

*This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.*

**AMELIA BONOW:**

Hi everybody. My name is Amelia Bonow. I use she/her pronouns and I am the co-founder and executive director of Shout Your Abortion. SYA is a nationwide organization working to normalize abortion and elevate safe paths to access regardless of legality. We make resources, campaigns and media intended to arm existing activists, create new ones and foster collective participation in abortion access all over the country.

So thank you so much for being here for Abortion Academy tonight. Each of these monthly webinars are presented by one of our exceptionally brilliant colleagues or, in this case, two of them. And we hope that these sessions will deepen your knowledge, help you connect some dots between issues that you're navigating regionally and other stuff that's happening at the national and international level and ultimately to give you fresh ideas to take back into your community.

Audience members will be off camera and muted for security reasons, but we will have a format for you to ask questions throughout the presentation, which our speakers will begin answering after 30 to 45 minutes of speaking. And also at the end of the webinar, there is a survey that will pop up and also if you are here, you are hereby entered for a fabulous raffle prize of SYA swag. So please consider giving us your feedback. It's really important to us. You can always shoot us an email at [shoutyourabortion@gmail.com](mailto:shoutyourabortion@gmail.com) if you don't fill out the survey, but you just have something you'd like to share.

Fun abortion story, uh, Abortion Academy story: I was in Wisconsin last weekend speaking at a Planned Parenthood event and two babes approached me. I'm seeing if either of them are here tonight. They are not. I know because they're both named Katie and Katie, and Katie came up to me and told me that they were huge abortion Academy fans, that they had been completely radicalized by Abortion Academy, that they watched every single one and talked to their friends about it and it was just the most beautiful feedback. So please continue telling us what you want to talk about and just giving us feedback. We really, really love and appreciate it.

So tonight, we're super excited to hear from **Breanna Kompelien and Destiny Spaeth** of North Dakota's Prairie Abortion Fund and Prairie Abortion Fund Book Club.

The Prairie Abortion Fund is the sole abortion fund working out of North Dakota and they serve North Dakotans, South Dakotans, Minnesotans, and people who travel to the region for care.

And since the book club formed in 2019, they've read dozens of books, hosted hundreds of readers from across the US and Canada, and have built and fostered a thriving community of abortion supporters who are actively leveling up their knowledge of all things abortion and reproductive justice, and just connecting, it seems, and discussing.

And, we are so excited about-

You know, we've focused a lot in recent sessions on movement building stuff on a lot of stuff about SMA and pills and you know, peer support of folks having portions at home and more sort of like technical aspects of what we're all doing these days as in clinic abortion access continues to decline. And it just feels like a great time to remember the profound power of building community around abortion and the fact that working against stigma, working to normalize abortion-It's not frivolous work in any way. It is lifesaving work and it is absolutely connected to building a world where there will be better policy and laws and all that kind of shit.

And also, you know, rural organizing is something that I think is often ignored just like rural America is often ignored. We, you know, access in rural America was very bad before Dobbs and it's obviously worse now.

And I often think that like the left is bad at-like the fact that the term flyover state even exists is like so fucking insulting and the organizers that I know in places like Fargo are some of the most loving badass, committed folks in the movement. So we're really, really excited to hear about what these guys have built with this book club and I'm gonna hand it over to Breanna and Destini.

**BREANNA KOMPელიEN:**

Thanks, Amelia. Like Amelia said, I'm BrEE. I use she/her pronouns and I'm joining you from Fargo, North Dakota tonight.

I am the treasurer and book club organizer for Prairie Abortion Fund, and I'm really excited to be on Abortion Academy and also to talk about the book club. This has been a really special community building, bias busting space for us and I'm excited to talk about the impact that it's had in the community it's helped build.

We can go to the next slide. Tonight, I've asked Destini Spaeth, the president of Prairie Abortion Fund, to join me. Destiny was on the board of directors at the time the book club was founded and so I've asked her to share the story of how the book club came to be and then we'll go off and talk about how we run the book club now and the community that it's helped build. So Destiny, welcome.

**DESTINI SPEATH:**

Hi everyone, my name is Destini. My pronouns are she and her, and I'm joining from Alexandria, Minnesota. Tonight, I am a Katie myself. I love Abortion Academy and all that the knowledge of people in this movement has brought. I am so grateful that this is being recorded so that it can be shared on and on and forever.

We are the Prairie Abortion Fund. We were founded in 1999 in response to the Hyde Amendment, which prevented people receiving Medicaid insurance from using their insurance money to pay for their abortion procedures.

So since then we've grown exponentially. We now are serving callers from North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota as well as folks who travel to our region for care.

North and South Dakota have total bans in place whereas Minnesota is this small pocket of politically protected space for abortion seekers.

We've, as I mentioned, we've grown exponentially and it's not without really, really a lot of grunt work taking place. But one of the really silver linings of this hellscape that we're in has been our abortion book club and I'm so excited to talk about the impact that it's had, sort of our trial and error sessions with it, and all that we've learned and been able to bring to the community with it.

Next slide, please: so with book club, our mission is to celebrate abortion stories, fostering a safe place to talk about those abortion stories. We read a variety of texts which create sort of an infinite amount of conversational opportunities. It's a place where folks can ask questions and are joined by people from all walks of life. It's really been a special situation for us and something that we are really intentional about continuing.

Next slide, please: so the first book club was held in 2019 and I actually went back to our board notes to see what this conversation looked like because all I remember from our board discussion in November of 2018 was how resistant I was to book club.

It was proposed by our former president, Tibby. She's phenomenal and I yield to all of her great ideas, but she wanted to make a book club happen. She proposed we pilot it with this first book. *Shout Your Abortion* was going crazy. It was so popular and there's really no better way to bust abortion stigma and celebrate abortion stories by reading those stories.

And so the idea for book club passed, and we joined together on probably one of the coldest days in January and for North Dakota that's saying something and joined together with a group of abortion supporters at our local library and had the joy of having Amelia BonoW join us for that book club.

It was so pure and we spent two hours just going round the table of what stories impacted you and what stories to out to you?, what did you learn? We're just a bunch of North Dakota gals like wanting to talk about abortion and it was just this really, really special time. So that is how abortion book club sort of kicked off.

Let's go to the next slide.

Okay, so the initial proposal was to further engage with the supporters. In-person meetings, we move to virtual meetings, but I do just want to speak on the history of it.

So Bree is here because of book club and it's something that I get like, really tender about which I get really tender about everything related to abortion. But Bree is here because of book club.

We worked together at a local hospital and I would always bring my book club book with me and I would set it on my desk and she would see it.

And she started asking questions and borrowed a couple of books and then joined a book club. There was even one night that we were both working late, but we couldn't stand to miss book club and so we joined from our COVID research office. And I believe it was to discuss the COVID research office and I believe it was to discuss the mothers, which yeah, I just remember because it was so pinnacle.

And so with that, showed engagement and interest. She really had those internal conversations with herself about what abortion means to her and you know, how important these abortion seekers are in her heart and then applied to be on the board and now she's in an officer position and running our book club.

So, it really really comes full circle. Additionally, with our first book club being a part of Shout Your Abortion, it was and has been so so important to, just me as an organizer, but also to Prairie Abortion Fund. We formed this relationship with SYA and now for the last five years, I've been able to bring everything that I know or have learned from SYA back to our fund and it's always pushing the boundaries. It's always challenging. It's always so informational and deep and motivating and I've gotten to this place both in my activism, and the way that hopefully PAF has been able to be raised up with the help of Shout Your Abortion.

And so everything is coming really full circle tonight, being able to present on our book club that was started with SYA, that brought Bri into the fund. And so this is just really truly an honor and so excited to share this with all of you. I will yield to Bree.

**BK:**

Thank you, Destini. I love when you tell that story. I came from book club. We also actually have another current board member whose initial involvement began in book club, too, and she's a co-organizer. We're working on co-organizing book club together so that's kind of a transition process, but it's been a really neat pathway to get kind of an informed background before making the jump for a board position.

So, initially our book club met in person and it attracted local readers because those are the people that could get to us. And in 2020, because of COVID, book club moved to virtual in response. But what we saw was that our local and regional attendance grew because it was more accessible. In 2019, our average number of registrants was 21. And then the last couple of years that's gone up way higher to about 35 people for book club.

Next slide.

So who are all of these people that are interested in book club and abortion stories? Looking at this community that's formed around our book club geographically, we have people from the Upper Midwest, North Dakota, Minnesota, South Dakota, Iowa.

But we've also got people who join us from across the United States now: California, Texas, Tennessee, and New York and we've even had readers join us from Canada.

I've included two quotes on this slide that are from readers that show the appreciation there is for the space, and how they felt comfortable engaging in abortion discussions, which is huge because we have people come to book club from very different life experiences with different goals for their engagement with book club.

Some readers come with no knowledge of abortion and they join book club with the intent to learn. Others have strong rooted values in repro justice and they enjoy the nuanced discussion that's possible because the space exists.

We've had people cry at book club. They've unpacked complicated relationships related to family or pregnancy and parenting. We've had people bravely share their own abortion stories with us. And we watch abortion biases and just stigma crumble in real time because book club offers the space and the nuance for people to process and get to that point.

Next slide: So how do we foster good discussion and good space? We pick really good books and I don't say that as a brag. I say that because we're very intentional about our selection. Abortion intersects with so many different aspects of life. It's important to seek a variety and ensure a range of opportunities for people to connect with the content.

The books along the bottom are some examples of books that we've read. This is from first person abortion stories like *Shout Your Abortion* to non-fiction novels or graphic novels like *Comics for Choice*. We've even read research like the Turnaway Study, which is fundamental in progressing our advocacy for abortion.

We'll plug our book club web page at some point, as well. There you will be able to scroll and see all of the books that we've read. And we hope this will be either an inspiration or maybe a foundation to running book lists for your book club.

Next slide: So we keep a running book list of book ideas. We use an Excel spreadsheet and our Google Drive and we add to it as we find new titles. Maybe you see something on Twitter or Barnes and Noble email comes out or there's a *Shout Your Abortion* email that's promoting a new book.

We keep them logged so that every year when we go through we have a big list of books that we can select from. Actually, selecting our books, we've tried a few different methods. So the board of directors has just made the decision of which titles book club will read. We've also asked her participants to participate in voting for their top choices. But for the final selections, we try to avoid reading duplicate genres and themes back to back.

Next slide: We also consider who the author is and what their relationship is with the abortion community. So we seek authors and books whose values align with ours as an organization.

So we do take that time to research and assess the author's reputation and the book and how the author has voiced their support for abortion. We want to observe kind of for any underlying stigmas that could be harmful to promote. So doing a Google search, reading book reviews, and being intentional about your selections to ensure that you're selecting books with content that promote growth and exploration, and you're avoiding ideas that may feel outdated or misaligned with your values.

Next slide: So we host four book clubs per year. Prior to this year, we scheduled our book club quarterly but as we were planning our 2024 date, we noticed that December historically has low attendance so this year we're hosting our final book club in November instead of December. We'll see how registration goes and when we plan our 2025 days will assess and decide if we want to make any changes then.

But we really want to try, we try to adapt to our readers and build a space that's accessible to them so sometimes that is adjusting the meeting dates, and sometimes that might be developing different types of questions to provoke curiosity.

But as far as scheduling goes for us, we found the most consistent attendance on Tuesdays and Thursdays, but if you're looking to do your own book club, you'll schedule what works best for your organization.

For us, we have a preference for Thursdays because that's when we're available to host book club consistently.

Our board members are volunteers and we're the ones that organize book club so scheduling out these dates each year allows us to plan who the host will be and you know, if there's a book we're wanting to connect with an author on, this also gives us an opportunity to coordinate with them. Maybe an author is available in June, but not in March or September. So then you can adjust your book club schedule accordingly to accommodate the author.

Our engagement with our readers: so our book club announcements, we send them out on three platforms. We do a mass email to our email subscribers as well as posts on Facebook and Instagram. Every January, we announce our books for the upcoming year and then prior to book club we send out calls to our readers and reminder emails in hopes that they remember to not forget to attend book club when it's scheduled.

Next slide: So this is our announcement schedule for each book club. We have created email and social media templates that help us streamline these posts.

So, starting about eight weeks prior to book club, we send out a call for reader's email and this email announces the upcoming book club. It contains all the main information: the book's title and author. We include an image of the book. We'll normally include either a summary or a vetted review to give some context. And then the date and time that we're planning to meet.

We embed a link to a Google form that readers can click to register, and then we also post the call for readers on Instagram and Facebook.

So our book club, we prioritize getting books to readers and connecting readers with the abortion stories. Each book club, we provide 20 copies of the book for free to readers. So about six weeks prior, we close that free book registration. That allows us a couple of weeks to order and ship the books. But still allows the reader about four weeks with the book before book club.

So six weeks before, we order and ship our books and then we also repost on Insta and Facebook to promote the event.

Four weeks prior, we will email all of our registrants to confirm that they did in fact receive their book and will also do another repost to promote. And then we don't do much more engagement until a week prior when we email our registry registrants a meeting reminder and the zoom information for them to join. And then we send an additional reminder the day of book club, hoping that that link being available right at the top of their inbox will remind them to join.

And then following the book club, this is another opportunity to engage with readers, thank them for joining, share pertinent links and resources from the discussion or use this as an opportunity to solicit reading recommendations or feedback from them on what they would like to see in the book club.

Next slide: These are some of the applications that we use to help streamline our book club operations. So we use a separate book club email so that email communications to our readers come from the book club.

And then all booklet communications will go to their own inbox. The inbox is monitored by the book club organizers and it's especially helpful with book ordering because you can use it to make your own accounts and then all of the shipment notifications will be filed in that same inbox.

So we mentioned that we provide 20 books to readers for free at each book club. This is something that we as an organization have dedicated funds to and received grants for because we have made it a priority.

At one point in time, we used to both order the books and then ship them to readers ourselves. But now we order the book through second hand sellers. This is to promote sustainability. Used books are also cheaper, and this allows us to ship the book directly to the reader. This way all of these combined allows us to extend the life of our funds for book club.

An important note if this is a route you do choose to go is that a lot of secondhand sellers pull from shared inventories because they do resale. So if you're ordering multiple books in a row or a large chunk of books at a time, give time for those inventories on these websites to update,

otherwise. you may end up with some rejected orders that will delay the shipping to your readers.

I've listed some of the second hand sites that we have used reliably. We also use Canva. We use this to create our social media graphics. Canva Pro is free for non-profit and, within Canva, we have book club templates. We've given book club kind of its own little brand and these templates make it easy for us to update the content so that our social media posts don't take us a long time and we're not reinventing the wheel or adding unnecessary work to our book club operations.

And then of course Zoom. We meet via Zoom and Zoom is available at a discounted rate for nonprofits as well.

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So as far as discussion structure goes, we meet from 6 to 7:30 on Zoom. We recommend having a co-host present to help admit attendees and take attendance and then monitor the chat. Because it's zoom, you allow a couple of minutes for your readers to get logged in and connected, but then you can begin with your welcome. We try to keep our welcome to just a few minutes, but we want to introduce the organization and the space that we're sharing. So what is Prairie Abortion Fund, who are the hosts and why we're hosting book club to lay that context for your reader.

And then for participant introductions, we've done a couple different techniques for actually having people introduce themselves. So we asked readers to give us their name, pronouns and location. We do usually try to think of an icebreaker question to include. This could be anything from what's your favorite cookie to what's the last book you read outside of book club.

And then, we have our book club host go first just to give an example that maybe will resonate audibly with the reader. And then we have done reader introductions either by roll call down the list in Zoom or by having the readers popcorn around and call on each other to introduce themselves.

After introductions, we begin with open-ended questions to open up the space for discussion.

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Open-ended questions. So we start with open ended questions because this requires the reader to reflect on the contents of the book and give us more than a one word response.

So open-ended questions can be broad such as what was your overall reaction to the book and this will elicit a more broad response, but it will be, a more verbose response than a question that only, you know, requires a yes or no answer such as did you like the book so asking about their overall reaction will push them to elaborate on their thoughts.



Open-ended questions can also be more narrow and provoking. So an example would be asking what type of emotions the reader experienced while they were reading the book. So now you're kind of going beyond just the content and reaching into that self-reflection, without being too invasive of the boundaries maybe that you want to maintain in the space.

The 4 L's: these are staple questions that we keep on our discussion list. What did you like, love, learn, and long for? These always seem to elicit good responses and discussion so we have added them to our discussion template. And another staple question on our list is asking readers if the biases are challenged in any way from the reading. This is a question that has been on our list since our first book club. We love it when we read *Shout Your Abortion* and we continue to use it in all of our book clubs.

And then at each book club we also ask about the conversations that may be happening because of this book or the book club upcoming. Our hope is that readers have or will be inspired to share these stories with family and friends and if they're willing to share how those conversations played out for themselves, this may inspire or provide a little bit of context for other people looking to have those conversations whether it's with family members or friends. Hearing how other people navigate some of those situations can be helpful when other people are trying to think about how they might go about engaging in those conversations.

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We do want to emphasize that it's worthwhile to spend time curating book specific questions. This doesn't mean that you have to dig deep with every book club and spend hours reflecting and developing inquiries.

Some books do have online reading guides with questions already available. You might also consider collaborating with your peers and using this as an opportunity to discuss abortion with the people around you, whether that's people part of your organization, or maybe people in the community. Friends or acquaintances, you feel comfortable expanding on topics with.

An example might be considering how the themes in the book relate to abortion access or reproductive justice and framing the content of the book within either the abortion or reprojustice mindset for the reader and then guiding discussion topics with that as a foundation.

You might also take a look and see if there's any relevant events from the book or current news that you could tie together, or even ask readers to share relevant events from their location which might connect to the book. And then as you read, whether you're a host or a participant, I always share that my favorite thing to do is to notate my book or actually take notes on your thoughts and feelings as you're reading. This active engagement with the content of the book helps you process and reflect, differently, maybe more deeply on the information.

And if you're the organizer and you feel so bold sometimes sharing those topics that resonated deeply with you and the way they impacted you will spark deeper discussion among the attendees as well.

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We are very fortunate in our five years of book club. We've had a number of authors who have joined us for discussion. They have also joined us in person as keynote speakers. They provided resources. They've been supportive of this initiative and this community.

We've even had authors send us books, send us their book, which we were able to send back out to the readers. Having them join us for conversation is always a wonderful time. When authors join, we do offer them a stipend for their time and then we also promote the heck out of their generosity because author book clubs are pretty popular, but they generate such good discussion that feels very applicable practically versus super reflective on the content. It fosters a very different type of abortion conversation when the author joins but it's always very engaging.

Having an author join doesn't necessarily need to change the structure of your book club. But be sure you allow space for the author to introduce themselves, and then prepare some questions for the author. Maybe ask about their motivation for writing, what their writing process was, or even their own reflections on the content of their own book-maybe they have differing reflections post publication that they're encouraged to share.

You'll also definitely leave plenty of space for participants to ask their question. Hosting a book club, you want to be there to kind of moderate the conversation and then throw out questions to promote discussion when it lulls but, make sure that you're promoting participants getting their connection with the author and allowing them to explore their kind of their take on the content.

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Okay, so we have made a ton of connections through our book club, but we do just want to note that we've been very intentional and our community wasn't built passively, but the engagement is really exciting and well received, so that intentional connection and reaching out to the authors or promoting local resources, for us, has been much appreciated.

We really value connecting and connecting abortion stories to readers. So one thing we do, and have done is prioritizing getting those stories in the hands of the people who will read them. Each book club, like we've mentioned, offers 20 free books to readers that we ship directly to them. We do not make it a requirement that they attend book club. Our genuine hope is just that if they have the literature and they're reading it or they're sharing it. All we want to do is make sure that they are connected.

We've also previously partnered with local bookstores. They've offered us a space for meeting when we met in person, but also for local readers if they want to make a local purchase, they gave them a 10% discount on their book club book.

We've uplifted our local library and encouraged readers to check out what's available. The amazing thing with the growth in our book club attendance is that every book club, we are getting 20 books shipped across the United States and that's 20 abortion stories connected with at least 20 readers.

In 2022, we were connected with Abortion Conversation Projects. They were interested in our book club at that time and we partnered with them to host a webinar on how we were running our book club then. And, in return, they have provided us with a grant, which for the last couple of years has covered all of the book and shipping costs to keep our book club running as we have. And so this is a plug that if you're looking at maybe starting your own book club, Abortion Conversation Projects exist to promote abortion conversations so consider applying for one of their grants. This may be a really good resource to get you started with your first book club.

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Okay, as we have questions coming in, I'm wanting to leave you with some quotes from our readers about their favorite parts of book club. We also have a book club guide that can be found on our website, and we'll also be linked in the chat at some point.

And that is all that we've got.

**AB:**

Yay, thank you so much for that. What a just...What a great vibe. I just feel so happy listening to you talk about this project. It's just so beautiful and like, I love how much you considered making this a sort of teachable little capsule for people who might wanna do the same thing in their communities, which is like the whole idea of, I mean, of, I think it's always been a part of the SYA ethos and I thank you, and it means so much to hear you like shout that out and hear you talk about the way that like it's helped inspire you to do this thing that will have such a ripple effect, you know? I love thinking about the people in this room that are gonna be like "Who's gonna start a book club?" You know, it's just really, it's really special and you've just been so deliberate about the creation of it, just like from top to bottom.

So, we did have a question about ordering books, which you already answered, Breanna. Love that, like, hack of using used books, but being aware that they might not always be free flowing.

One question that I had and-

Okay, I hope that none of these were covered. My maintenance dude came and knocked, and then came in here and was very distracting for like four minutes. So obviously you, you know,

you put this, you put the invitation out there like on social media and stuff like that. Do you do any vetting of people? Like looking or looking at social media or anything like that?

**BK:**

Yeah, not for attendees. We haven't, and Destiny, you could speak to this before I joined, but since I've been involved with book club. We haven't had anyone who's infiltrated or come in and been aggressive or tried to work against the mission of what we're trying to achieve.

**AB:**

That's great.

**BK:**

Yeah, true it is.

**AB:**

Yeah, I mean, it feels like, it's probably not the top of the list for antis to infiltrate a book club and then just be a dick but I mean you never know.

**BK:**

Yeah, for sure.

**AB:**

Is that something that you have discussed as a group, like, a sort of like ,safety plan of like.. I wanted to ask in general about managing conflict and if that's been an issue, even something sort of sub-conflict like sort of interpersonal issues or discomfort stuff that's come up and if you have sort of like an internal game plan about how to navigate that? Like do you kind of have a designated game plan about how to navigate that? Do you kind of have a designated facilitator type person within the group? Like how has that been?

**DS:**

So as far as joiners go, I feel like it very much is a ripple effect. So a lot of times it will be like I've joined five book clubs and when I send my email saying that I want to join this one, I might say "my friend Sarah also is going to be joining. I can't wait."Well great, we know where Sarah is coming from.

Two: it's maybe bottom of the totem pole as far as somebody being interested in infiltrating. We don't have much of a security plan. Like we're just we're just here having a zoom in a book club and if you If you want to listen in on that, okay.

**BK:**

Yeah, like Zoom has a remove from meeting button.

**DS:**

Yeah, we can remove you from the meeting like if you're gonna go off. But I do appreciate your question about some difficult conversations. I would say there's been a couple from like different religious standpoints which are really interesting to listen to. And then of course always with talking about abortions later in pregnancy. And we are all just humans, sitting in a circle, a little virtual circle, and we can feel that. And let's sit with it for a second and sometimes there are like those awkward pauses, but that's just folks processing and that kind of speaks to the biases that Bree was talking about like you can kind of watch them shake in real time.

We've not had anybody like angrily click out of the meeting. It's very much like, okay, let's sit with this for a second. We mentioned in book club about confronting those biases and I can sit here and be like, well, I have my abortion forever, no matter what t-shirt on, but there's been points in different books that we've read especially in the beginning where I was like wait a sec, let me sit with that for a second and why do I have that bias? Where is that coming from?

So even folks who are very pro-abortion could benefit from reading more and more abortion stories and from these different perspectives.

**AB:**

Oh yeah, absolutely. I think that sometimes there's a thing within like our movement- I've also talked to my Polish friends a lot about this where it's like, there is... Sometimes it feels like it's difficult to find a space to sort of like unravel your own to like... find your own discomfort and talk through it, like, lest you be considered not fully down or whatever.

And, I remember having a conversation with my Polish friends who are abortion doulas. You know, there aren't providers in the country so they are all doing doula work with pills including people after the first trimester. And I remember a session at their abortion camp, where we were talking about... I sort of just opened up the question of personal comfort with assisting abortion later in pregnancy.

And it was like, a kind of revolutionary, like, no one had ever felt safe to talk through that before. You know what I mean? And there was a really amazing conversation where folks were kind of finally able to say: Yeah, you know, like, I don't totally, I don't really want to help with the 20 week SMA and like I think that... You know, it's just so important to have spaces where people are really allowed to find their own boundaries and be trusted in their like values but be like allowed to like find their line, you know what I mean?

And I think that something like this book club is perfect for doing that, and I can definitely see how stuff would come up with stigma with multiple abortions with abortion later in pregnancy.

Erin had a question in the chat that I had a similar question to, which is just kind of like, what have some of the challenges been that have come up over the course of just like either organizing it or like administering it? You know, because it's obviously just like a wildly successful project, but like what have you navigated that was tough?

**BK:**

Yeah, I think, yeah, Destini, you start, you start.

**DS:**

I wanna just speak like your stigma discussion and how important your conversation with your Polish friends was. I just want to plug the book "Our Bodies, Our Crimes." And that was something that we read maybe in 2020, and it was one of the most important books that I could have done for my own work about drug use during pregnancy and that was...

It's you finding your boundary and then you find a way to push past it and to inch further along. It's a book that I encourage everybody to read, especially if you're feeling like: Oh, no, like abortion forever, read "Our Bodies, Our Crimes", and then see where you're sitting. I think that that's like a really important place to be.

I'll speak just a little bit to the beginning of book club and then Bree has been here through like the evolution of it. It was very haphazard and a lot of trial and error. What forms do we use? What, how do we do our book club ordering? I mean, there was a time where, in COVID times 2020, I was dropping books off on people's doorsteps like that wasn't sustainable.

We have gotten it down so pat that now I'm really really confident in us sharing this. Like three years ago, I would have maybe said give us another year or two. But especially with Bree's organization skills, it's just been great.

Bree, I'll let you speak to how you've gotten us here.

**BK:**

Yeah, operations wise, like Destini said, it was kind of haphazard and then we collaborated and just gave it some focused attention. We set up some spreadsheets and you know, having the templates is a really useful tool that if you do something that's going to be consistent or repeated like book club. Templates, one, not only make it easier for you but also kind of having that little brand makes it recognizable so like they recognize when it's a book club post and they know like if I scroll down, I'm gonna click this and go to the form and register.

Registration is another thing we've kind of been playing around with. So, we had originally established our book club email. And if people wanted to join, they would email us their name and then if they wanted to book we would ask for their preferred shipping address.

And as registration continues to grow, our newest journey is learning how to use Google forms to recruit and so we've got a form now instead of emailing us to join. The readers can fill out a Google form. They'll check if they want a book or not so that when it comes to us, we know if we need to mail it. Also, if they don't wanna book, then they're not forced to provide their address for us.

And that we've done the last two book clubs and that's been working out all right. Some things that we troubleshoot is like proofreading the emails to make sure that the you know, if we use a book review or a summary that it is written in a way that aligns with us or that, you know, we're using a review that, accurately reflects what we are hoping to establish with book club. What can you think of anything else, operations?

**DS:**

The hack of ordering books and having them ship directly to callers or readers, sorry, is like incredible because that and it was maybe started within like the last year and a half because otherwise we were spending like seven or eight dollars a book on shipping those. And using those second hand resale stores and shipping directly to the participants has just been incredible.

I will make a note that shipping to Canada is insanely expensive, like I learned that the hard way. And so we have offered people like in Canada like if you want to buy a book, great, we'll reimburse you for that cost because me buying it and sending it to you makes it like a \$60 book. But those hiccups happen.

**AB:**

Yeah, of course. Okay, I feel like I know the answer to this, but do you get in trouble if you haven't read the whole book?

**BK:**

Absolutely not. No, we have people who come that haven't even started it, but like want to be part of the conversation. And that's the whole goal is whatever your goal is to engage with this space. We want to help you achieve that. And if it's coming to listen about the book and reading it later, or just calling for the discussion space and not really totally caring about the book but wanting to engage then it's like, sure, we'll take you as long as you know you're respectful and engaging like all for it.

**DS:**

I will note one other hack that Bree has done is giving our local library a heads up of what books we're going to be reading and so-

**AB:**

Are you still doing it at the, do you ever have in person ones anymore? No.

**DS:**

Well, we did an in person one with Hannah Matthews when she was here and that was really special. But this virtual forum, like we mentioned, like we have really, really consistent readers and I think we would be devastated if we left them out.

At abortion camp, I was able to share book club with Judith and she was so excited that she sent me home with all of her books and signed them for me and we're going to be reading her poetry book as one of our book clubs and fingers crossed she'll be able to join us.

**AB:**

Oh my god!

**DS:**

So that was like so, so special.

**AB:**

That is so special. Oh, wow. That makes me just like feel that... I'm just thinking about that poem she wrote that she read at the end of camp: "We have always done this." Oh, so beautiful. Oh my god. And Judith is just like so down, too.

She's like she'd be down to go sit with a group of five people like across the country. She's a really real one.

**DS:**

It'll be really, really special.

**AB:**

Yeah, that's... I love that for y' all. I guess, you know, I wanted to ask, so Prairie Abortion Fund is obviously...like your mission and the work you do is oriented way beyond just practical support and helping people pay for procedures, and helping people to just logistically have abortions. And I guess, I just wonder if you could speak to the importance of this kind of community building which like this has been kind of the whole point of your everything but just like the point of just or like the importance of this kind of community building of this kind of like challenging stigma, normalizing abortion in a place like Fargo.

And not that it's limited to Fargo at this point. Obviously, it's far beyond that, but just like, in real life communities, how does something like this change people's abortion experiences, you know, and change the way they engage with this issue?

**DS:**

So right now we are the only abortion affiliated organization rooted in the state of North Dakota, which puts a little bit of a target on us, but also gives us a huge platform. I think that folks who are looking for a safe space to love abortion find us and that is really important in such a deep red state like where we are.

They want that safety and they want that community. We are called upon to do media when something about abortion happens and testimony when legislature goes which is always. We are very much one of the main faces for abortion access in our area and I think providing this very safe space where those little pockets of progressiveness lie is important for people to not



feel alone and not feeling like they need to give up because we are here and we're really defiant.

**AB:**

Hell yeah. Bree, do you have anything to add to that?

**BK:**

Oh no, I can't add to destiny covers at all with the empathetics.

**AB:**

So any books on the horizon that we need to be like, clocking? Anything you're excited to read?

**BK:**

Well, Judith Arcana's poetry book. Our upcoming book in June is Birthing Liberation by Svia Wade. This one is interesting. This one is an experience for me. I don't know, Destini if you started it, but there is a very large chapter on trauma. And I found myself struggling internally getting through this book. So I'm excited to see how the discussion plays out and if other people, you know, it's a talking point, so do other people feel the same? And like, how did they experience reading that?

**AB:**

Right.

**DS:**

We also just read Ros' book. What was Ros' book called?

**HK:**

Oh, Focus on Abortion. So-

**DS:**

Which is very similar to SYA. Go ahead, Ray.

**HK:**

Roslyn connected with us. She was also on the board for Abortion Conversation Projects with Peg Johnston.

**AB:**

Yes, shout out to Peg. I was just about to bring Peg's name into this conversation.

**HK:**

Yes, wonderful, wonderful people. Roslyn sent us 20 copies of her book, which is first person abortion stories paired with a portrait of the storyteller. And she sent us 20 copies that we were able to send out to readers and then she joined us for book club. And it was one of like our most

well received book clubs that we had so much positive feedback and we had such great discussion.

We read so many different types of books that no discussion is ever the same either, which is fun.

**AB:**

Yeah, totally. I know it's like an infinite like, you just talk about this shit from a million different angles forever and still be having new conversations.

**DS:**

There's a lot of new books always coming out, especially right now. I do maybe have a little goal in the back of my mind where we would go back and reread maybe a couple of the books.

Shout your abortion is the number one book that I recommend to people when they're dabbling in an interest around abortion. I'd love to reread *Our Bodies, Our Crimes*, and just to re-up those stories I feel like, and bring them to like our new joiners, but we do have like a massive list of books that we want to read. But I'm hoping to make some time for maybe some of those flashback books too.

**AB:**

Totally. There's a really good question in the chat that says you're also an awesome abortion fund. Have you had previous callers get involved in your book club? And like do you ever mention your book club to callers, I guess? That seems like it would probably not be super appropriate or like top of mind for folks.

**DS:**

We have very little follow up with callers after we'd say yes. I hope that they find us. One of the most special times is when folks do feel safe enough to share their abortion stories with us, and so I'm not sure maybe they were a caller. Maybe, they were maybe they weren't, but those moments are really, really...

I'm just thinking of this one woman and she's in her seventies and she's incredible and she didn't share her abortion story until she was like 60 and now she shouts it from the rooftop and tells it at every single book club and it's just like yes girl like say that shit we love this.

And so, after like a couple of clubs you're like, oh we're all buddies like this is this is so special but also very welcoming to like new members. It's very like low lift. We, if you can join one book club a year, great. You're not indebted to join like every single one. Join the one that works with your schedule and your interest.

**AB:**

Yeah, I love how flexible and accommodating it is and yeah, I mean like even if a person literally doesn't read any of the book like why shouldn't they be welcomed to sit in this conversation, you know? It seems like a really awesome way to structure it.

And yeah, I wanna shout out Peg Johnson who was the one of the founders of Abortion Conversations Project as well as Abortion Care Network before it was called that. And Peg passed last summer, I believe, and she was just the best. And I just wanna bring her presence into this room because she just like had...she was the first person I ever spoke to who was like...She was like, yeah, I mean, we want women to have a beautiful experience. And I had like at that point only ever spoken to people who, you know, worked for Planned Parenthood and spoke about stuff in a really different way.

And like I had a beautiful experience, you know, and it was just so I felt like I was meeting like a faith leader. Like she just was so energetically powerful and she was a part of that project, Abortion Conversations Project as a funder has, and changed the universe that we live in with funding so many teeny, tiny beautiful projects. And big ones, but like lots of just this core community level work that I think it's like so easy to just get lost in how fucked the politics are and like in helping people have abortions and forgetting to just like be together and connect, and hold this space and push our own understanding. And yeah, it's just it means so much to have you here with us and sharing this.

And also SYA is going to start our own book club, by the way, of course, inspired in part by you guys and now we have like the playbook, thanks to you. And shout out to SYA's all star admin Jessica Posey who is an avid voracious reader and will be our book club maven. So stay tuned for info about that. It's gonna be, we also I think would love to see your list if you feel like sharing that because yeah, so many directions it could go. I think Jess just wants to focus on fiction.

Jess has an intro, I'm hearing, in the chat.

Jessica, do you want to hop on and say? Say a thing or two about book club.

**JESSICA POSEY:**

Yeah, hi. This was great. I love hearing about books and activism and abortion. And I love Prairie Fund so thank you guys for being here.

Yeah, my name is Jess. I'm the admin assistant for Shout Your Abortion. I go by she /her and I am here to announce that SYA is launching a book club. I've loved reading since I was a kid and I found that a lot of my world views were shaped by books like me being so into activism. Like my grandma likes to call me Harriet Tubman because I can't shut up about injustice and that's probably because of Hunger Games with Katniss. After her like, I was about it. I was like, yeah, let, let me storm the capital too, the US government.

Yeah, so SYA started with the power of storytelling, our amazing co-founder Amelia just told a story about her abortion. She inspired this big movement of people telling their abortion stories

like that's really cool and I think storytelling has the power to change minds and to empower people and to make people feel safe in this really fucked up world.

So SYA book club so far will be hosted quarterly, and will be promoting healthy discussions around the topic of abortion. And just doing what stories do best, which is seeing different points of views in the abortion, repro space and promoting us to take action to create change in this current world we're living in. It'll be mostly focused on fiction, poetry, graphic novels.

And just like the Prairie Fund, we're just very interested in making it as accessible and safe as possible and yeah we hope you join us.

**AB:**

Yeah, do you wanna join a new book club?

**JP:**

Yeah, I'd love for you guys to join. Oh my god. You guys are so amazing.

**AB:**

Thank you, Jess. Okay, what do people need to know to learn more about SYA Book Club?

**JP:**

Well, we'll be sending out a survey after, it's a interest survey. So you'll just fill out a few questions and in a couple of weeks. We'll be filtering your questions and announcing it. We already have our first book picked out. So stay tuned for that. And yeah.

**AB:**

What's the first book or is it a surprise?

**JP:**

It's a surprise.

**AB:**

Well thank you, Jessica Posey, for that.

**JP:**

Thank you.

**AB:**

Yeah, I think you also just touched on something that I think is like the perfect conclusion to all of this, which is that reading books is like what makes people more empathetic ultimately, right?

And like I deeply believe that in every place in this country, the vast majority of people who have negative feelings about abortion have simply not ever been asked to look at them before. They've never spoken to someone who's had an abortion, they've never read an abortion story. I

don't really think that people are that against it even in the deepest red places. I think that most people are movable.

And so it's not like I think that those people are going to go join book clubs but their nieces might, you know, and that that thing is what culture change looks like at the most granular level. It's people deciding to talk about their own lives on their own terms in a way that society's told them they're not supposed to, or it's people deciding to engage with a story of someone whose life they never could have imagined before. You know, like when I started this work, I was totally green. Had never imagined the idea of someone who's had six abortions. How could that be? How could that happen? I just never thought about it. These are all real people's lives and the way that you understand and the way that you open your heart up to just understanding humanity in a greater depth is by listening to the people that can tell you what it was like. And, that's what it's all about.

And this is such a beautiful project. It's made my heart feel so good. And yeah, thank you so much for being here with us.

Do you have anything else to tell us before you bounce? Anything that you didn't get a chance to say that you want to tell us?

**DS:**

Yeah, I will just say our book club list is on our website, [prairieabortionfund.org](http://prairieabortionfund.org). Our book club is right at the top. When we designed our new web page, I was like, we need our own tab for book club. This is part of us, right?

Also just like this is such a full circle moment. Again, I've looked up to Amelia forever and never ever and this is like a huge honor. Shout Your Abortion was the seed that made this all possible so this is really, really special.

**AB:**

Don't make me cry again. I just got done. Destini, back at you, babe, like a thousand percent. Destini has worked in a clinic, at the fund, you know, does cultural work and in a deeply red place and just like, such an honor to know you both. Such an honor to do this work alongside you.

Speaking of raffle, SYA also has a raffle going on that all Abortion Academy attendees are included in so we will let you know if you're the big winner. And the last thing that we have to say for anybody that may be watching this video after the fact, or those of you who are still here.

Our next guest, Drumroll, please is none other than Riannon Hamam, who is one of the hosts of the Five Four Podcast, which is a podcast about how much the Supreme Court sucks. Riannon is a brilliant lawyer and activist. She is a member of the Palestinian youth liberation project.

She lives in Texas. She's a former public defender. And this Five Four Podcast podcast has been really formative for SYA in terms of our own sort of strategic orientation in rejecting the authority of courts to tell us what to do with our bodies, and our just unwavering approach of we're going to do the right thing and figure the rest out later. Or in advance, but we're just gonna do the right thing.

And we're super excited to have Rhiannon. We don't know when obviously like the Supreme Court decisions will be announced on either the Mife case or the Idaho EMTALA case, but it's totally possible that they'll be announced before this next abortion academy if so we'll be talking about those but it's also just gonna be like a legal and scotus related AMA. We would love for folks to...we'll be sending out an email where you can send questions in advance. And Rhiannon really is just an expert in talking about the conservative legal project, in general, and stuff like the Alliance Defending Freedom and just like how this has a sort of shaped abortion legal landscape.

And I also think, "What does that mean for activists who are doing the work no matter what?" So we're just ecstatic to have Rhiannon and hope that you can join us. And, again, that's June 26th at the same time, same place you'll get a, you'll get a link, all that stuff.

And, thank you, babes, both so, so much. We love you and we'll see you around. We'll see you on the internet.

**DS:**

Thank you.

**BK:**

Yes, thank you.

**DS:**

Thank you. All credit to Bree. Thanks, Bree.

**AB:**

Thanks, Bree. Okay, bye everybody.