Understanding Anti-Choice Activity in Niagara

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created by **Niagara Reproductive Justice**
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Introduction

This Guide will walk you through the anti-choice groups in Niagara, their strategies, as well as some strategies for protesting against them (counterprotesting). It also provides some additional resources for reproductive justice (RJ) and abortion issues locally and nationally.

We recommend that you familiarize yourself with the FAQ: Abortion in Canada page on NRJ's website that provides important information before engaging with anti-choice groups: **bit.ly/NRJFAQ.**
We also recommend that you check out our Counterprotesting Guide here: **https://niagarareproductivejustice.com/materials/**

This Guide was created by members of NRJ and contains recommendations and advice gathered from personal experience and research. TW: Some of the content in this guide includes anti-choice terminology. While we feel this terminology is important to know for understanding anti-choice groups, we recognize that it may be triggering for some to read. **Please always prioritize your own emotional health and personal safety needs.** We can't do this work without also taking care of ourselves!

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Please contact us to contribute information and recommendations to this guide.

Anti-Choice Groups in Niagara

In the following section, we will highlight the most active anti-choice groups in Niagara. For a complete and up-to-date list, visit **niagarareproductivejustice.com/monitoring-anti-choicers.**

Local

Niagara Against Abortion

NAA is responsible for most of the graphic protests you see around Niagara. They usually hold large posters with graphic images on them at intersections in St. Catharines, Welland, and other regions.

They are interns with the Canadian Centre for Bioethical Reform (based out of Alberta) and their goal is to convince people who are on the fence that abortion is "wrong". They are also the people responsible for the anonymous graphic leaflets left in mailboxes throughout the region.

Clarity Pregnancy Options

Crisis Pregnancy Centre in Welland (263 Division Street) and there are two satellite locations, one in St. Catharines (226 Merritt St), and one in Niagara Falls (4099 Portage Road). They are a branch of the Niagara Life Centre.

They promote misinformation about the risks associated with abortion and are religiously affiliated.

They pose as a non-judgmental pregnancy resource centre, but their goal is to prevent people from accessing resources that don't align with their anti-abortion agenda.

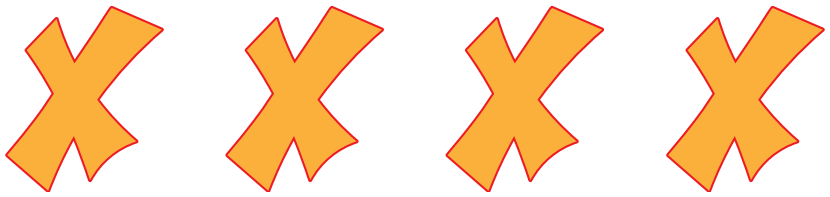
Anti-Choice Groups in Niagara (cont.)

Niagara Life Centre

Niagara Life Centre is an anti-abortion, Christian Crisis Pregnancy Centre that also offers mental health counselling and other programming.

The following are an extension of Niagara Life Centre: Clarity Pregnancy Options (formerly known as Elisha House), South Niagara Life Centre, and Grimsby Life Centre. While all these organizations have established their own boards of directors and registered as separate nonprofits after getting their start within the Niagara Life Centre, they all remain committed to the same goal of misinforming the public about abortion.

They are a member of the Canadian Council of Christian Charities that intentionally promotes misinformation about abortion. They also run a group called Young & Pregnant in Niagara, which finds its way onto well-intended resource lists across the region, so be careful even when receiving information from sources you trust!



Choose Life Niagara / St. Catharines Right to Life

Part of the national Right to Life network. They are a registered non-profit with a chapter in St. Catharines that is called Choose Life Niagara, Choose Hope Niagara, and Right to Life St. Catharines. Located in St. Catharines at 1 Belton Blvd. Ste. 102 off Glenridge Avenue.

They design and fund most of the anti-choice billboards across the region. They claim they never use violent or graphic imagery on signs or pamphlets and do not agree with those who do. They purposely spread unscientific misinformation about abortion in an attempt to create an atmosphere of guilt around the medical procedure.

They do a lot of work with high schoolers:

- They have an annual high school scholarship program where they award money to students who write essays on anti-choice topics.
- Their Youth Banquet and Conference indoctrinates high school students to “stand up and be a voice for life.”

Anti-Choice Groups in Niagara (cont.)

National

Canadian Centre for Bioethical Reform

National organization based out of Alberta with the goal of having an "abortion-free Canada". They provide training and graphic materials to Niagara anti-choice groups, and run an internship program.

Their graphic leaflets have been known to end up in unmarked envelopes in mailboxes throughout Niagara for the past decade. They are distributed by their local interns.

They develop local "Against Abortion" community groups throughout the nation, including Niagara Against Abortion, Hamilton Against Abortion, and London Against Abortion.

Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA) & We Need a Law

National organization advocating for restrictions on abortion access through policy with activity in Niagara.

They sometimes hold flag demonstrations at Montebello Park in St. Catharines. Most recently, they have launched a legal challenge to St. Catharines' bylaw restricting the unsolicited delivery of graphic anti-choice flyers.

ARPA works closely with other anti-choice organizations such as Canadian Centre for Bioethical Reform in order to provide them legal support.

National Campus Life Network

They attempt to help university students start anti-choice clubs. They have worked with students at Brock to start Badgers for Life, but were unsuccessful.

They lack organization and follow-through and haven't been able to have much of an impact in the last few years.

In March 2021, MPP Sam Oosterhoff headlined an event for this group. He was re-elected as MPP for Niagara West in 2022 and he has previously pledged to "make abortion unthinkable in our lifetime".

Anti-Choice Groups in Niagara (cont.)

Choice42

This organization and their founder is disgusting: National organization that focuses on anti-choice media. Their mission is very shame-based and their goal is to “change public opinion” and “educate the public” through their media.

Their director/founder calls herself an “Anti-Abortion Influencer” and makes "satirical" videos that include insensitive jokes, making fun of people experiencing unwanted pregnancies. They have also produced many videos that include aggressive messaging and graphic content, in an attempt to shame/scare people into cancelling their abortion appointments.

Right Now

National organization that focuses on “pro-life legislation” and electing anti-choice politicians in Canada. Their focus on legislation presents a significant threat to abortion rights in Canada.

They recently produced multiple videos where they went undercover to four different abortion clinics across Canada (Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto) to “investigate” late-term abortion, in which they villainized the clinically appropriate care they received.

Understanding Anti-Choicers

Summary of anti-choice talking points

This section summarizes some of the main talking points and arguments used by anti-choicers. See the **next section** of this guide for more detailed information.

They typically rely on finding common ground with the person they're speaking to by starting with what can be agreed upon and attempting to lower defences. Then they'll use analogies, stories and graphic images to provoke empathy, and then push their "evidence" and pro-fetus arguments.

In conversation, they'll try to push the human rights argument and the ageism argument:

Human Rights - They believe fetuses are humans that deserve human rights, they'll try to use faulty questions like "if two humans reproduce, what species is their offspring?" or "if an organism is growing, doesn't that mean it is alive?" to attempt to justify their point.

Ageism - They believe denying fetuses human rights is due to ageism, calling it "deadly age discrimination"

They're also prepared to argue that the fetuses life is more important than all circumstances including teen pregnancy, poverty, sexual assault, and the pregnant person's life being in danger.

Known sites and times

You can view the Anti-Choice Activity Map to see recorded instances of anti-choice protests and events in Niagara on our website: niagarareproductivejustice.com/monitoring-anti-choicers.

If you know of anything missing or have seen something, fill out the Anti-Choice Activity in Niagara reporting form: bit.ly/reportantichoicers.

Understanding Anti-Choicers (Specifics)

Their Goals

The goal of most anti-choice groups is to end abortion. Some groups advocate for a law that bans abortion across Canada, while other groups, like Niagara Against Abortion, claim to not want a law. Instead, they want to "change people's hearts and minds by exposing the 'truth' about the harm that abortion causes to fetuses and women". Anti-choicers want to shift the narrative around abortion so that it becomes shameful, stigmatized, and socially inaccessible.

Their Strategies and Talking Points

Niagara Against Abortion, who are the most frequent protesters in Niagara with the graphic posters, rely on a set of strategies when protesting. The first is their use of graphic images of what are supposedly fetuses that have been aborted. They believe that "abortion photography" is essential even though it causes harm to some passerbys because photography has been successfully used in other social movements.

Below is an outline of the strategies they use when talking with people on the street. You may want to familiarize yourself with these strategies if you plan to confront anti-choicers using the "waste their time" counterprotesting strategy. Please note that the terminology used here is paraphrased from their pamphlets; you can access one of their pamphlets here: http://bit.ly/antichoicepamphlet.

****WARNING: The terminology below was taken directly from Anti-Choice Training materials. (These are not our words)***

Effective Communication

Build a Bridge

- Find common ground with the person. The goal is not to win arguments, it is to reach the person.

Touch the Heart

- Know what to say and when to say it. Use analogies and stories to touch the heart. (*They are taught to manipulate the emotions of others*)

Deliver the Message

- Ask questions (like the Socratic method) to draw out the "truth."
- Use scientific evidence and the philosophy of human rights.

Understanding Anti-Choicers (cont.)

Anti-Choice talking points and strategies, paraphrased from their pamphlets.

Conversation Tools

The Human Rights argument

- Argues that fetuses are humans and therefore deserve human rights. They may ask odd questions like "if two humans reproduce, what species is their offspring" or "if an organism is growing, doesn't that mean it is alive?" to make this point.

Ageism argument

- Argues that denying fetuses human rights is due to ageism. "Pre-born children" are denied human rights because of their age. Therefore, abortion is "deadly age discrimination."
  - You are still dependent on your parents after you are born, but then it's not okay for a parent to abandon their child because they will die.

Common ground

- Start with what you agree on
- Show that you are listening and you care
- Break down barriers and lower defenses

Analogies

- Use analogies or stories to illustrate your point
- Show, don't tell (i.e., use the graphic material)

Question

- Help people realize what they already know, and leads them to their own conclusion
- Show that you're interested in dialogue and understanding their position
- e.g., "Would it be okay, however, for me to swing my arm into somebody else? Why not?"

Circumstances

Have responses prepared for all of the circumstances listed here that argue that the fetus' life is still more important: poverty, teen pregnancy, sexual assault, mother's life is in danger

Drowning Analogy (if two people are drowning and you only have time to save one);

- If you don't have time to save the second person, have you killed them? If you hold the second person's head underwater, have you killed them?

Understanding Anti-Choicers (cont.)

"**Science:**" **When does life begin?**

"Human Development begins at fertilization when a sperm fuses with an oocyte to form a single cell, the zygote. This marks the beginning of each of us as a unique individual."

"The term 'fetus' tells us how old an organism is, not what kind of organism. A human fetus is a human being from 8 weeks to 9 months — fetus is an age-range term."

List all the "facts" about when the heart starts beating, when the brain is developed, etc.

Counterprotesting

What to do if you come accross anti-choice activity:
Counterprotesting involves responding to anti-choice protesting efforts with your own pro-choice materials!
Often, this looks like occupying the same space as anti-choicers at the same time, with materials that clearly oppose their anti-abortion messaging.

Counterprotesting strategies:

1. ***Gathering Information:*** If you don't have time to counterprotest but you do feel comfortable approaching the anti-choicers, try to gather as much information as you can from them.

2. ***Leafleting & Sign Holding:*** The most effective counterprotesting strategy is to hold clearly pro-choice signs near the protesters and pass out pro-choice / reproductive justice materials.

3 .***Waste Their Time:*** If you are by yourself or don't have any counterprotesting materials with you, you can waste the time of the protesters by talking to them. Remember that the goal is to waste their time, not convince them that you're right.

For more information and materials for counterprotesting, check out our Counterprotesting Guide & our printable posters!
www.niagarareproductivejustice.com/materials/

Additional Resources

NRJ Resources

Please read our Values Statement on our website: www.niagarareproductivejustice.com/our-values

Anti-Choice Activity in Niagara Reporting Form: bit.ly/reportantichoicers

Our Niagara Resources page lists sexual health resources in the Niagara Region: www.niagarareproductivejustice.com/niagara-resources

You can find our zines (The Truth About Abortion in Canada; Debunking Crisis Pregnancy Centres; Sexual Health Resources in Niagara) on our Materials page, www.niagarareproductivejustice.com/materials

You can also review some of the basic information about abortion in Canada on our FAQ page: www.niagarareproductivejustice.com/FAQ

It's always good to know how to help people access abortion in Niagara: www.niagarareproductivejustice.com/support

Follow us on Instagram (@niagarareproductivejustice) for updates and links to other resources

Educational Resources

What is Reproductive Justice? | SisterSong

Abortion in Canada | The Canadian Encyclopedia

Crisis pregnancy centres mislead women, report says | Global News

Five Years After Abortion, Nearly All Women Say It Was the Right Decision, Study Finds | University of California San Francisco

Canada's anti-abortion movement is rebranding — and pushing for political impact | CBC

Additional Resources (cont.)

Abortion Issues in Niagara

"Fatigue, frustration and anger" felt in Hamilton, Niagara region after Roe v. Wade overturned in U.S. | CBC

'People need to be very vigilant': concerns rising over future of abortion access in Canada | St. Catharines Standard

Niagara MPP Oosterhoff headlining event after organizer compared abortion to Holocaust | CBC

My Unthinkable Abortion: St. Catharines Reg. Councillor Goes Public and Sends Letter to Oosterhoff | iHeartRadio

Organizations Doing Related Work

Local to Niagara

- OPIRG Brock: www.opirgbrock.com
- Niagara Falls Community Health Centre: www.nfchc.ca
- Quest Community Health Centre: www.questchc.ca
- OUTNiagara: www.outniagara.org
- Positive Living Niagara and Streetworks: www.positivelivingniagara.com
- Student Justice Centre at Brock University: www.brocku.ca/human-rights/student-justice-centre

Online & National

- Maggie's Toronto Sex Workers Action Project: www.maggiesto.org
- Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada (ARCC): www.arcc-cdac.ca
- SisterSong: Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective: www.sistersong.net
- Native Youth Sexual Health Network: www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com
- Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights: www.actioncanadashr.org
- National Abortion Federation of Canada: www.nafcanada.org
- University of Victoria's Anti-Violence Project: www.antiviolenceproject.org

See www.niagarareproductivejustice.com/rj-resources for more local organizations and reproductive justice resource recommendations.

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Stay in touch!

Niagara Reproductive Justice

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