

A New Advocate in Forty-Five Minutes

Training thousands to make abortion unthinkable for millions...

Impact Report

JUSTICE FOR ALL

June 2017

In this Impact Report, Grace Fontenot illustrates how some simple tools, including questions, pictures, and a calm demeanor, can help a person change his or her mind on abortion. In this case, the person with whom she was speaking not only changed his mind but became immediately active in changing the minds of others!

Notice the different levels of experience featured in this story. Grace has served as an intern with JFA for about eight months and is still raising her support. Bryan had virtually no experience as a pro-life advocate before starting his own conversations using what he had learned from Grace. Jon used his decade of outreach experience to be helpful to Bryan at an opportune moment. In all of this, the message is clear: *anyone*—with *any* level of skill or ability—can engage people in conversation and help them change their minds about abortion. This is especially true if the pro-life advocates work as a team. We hope the example set by Grace, Jon, and Bryan will give you courage this month to join them in speaking up for those who have no voice. Our enclosed Resource Bulletin (www.jfaweb.org/this-month) can help!

- Jeremy Gorr

...one person at a time.

“I used to be pro-life, but then I came to college.” A boisterous young man was loudly proclaiming his pro-choice views and started to draw a crowd. As I engaged him in conversation, I learned that his name was Bryan.

A few minutes later, Bryan was actively persuading his friend DJ to be pro-life. This almost immediate transformation was one of the most extraordinary things I’ve witnessed at a Justice For All outreach event. How did it happen?

Bryan’s dramatic entrance took place as I was standing by our “Should Abortion Remain Legal?” poll table at Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, Louisiana, in March. After he introduced himself, he explained his view further:

Bryan: I used to be pro-life, because that’s how I was taught growing up. But when I left home, one of my professors said, “You go to college to learn how to think for yourself.” That influenced me a lot. It’s not that I think abortion is a good thing now. I don’t. But I do think it should be legal in the first trimester. Specifically, it needs to be legal for victims of rape.

I listened carefully to what Bryan shared and began to discuss his view with him. About ten minutes into my conversation, I asked Bryan a simple question. I had no idea at the time, but that question would be the catalyst for Bryan’s change of heart. In fact, Bryan’s response to it proved to bring new energy to the whole outreach event! I simply asked:

Grace: Bryan, have you ever seen images of abortion?

Bryan: No, I haven’t.

Grace: Would you be willing to view them?

Bryan: Sure.

I opened the Justice For All Exhibit Brochure and showed him an image of a nine-week-old aborted baby. Bryan’s face fell. He was so shocked that he immediately became even more loud and expressive than he had been previously, which drew the attention of other students who were passing by.

I went on to share with Bryan that approximately 3,000 babies are aborted every day in the United States. As we talked about Bryan’s concerns, I also clarified that only 0.5% of women having abortions cite “rape” as the “most important reason” for their abortion. (When women can select more than one reason, the percentage who cite rape or incest as one reason for their abortion is less than 1.5%. For sources and more detail, see JFA’s “What Are the Facts?” at www.jfaweb.org/facts.)

In the midst of our forty-five minute conversation, I had the opportunity to share much of JFA’s training material with Bryan. I “trotted out the toddler” to help him see that the central question related to the morality and legality of abortion is, “What is the unborn?” I also walked him through the biology of human development from conception, and we discussed philosophical arguments regarding whether or not the unborn is a human being



Grace (right) engages Bryan (left) in conversation at Nicholls State.

This girl...she changed my mind in like forty-five minutes, and I’ve been out here for two hours now! - Bryan

with equal rights to the rest of us.

As he learned more, Bryan began asking questions about why abortion looks so violent. I took out the “What Are the Facts?” sheet to show Bryan medical descriptions of the procedures used to perform abortions at different stages. As we read through these descriptions, Bryan was so horrified that he lost all composure. He told me that I had completely changed his mind and walked over to sign the “No” side of the “Should Abortion Remain Legal?” poll table. He then turned to me and said:

Bryan: My girlfriend and I had a pregnancy scare a month ago, and I know this right now: If she got pregnant today, we are keeping that baby, no matter how hard it might be!

Bryan then started to converse with Ashlen (the president of Nicholls Students for Life) and Jon Wagner, a JFA staff member with a decade of outreach experience. While they talked, I invited a student named DJ to stop. DJ started out very apathetic about abortion.

DJ: Well...honestly, it's sad to say, but if I messed up and got my girlfriend pregnant, I'd want to have abortion as an option.

Bryan must have overheard us talking, because he enthusiastically joined the conversation and began asking DJ about his thoughts and for permission to share images of abortion with him. Bryan began to use the same conversational tools that he had picked up from me. He “trotted out a toddler” and shared biological evidence for the humanity of the unborn. I was amazed!

DJ began to follow Bryan's logic and ended up becoming pro-life. At the beginning of this second conversation, DJ had made it clear he wanted abortion as an option if he “messed up.” After our conversation, it was encouraging to hear him and Bryan reflecting on things so differently than just a few minutes before:

Bryan: You know, man, I'm so glad I stopped here today and talked to Grace. I'm so glad that I know the truth about abortion now.

DJ: Yeah. Honestly, I am too. I kind of wish I didn't...but at the same time, I'd so much rather *know* than not know.”

I'd so much rather *know* than not know. - DJ

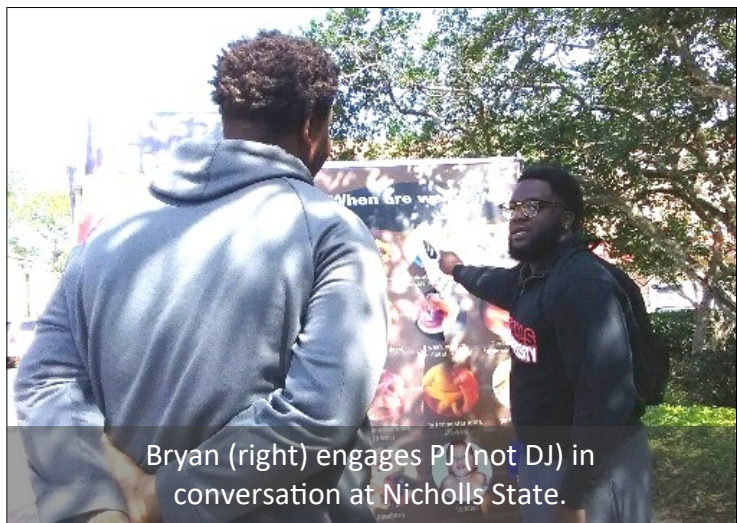
After talking with DJ, Bryan didn't stop. Soon, he began pulling other students, friends, and even strangers into conversation with himself, me, and other JFA staff members. He probably encouraged at least ten people to stop, saying:

Bryan: This girl...she changed my mind in like forty-five minutes, and I've been out here for two hours now!

Because he was so passionate and vocal, Bryan ended up drawing even more people than he had directly invited to talk. His zeal was contagious, and his passion prompted other students to listen. He began changing their minds.

Bryan was doing an incredible job, especially considering his only training had been one conversation with me. Still, he was easily becoming frustrated when people couldn't seem to track with what he was saying. I saw a need for Bryan to receive more formal dialogue training. Later, I was happy to see Jon Wagner step into a conversation Bryan was having with another student, this time named PJ. Jon suggested slowing the pace down and provided a good model of finding common ground, listening to understand, and asking thoughtful questions. Bryan exclaimed at one point, “Oh man! I like how you said that!”

It left me speechless to see Bryan's transformation from pro-choice to completely pro-life, even to the point of immediately jumping into our outreach. At times, it made me uncomfortable to see him nearly shouting in disbelief. Bryan's response was shock, horror, and a burning zeal to bring awareness as a means of saving as many lives as possible. This stood out in stark contrast to the apathy I have been used to seeing. But perhaps, in that sense, we should all be a bit more like Bryan. After all, if there were thousands of already-born people being systematically killed every day right under our noses, then wouldn't we respond just as he did? Bryan's response was a vivid reminder to me of the horror of abortion and the urgent nature of creating more conversations about this injustice.



Bryan (right) engages PJ (not DJ) in conversation at Nicholls State.

- Grace Fontenot, for the JFA Team

Note: Joanna Bai contributed to this report.

Find Practical Next Steps in JFA's Monthly Resource Bulletin:
www.jfaweb.org/this-month

