

Hello! I'm Alanna and I work as a field organizer for the American Civil Liberties Union of New Mexico or the ACLU. At the ACLU we work to maintain and advance civil rights in New Mexico through litigation and legal advocacy, public education and organizing, and legislative advocacy. We work on a whole range of civil rights issues, but today I want to talk to you about our new campaign for reproductive freedom and how we think folks like you, voices from the faith community, can shift the conversation about abortion in our state away from shame and stigma and towards compassion.

One in three women will have an abortion in their lifetime. One in three. Yet, most people who I speak with would tell me that they don't know anyone who has had an abortion. That is statistically impossible. Now everyone in this room can say they know someone who has had an abortion because you all know me.

I grew up in Pojoaque, New Mexico which is a small village just north of Santa Fe. It is conservative, very Catholic and I don't remember ever hearing about abortion in sex-ed classes at school. I learned about abortion when my 15 year old classmate became pregnant. She asked me to figure out a way for her to skip school and drive all the way to Albuquerque to get an abortion without her parents finding out. While I didn't understand abortion I knew that it was her decision to decide if she wanted to parent so I convinced my older brother to let me drive his 1970 El Camino without a license to Albuquerque so she could have one. I just felt like it was the right thing to do.

Fast forward a few years and I'm 17, freshly at college after working hard to graduate from high school a year early, and I find out I'm pregnant. Usually at this point in an abortion story a person will attempt to justify their abortion. They will mention a birth control fail or an unhappy relationship. I think it is garbage that women have to do that.

When we do that we create a situation where there are "good" abortions and "bad" abortions and if we are moving away from shame and stigma surrounding abortion we have to push against that narrative. For me the decision was easy. I knew right away what I wanted and I booked an appointment at the Planned Parenthood in Albuquerque. My mom loaned me the money for my abortion. My friend with went me. I had a positive experience at the Planned Parenthood in Albuquerque. I had support from my family and friends when I got home. It is important to note that not all women have that support and that is why this work is so important. After my abortion I was sitting in a group of new friends in a study group. I mentioned to them that I missed class the last week because I had an abortion. Every person in the group shared a story about their experience with abortion. Some of the women shared that they had an abortion or had supported friends or family. The men shared that they had gone with partners, family members, or friends in support or helped financially with the cost of an abortion. All of them said that they had never told anyone about their abortion experiences before because they felt like people would react negatively. Throughout my life I have met countless people who tell me that they feel like they can't talk about their abortion because of the shame and stigma that

surrounds abortion in our society. My story is just one of many and I'm one of the lucky ones because I came home to an environment that respected my ability to make decisions about my reproductive health. Too many women don't have that. The decision to have an abortion should be left between a woman and her family and her doctor in consultation with her faith should she choose. We at the ACLU are working in collaboration with many folks in the community to shift the way we talk about abortion so that more women feel that their decision will be met with understanding instead of shame. We envision that as we move forward with this work more women will feel like they can share their abortion stories and will have access to safe and legal abortion. For too long anti-abortion groups have co-opted the language of communities of faith to spread misinformation about abortion. We want to take back that message and we hope that all of you will join us. Real change starts when we talk to each other. I have some examples of conversation starters that can help.

- A woman's moral agency must be affirmed:
 - the decision to have an abortion is always made with serious thought and consideration of her circumstances
 - we cannot judge a woman for wanting or having an abortion. We must act compassionately, as that is what we would want for ourselves when facing complex moral decisions
- Respect for life and women
 - pregnancy, birth, and abortion should be safe and legal for every woman
 - respect her unique circumstance
 - When I was 22, I lived with my best friend in the same house. We went to the same school. We worked in similar jobs. We had a lot of the same friends and hobbies. We both found out we were pregnant within a few weeks of each other. She made the decision to have an abortion. I made the decision to become a single parent. No matter how similar our lives looked on the outside, our circumstances were unique.
 - a woman's health, life, and moral agency must be protected
- The Golden Rule:
 - Reminding folks that scripture calls on us to treat others as we want to be treated. This applies to a woman who had or wants an abortion
 - Abortion is a common experience in a woman's life. Think about how you would want a woman in your life to feel if she had an abortion
 - you would probably want her experience to feel comfortable, supportive, non-judgemental, without added burdens, informed by medically accurate information, and without coercion or pressure
 - We don't know the complexities of a woman's individual circumstances. We must offer her compassion and support regardless of her decision.

In light of what happened in Colorado Springs just a few days ago it might seem like we are a long way from living in a world where a woman's decision to have an abortion is protected and de-stigmatized. I agree. But I ask you to think back to ten years from the Supreme Court decision on marriage equality and if anyone thought it would be possible to have marriage equality in all 50 states. Most people would have laughed and said no way! What happened in those 10 years is that people started talking to each other and telling their stories. It became harder and harder for someone to look around at their networks and say that they didn't know anyone who would benefit from marriage equality. The same strategy can work with abortion. One in three women will have an abortion in her lifetime. Together we can make the message that a woman's decision to have an abortion should be between a woman, her family, and her doctor in consultation with her faith so much louder than the messages of shame and stigma. All we have to do is start talking.