women, embracing a variety of models over the years to meet changing needs. Shepherding or host homes grew in popularity in the 1980s and 1990s as a new type of housing resource for those involved in pregnancy help ministries. In this model, pregnant women in crisis pregnancies were housed within the spare bedrooms in the homes of passionate pro-lifers. Several long-standing maternity homes, as they currently exist, used some version of a host home living environment as the launching point for developing a housing program. Additionally, many founders of established maternity homes (and other pregnancy help organizations) began by welcoming women into their personal home.

In the last 20 years, the host home model has become less widely used. Potential reasons include 1) less stigma for unplanned pregnancies (correlated to more family support and fewer adoptions), 2) increased challenges in the lives of the women (i.e. mental health, behavioral issues, addiction, criminal history) which raised additional challenges in being welcomed into households with vulnerable people and 3) increased legal concerns related to liability.

Prior to the 1980s, housing for pregnant women was offered in larger, more institutional like settings that were strongly adoption-oriented. It is from these settings that many of the misconceptions around maternity homes that continue to this day grew (e.g. forcing women into adoption, not allowing adoptive mothers to see their child, not providing any information about placement.) In these homes, confidentiality was a priority due to the social stigma around unwed births and the laws of the time. In the 1970s and 80s, the adoption process began to grow in flexibility (e.g. changes to father notification, no longer making short term placements of babies into foster care, making use of probate court adoptions rather than solely via adoption agencies, increased inter-state adoptions.) Offering a more flexible housing option seems to have paralleled the more flexible adoption process. The institutional maternity homes began to close during this time.

As the situations of women grew more complicated in recent history, small, group-living residential programs have emerged. The average size of today’s maternity housing program is 5-8 pregnant women and focused on supporting a woman through obtaining her goals in a variety of areas, not just pregnancy. As such, in most homes, the length of stay has extended beyond pregnancy. The major methods of delivering maternity housing care are now 1) via house-parents, 2) via other live-in staff members, 3) via a shift or rotating staff model, and 4) via a host or shepherding home.
Related Models:
- **Host Homes for Niche Groups:** There continue to be a variety of programs placing exchange students into the care of host homes. In addition, programs like The Mentor Network (http://thementornetwork.com/program/host-home/) help address the needs of vulnerable adults.
- **Foster Care/Alternatives to Foster Care Programs:** In addition to the state managed foster care program, there are emergency housing programs like Safe Families for Children (http://safe-families.org/about/). Safe Families for Children has multiple programs across the country, including partnerships with groups like Bethany Christian Services (https://www.bethany.org/other-services/safe-families-for-children/be-a-host-family)
- **Room Rental/Cost Sharing:** A variety of services, like Air BNB or couch surfing sites, have grown due to the willingness of self-selecting people to rent or welcome people into their homes. In addition, some initiatives at house sharing have focused on single mothers (i.e. http://www.co-abode.com/)

Potential Concerns:
**From the Perspective of a Host Home:**
- The history and circumstances of the moms may lend themselves to creating chaos within home dynamic and potential strain on marriages (including mental health challenges associated with manipulation, lying, paranoia, sexual behaviors and patterns of male interaction.)
- There are related liability issues for potential harm (real or perceived) to mother during pregnancy or to her infant (i.e. falling down the stairs, food or pet allergies, household accidents, hospital access.)
- Having “street smart” mothers brings a culture, philosophy, and set of behaviors into a household, at the risk of exposing vulnerable members of the household inappropriately.

**For Organizations Using this Model:**
- The central question raised by organizations wishing to facilitate a host home model is around the issue of liability. If something goes wrong, who is liable? The organization must think through how to protect the three parties involved: 1) the mother (and her child), 2) the household offering hospitality, and 3) the organization.
- Organizations are quick to point out that the support given to host homes must be significant. While perceived as a way to house many women without administrative or infrastructure expenses, host home programs express that significant amounts of staff time must be invested in the host home families in order to be effective.

Potential Benefits:
**From the Perspective of a Host Home:**
- The work reflects the Christian witness to care for widows & orphans, to exercise hospitality, to be a voice for the voiceless, and more. It creates a deep opportunity for growth in spirituality.
- The hospitality offered facilitates growth related to sharing life with someone of a different culture and perspective.
- The mission provides a credible witness to the pro-life position despite “hard cases” and to an in-depth commitment to women at risk for abortion.

**For Organizations Using this Model:**
- There may possibly be less staffing-related costs or a shift of staffing resources to more traditional working hours (rather than 24-hour staffing needs.)
- The type and length of stay for housing offered may increase.

Methods to Consider
- The National Maternity Housing Coalition strongly recommends that households only take on the responsibility of providing host home services in alignment with and under the support of
organizations with some level of expertise. At a bare minimum, the supporting organization should be able to easily direct host homes to appropriate community resources.

- The National Maternity Housing Coalition strongly recommends that rather than being the starting point of an organization, a host home program might be thought of as an outgrowth of knowledge and experience. Said another way, it is suggested that organizations “grow into” (rather than “begin with”) a host home model.

- Organizations actively using a host home model describe that it tends to be specialized circumstances in which placement into a host home is most successful. In particular, there were three general situations:
  1. Unique circumstances (i.e. mother is placing child with adoptive couple and hesitant to return to maternity home, the mother has a short-term gap in housing between programs, the mother has developmental delays.) Some programs only place women in college programs or in stable employment into host homes.
  2. For minors. However, note that the number of minors being served have been on the decline in recent years.
  3. As a next step for women demonstrating deep program engagement (i.e. the mother is investing deeply into making use of the opportunities of maternity housing program and is interested in ongoing support for changes that she is making)

**Continuum of Oversight:**
Within organizations who have a host home model, there is a significant continuum on the degree of organizational oversite:

- **High:** The organization works with regulating body (i.e. foster care) as a placement agency. As such, the organization follows licensing requirements on screening, review, etc. and uses state training.

- **Med:** The organization provides training to host homes. Various existing curriculums may be used in this capacity (i.e. The LOVE Approach, Equipped to Serve.) Organization may use internal mechanisms (questionnaires, interviews, home visits) to screen host families. The sample packet from Clara’s House follows this model.

- **Low:** The organization facilitates the connection of a mom and host home and allows their independent discussion to build the framework and conditions of stay. The organization may provide encouragement and knowledge of resources from a distance without assuming responsibility or providing oversite. See attached samples.

**Things to Consider:**
- **Recruiting and Screening Families.** Many programs report having host homes “at the ready” is the most challenging component due to changing circumstances of the household, burnout after serving a small number of women, and the possibility of infrequency in having women appropriate for and interested in a host home. Programs mentioned that they are often interviewing or developing a host home relationship with a specific mom in mind. Organizations are advised to attempt to understand any mixed motives that a host home might have (e.g. providing hospitality so as to adopt the child) and to think carefully about eliminating host families that may not have the well-being of the mother as their top priority.

- **Initial Training and Ongoing Support for Host Homes.** As noted above, the degree of initial and ongoing support varies significantly across programs. However, it was generally agreed that training was extremely useful (i.e. boundaries, having challenging conversations, etc.)

- **Preparing Moms to Live in Host Home.** Preparing the mom to be in a semi-supervised environment, especially if she has been independent, is crucial to a successful host home relationship.

- **Opportunity Costs / Alternative focus:** Prior to starting a host home program, organizations must wrestle with associated opportunity costs. i.e. Would it be more effective to strengthen a member of
the mother's family to provide care? Would it be more efficient to invest specialized training into staff members for a centralized program?

- **Cultural Pendulum:** Although it is challenging to understand cultural shifts, the question was raised about whether or not adoption and/or host homes might see a resurgence (i.e. a desire to experience family life, a more pro-life young generation.)

**Please note:** Any information provided within this document is solely for research and meant to prompt independent decision-making by organizations considering a host home program.

**Resources:**

Booklet by Michael & Dianne Monahan: [http://www.abortionfacts.com/books/the-shepherding-family-experience](http://www.abortionfacts.com/books/the-shepherding-family-experience)

Thank you to Peggy Hartshorn, Ruth Harbor, Life Choices, Sisters of Life, Clara’s House and Breathe of Life Ministries for conversations and information regarding the host home model.

To learn more about the resources and support that Heartbeat and the National Maternity Housing Coalition offers to maternity housing programs, please contact housing@heartbeatinternational.org.
SAMPLE: LETTER OUTLINING EXPECTATIONS (Low Oversight Example)

Date

Host home family and guests,

When a resident leaves our program, we at ______ wish to be a facilitator in connecting young women still needing housing with individuals or families that seek to show Christian hospitality to them while there is need. We refer to these caring families as Host Homes.

The attached agreement is an important tool for outlining expectations of the Host Home and their guest. You will find suggested responsibilities and expectations for each party. This is a starting place where additions and deletions are likely and encouraged to meet specific needs. As time passes, the agreement can be again modified with mutual consent for various circumstances or opportunities that may arise.

The organization functions as a facilitator in the relationship and is providing the attached information as a starting place for an agreement that will ultimately keep each party's expectations clear, concise, and communicated.

Additionally, the organization will seek to support each of the parties by providing the following support:

1. Continuing counseling for our alumnus, if desired.
2. While our relationship with the young woman changes from resident to alumnus (e.g. she is fully discharged from our program), our staff members will be available for encouragement, emotional support, and be able to provide some physical needs should they arise (personal items, food, baby items, etc.).
3. The organization can support a young woman's efforts to connect with various community resources.
4. If needed, we will assist the family and the young woman in defining guidelines for an exit plan. This will involve an agreed upon time when provided housing should end.
5. We will pray for you and the success of your time together!

Contact us with any question or feedback. Our involvement should be at your comfort level.
SAMPLE: HOST HOME AND GUEST AGREEMENT (Low Oversight Example)

The following is an agreement between ___________ (host home at ____________________) and ____________ (guest) and her baby. This housing agreement begins (date) and will last for ____ months. At that time, the host home will decide if a new invitation is to be extended (and for what length of time) and the guest will decide whether to accept the invitation or, if needed, locate new housing. Both parties commit to communicating their thoughts and plans regarding this arrangement and the associated timeline.

Expectations and Responsibilities
1. The host home will provide living quarters (including her own bedroom) and the basic daily needs for the new mom and her baby while she lives in their home.
2. We all value open communication as importance in this process. The host family and guest will communicate to one another their positive feedback as well as any concerns, questions, or difficulties with the living arrangements. The process is a two-way conversation and should not be delegated to a third party (parent, agency, etc.) unless third-party, non-interest mediation is desired by the family or guest.
3. The host family and guest have determined and put in writing their daily and long-term expectations of this arrangement. These should be briefly reviewed monthly, addressing any changes that will surely be needed as time passes.
4. House keys are for the guest and not given to others or duplicated without permission.
5. Any visitor that the guest brings into the home should be communicated and scheduled with the host family in advance of the visit (male visitors or someone not known by the host will take place only when the host is at home).
6. Guest takes responsibility for no illegal substances, alcohol, or tobacco products to be brought into the home by her or her guests.
7. Guest will communicate arrangements when leaving for extended periods of time or returning unusually late.
8. Guest will provide host with $XX during the first week of each month as “rent.”
9. Host family will provide food, laundry soap, and daily use items needed around the home. However, this does not include guest’s personal items (toiletries, clothes, etc.) or personal items for the baby (diapers, wipes, clothing, etc.).
10. Guest is invited to be “at home” and any express needs with the host family.
11. Guest is invited to put desired foods and grocery ideas on the families “shopping list” for purchase consideration.
12. Guest is invited to have dinner with host family and offer menu ideas. Host family or guest will communicate other meal plans in advance of the meal time (leaving, etc.)
13. Guest responsible for her transportation and childcare, but may occasionally request help. Host family may occasionally request short-term assistance (with pets, childcare, etc.).
14. Guest plans to attend _____________ Church, but is welcomed to visit or attend the host family’s church and meet their friends as well.
15. Guest will pick up and clean up after herself and keep the living space tidy.

This agreement will be our baseline and starting point. We will meet to evaluate and/or edit it, if needed, to both party’s satisfaction on ______________ (date).

Guest Signature: __________________________ Date ____________

Host Family Signatures: ___________________ and __________________ Date ____________