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Bay Area Organization Breaks New Ground in National Choice Debate

Oakland-based Exhale, an After-Abortion Talkline, Goes National June 1st

Oakland, CA – In response to overwhelming demand, Exhale, an Oakland-based organization, is expanding access to its after-abortion talkline and public education programs nationwide.

Exhale was founded in 2000 by five women who had either personally or professionally experienced the lack of resources for post-abortion support in the Bay Area. When Aspen Baker, Exhale's executive director and co-founder, had an abortion in 1999, the only support services she could find were Christian-based, which didn't meet her needs. Other services — such as support groups or individual therapy — were either short-lived or not universally accessible.

So the founders of Exhale decided to create a talkline for the Bay Area that is free, anonymous, and accessible to everyone — including families and partners of women who have had an abortion. It also offers workshops and in-service training for other agencies that work around the issue of abortion. *“Exhale fills the void for many women who find themselves stuck in the middle of the ideological and politicized battle around abortion,”* Baker said. *“We allow callers to talk freely about their experience with abortion, without judgment. Exhale operates with respect for the social, cultural and religious beliefs of all of our callers, this is the unique cornerstone of our service and philosophy,”* Baker added. Since its inception, Exhale has provided services and information to more than 1,500 Bay Area residents and has increased its call volume by 77% over the last year.

The women and girls who call Exhale react to the experience of abortion in complex and unique ways, said Carolina De Robertis, co-founder and program director at Exhale. Some feel ashamed to talk about their experience because they wonder how they can be a “good feminist” and still be sad. Others believe that they made the right choice for their family but wonder if their decision makes them a “bad Christian.” What they all have in common is that they need someone to talk to and may not have anywhere else to turn, she said.

Exhale will launch its services nationwide on June 1st, and will likely be a breath of fresh air to women and the choice debate across the country.

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Exhale's mission is to create a social climate where each person's unique experience with abortion is supported, respected and free from stigma. Exhale provides services, training and education to empower individuals, families and communities to achieve post-abortion health and well-being. For more information, visit www.4exhale.org.