



"No matter how scared, alone or desperate you feel, there is a way, without telling your name or any personal details, you can make sure your newborn is safe and will have a good chance at a healthy, happy life."

Heather Burner, executive director, Arizona Safe Baby Haven Foundation

Emergency Department Technician Judit Imre, from the Arizona Children's Center at Maricopa Medical Center, checks her hospital's anonymous Safe Haven baby drawer. Maricopa Integrated Health System

Arizona's Safe Baby Havens

Safety for newborns; relief for their moms — with no questions asked

By Susan Fuchs
 Editor's note: This is the first in a series of articles on Arizona's Safe Havens for infants.

Since 2001, 26 Arizona infants have not been tossed into garbage dumpsters or abandoned in squalid alleys. According to statistics reported by Child Protective Services (now the Department of Child Safety) these young lives were saved because the babies were brought to Arizona's designated Safe Havens by new parents — usually their birth-mothers — who felt they could not provide the care the newborns needed. One of the first infants saved by the law was dubbed 'Baby Amanda', a blue-eyed beauty who arrived in the Emergency Department

According to the Maricopa Medical Examiner, during 2000-2006, the morgue received 767 deceased babies under 9 months old. Of these babies, at least 23 were known to have been born alive and abandoned.

Source: Arizona Safe Baby Haven Foundation

at Banner Thunderbird Hospital in Glendale soon after Arizona's Safe Haven for infants law went into effect some 13 years ago.

Safe Haven law

Arizona's Safe Haven law says a parent or an agent for a parent may surrender a newborn infant — one who is no more than 72 hours old — at any hospital, outpatient health facility, fire station, church, child welfare office or licensed adoption agency.

Newborns will be accepted, no questions asked. As long as the child is healthy and uninjured, the parent is not guilty of child abuse or abandonment.

Heroic moms

"These moms are heroes for loving their babies enough to make sure they'll have a better chance at good lives," said Peoria resident Nicole Olson. Nicole and her husband, Michael, adopted a Safe Haven baby who is now 3 years old. Her opinion is shared by firefighters and nurses who have received other Safe Haven babies — and by those who are still waiting for their first.

"It's a wonderful feeling to know a traumatized young woman has made a good decision by bringing the baby to us," said Jill Bish, RNC, director of women's services at Tempe St. Luke's Hospital. Bish was part of a team that received a Safe Haven baby several years ago, and said that obviously, Safe Haven saves infants. "But it also saves women from having to live the rest of their lives with the pain and guilt of abandoning their babies to die in dumpsters or gutters," she added. "They can move on without regret, because they know what they did means their baby will be safe."

The only problem with Safe Haven, its advocates agree, is that in spite of ongoing

Arizona Safe Baby Haven Foundation

The Arizona Safe Baby Haven Foundation has several dedicated volunteers who set up at health fairs and give presentations at public events to spread the word about Safe Haven. "But we always need more volunteers," said the foundation's unpaid executive director, Heather Burner. "I encourage any interested citizens who want to help to call us."

More info

Website: azsbh2.org
 Phone: 866-707-BABY (2229)
 Email: ArizonaSafeBabyHaven@gmail.com
 Facebook: facebook.com/AZSBH



Glendale Fire Captain Patrick Frey checks the Safe Haven logo on his truck at Station 156. Glendale has installed Safe Haven signage at all of its fire stations and Safe Haven logos on all its trucks, ambulances and automobiles. | Susan Fuchs

efforts to publicize the program, its provisions are not widely known, especially by the people who need it most.

"Safe Haven is a critical resource that, sadly, is not well enough known and not often enough utilized," said Deputy Chief Chris Ketterer of the Phoenix Fire Department. Phoenix Fire has received just one infant since Safe Haven went into effect.

No questions asked

"The beauty of the Safe Haven law," Ketterer said, "is that we will accept this precious cargo with no questions asked. A new mom who thinks she has no viable options can deliver her baby to us without fear. She can make the most beautiful lifesaving decision."

At the Glendale Fire Department, which was the first in the Valley to post Safe Haven signs on its fire stations right after the law passed (and now has Safe Haven decals on all their vehicles), firefighters are trained to accept and care for infants and all facilities are stocked with supplies a newborn might need.

"Like other Safe Haven providers throughout the Valley, we have had press conferences and public education programs about Safe Haven," said Michael Young, public information officer for the Glendale Fire Department.

"We have a website and Facebook and Twitter that are all used to get the news out about the law. But we have yet to receive our first baby," Young said. "We can only hope that ongoing efforts will eventually make an effective impact."