

New Life shop opens on Dumbarton High Street

By TINA KEMP, of the Lennox Herald
Pictures by Brian Averell



MARGARET Beattie remembers the day the girl came to say thank you. Margaret had counselled the young woman when she discovered she was pregnant. Sadly, her baby died – but she still wanted to acknowledge Margaret’s help. “I asked her ‘why thank me?’”, said Margaret. “She said ‘because you listened’.” Margaret is one of three volunteer counsellors at the Life Shop in Dumbarton High Street.

The charity, which runs a counselling and information service, has just moved to new ground level premises and is already reaping the benefits. As well as selling high quality baby and children’s clothes, equipment and accessories, volunteers provide vital information and practical support both throughout pregnancy and also counselling after abortion. Counsellors follow national guidelines, providing free and confidential support that is non-directional, non-judgemental and non-denominational. They are fully committed – as are all 24 volunteers who man the busy shop six days a week – to fulfilling the charity’s motto “Loving life, giving hope”. And that means encouraging clients to make their own informed choices when faced with, in particular, a crisis pregnancy.

Counsellor Cathy Howard explained: “We are not allowed to influence anyone’s decision. “We follow strict guidelines on what we can say and do. We are mainly here to offer a listening ear and to provide information.” The shop has a bell that rings only upstairs in the counselling room, allowing client confidentiality. Life’s cosy counselling room provides a relaxing and non threatening atmosphere in which women can talk. Pregnancy testing is made available as is fertility management. Life volunteers also host education seminars for schools, clubs and organisations, emphasising the importance of looking after your body.

Margaret said: “Sometimes for a girl the worst thing might be telling her parents she’s pregnant, and that’s something we can do. “Often that’s the biggest hurdle and when that’s over and the pregnancy is underway, people begin to rally round. “Sometimes they just need someone to listen.” In recent months, Life has seen an increase in the number of social workers bringing young women for support. “We are solving problems that were once solved by people in paid employment,” said Margaret. “It’s good to know agencies like this are contacting us. It is not only crisis pregnancies that Life deals with. Anyone seeking advice, or practical help, is welcome.

Life launched in Dumbarton 11 years ago and was previously in first floor premises on the other side of the High Street. Since then it has seen the birth of 185 babies and given out around 200 layettes to new mums. The deteriorating condition of the building meant the charity had a stark choice – close down or move. Luckily the former Photo Ecosse premises became available and the shop opened at the start of the busy festive rush. Staff have been overwhelmed by the amount of donations.

Cathy said: "When girl gets a layette her eyes just light up. It's more like a gift than charity and it's touching to see. "All our donations come from people around the Dumbarton area. People are so supportive and we'd like to thank them." New counselling training is about to begin with potential recruits welcome.

For more information call the Life shop on 01389 607902. The shop is open from 10am to 4pm, Monday to Saturday, with counselling available from 11am to 1pm on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Good quality donations are welcome. Visit the Life website at www.lifecharity.org.uk/caring

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