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A New Chapter for All Families Healthcare

Nearly four years after Kalispell clinic's destruction, family practice opens in Whitefish to offer primary and reproductive care, including abortions

BY [TRISTAN SCOTT](#) // JAN 30, 2018



Helen Weems, left, and Susan Cahill, pictured at All Families Healthcare in Whitefish on Jan. 26, 2018. Greg Lindstrom | Flathead Beacon

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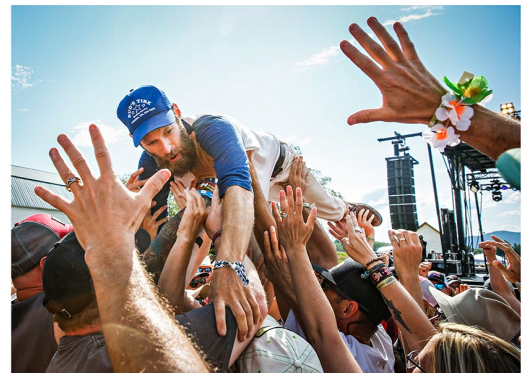
Moving through the hallways of her new Whitefish family practice clinic, Susan Cahill pauses to inspect a recent shipment of contraceptive instruments, nodding with approval at the birth-control

devices.

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In the realm of family planning and health care, Cahill is best known in the region for her role at the helm of All Families Healthcare, a family-practice clinic that, until its destruction in 2014, distinguished itself as the only clinic in Northwest Montana that offered safe, legal abortion procedures.

In reopening the clinic at a small, refurbished railroad house in Whitefish, Cahill will again make safe and legal abortions available as part of the menu of health-care options she believes are essential to help women and families plan their futures.

But her primary aim is — and always has been — to deliver the best care possible to women while helping them choose if and

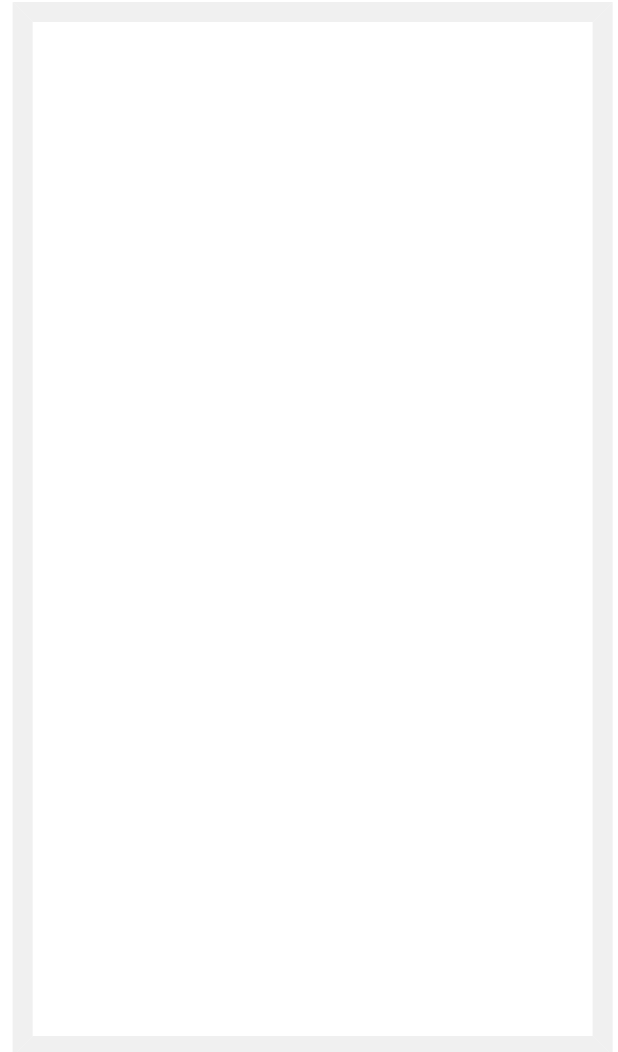
when they become pregnant while increasing access to sexual and reproductive health care, as well as birth control.

To that end, she not only offers a full range of contraception available to women regardless of their ability to pay, but she's also partnered with Helen Weems, a nurse practitioner who reached out to Cahill as soon as she learned that an anti-abortion extremist had broken into and destroyed her Kalispell clinic.

“When I learned that Susan’s clinic was a loss and the region was left without access to abortions, I was very motivated to connect with her,” Weems said.



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Cahill, still reeling from the destruction of the second clinic she worked at in as many decades, was reluctant to jump back into the fray.

“I was less than enthusiastic,” Cahill said recently as she prepared for the new clinic’s Feb. 5 opening. “The tipping point for me was that I totally appreciated how this person shared the same passion for care and understood the positive ripple effects family planning can have on people’s lives.”

When Cahill arrived in the Flathead Valley more than 40 years ago, she mentored under the auspices of Dr. James Armstrong, who at the time was the only physician providing safe and legal abortion procedures in Northwest Montana, having moved here from New York where, prior to the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case *Roe v. Wade*, which pioneered the way for legal abortions, he witnessed firsthand the tragic fallout of women seeking criminal abortions from unqualified providers.

Cahill joined Armstrong’s practice after receiving her physician’s assistant degree, and worked with him for nearly 30 years. On Oct. 11, 1994, the clinic was firebombed by Richard T. Andrews, a Washington man who was eventually convicted of scorching seven clinics in Western states.

Twenty years later, when Zachary Klundt broke into All Families Healthcare in Kalispell and lay waste to everything of monetary and sentimental value, Cahill couldn’t imagine emerging from the pillage and beginning anew.

But when she witnessed the passion and compassion in Weems and her desire to carry on Cahill’s torch, she realized her legacy had not been sacked.

“I feel like I am mentoring her to continue on,” Cahill said.

Where Cahill brings a wealth of experience and caliber of

reputation, the trajectory of Weems' professional career has been wending this way for years.

As a nurse practitioner in Seattle, she worked for the largest provider of primary medical and dental care for low-income and uninsured families and individuals in the region while spearheading programs that focus on preventing teenage pregnancy.

"I do believe that women should have access to birth control and that when we can plan our families the outcome is exponentially better," Weems said.

To revive All Families Healthcare, Weems sought and received a \$100,000 grant from a coalition of private funders who offer financial aid to regions with little access to reproductive care. Another grant, made possible with donations to the Montana Human Rights Network, allowed All Families to purchase an inventory of long-term reversible contraception, like intrauterine devices, which can be prohibitively expensive.

Many clinics can't afford to keep the devices on hand and won't order them for a patient unless she can pay immediately.

"That is a real barrier. It is a setup for an unplanned pregnancy," Cahill said.

By contrast, All Families can offer day-of services to women seeking long-term contraception, regardless of their financial circumstances.

All Families also offers guidance for prenatal care to women who become pregnant and choose to parent, as well as counseling to help guide women through the adoption process.

In addition to primary care for men, women and children, All Families specializes in LGBTQ health care, including gender-affirming hormone therapy and a "safe, non-judgmental environment," as well as adolescent health for teens during their formative years and increasing

independence, Weems said.

“These are lofty ideas that we have and they are dependent on funding,” Weems said, noting that the Montana Human Rights Network is accepting donations to assist with the cause.

Although Cahill and Weems anticipate controversy over their decision to offer abortions, they believe their values of social justice, inclusivity and compassion will appeal to all corners of the sociopolitical spectrum.

“Our ultimate goal is to help individuals and families plan their pregnancies and their futures,” Weems said. “It has a huge ripple effect for a family unit’s social and financial health.

For more on All Families Healthcare, visit allfamilieshealth.org.

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