



# The Catholic Advocate

Vol. 57, No. 21

November 26, 2008

## Finding 'shelter' in a turbulent storm, women receive support, reject abortion

### Havens provide options for life in troubled time

BY MELISSA MCNALLY  
Staff Writer

**E**mbarrassed, alone, confused and afraid. For young women who endure the many trials from an unplanned pregnancy, these emotions can make the decision to have their child extremely difficult. The women, some of whom are only 15 years old, often defy their families and friends by carrying their child to term.

In the Archdiocese of Newark, places like Several Sources Shelters in Ramsey ([www.severalsources.net](http://www.severalsources.net)) and Good Counsel Homes in Hoboken ([www.goodcounselhomes.org](http://www.goodcounselhomes.org)) provide a safe haven for the young mothers who, in making the brave decision, are unsure what the future holds for them and their child.

Founded by Kathy DiFiore nearly 30 years ago, Several Sources has four residential shelters in the state, including two in Ramsey and one in Washington Township, for pregnant women in crisis. There is also a 24-hour national hotline to assist these women. A faithful Catholic, DiFiore's primary goal at the shelter is to have the women keep their child.

"Our number-one goal is [for the women] not to abort their babies. A majority of those that come to the shelter are contemplating abortion because of their parents and loved ones," she explained.

In the shelters, there are up to three mothers with their children and staff, including house mothers. The average person in the shelter is 16 to 19 years old. The women stay at the shelter for up to a year, although some stay longer. They go to local high schools to complete their education, and receive training on how to care for their child. This year, through the generosity of Several Sources donors, three young mothers graduated college.

"The focus is always on the mother and child relationship," DiFiore said.

Women-in-crisis pregnancies are a worldwide epidemic. Several Sources shelters are currently filled with women and there are four on the waiting list. DiFiore



Submitted photo  
Kathy DiFiore, a member of Saint Paul Parish, Ramsey, and founder of the Several Sources Shelters, is surrounded by her many friends. DiFiore received the Supporting Our Aging Religious (SOAR) Mother Seton Award on Oct. 7, honoring her three decades of service. While many people of faith focus on debates concerning stem-cell research and Supreme Court verdicts, crisis shelters operate—literally and spiritually—on the front lines of fateful life decisions.

also counsels women online at [www.lifecall.org](http://www.lifecall.org), which reaches out to women as far as Australia and England. The hotline (800-NOABORT or 662-2678) receives thousands of calls from around the country.

DiFiore said the shelter has had a mother as young as 12 years old.

"The lives of these young women are so complex. Women who go against the tide and keep their baby become their baby's hero. They are willing to leave their family and go to a shelter. I can't help but admire them. They are changing the 'culture of death' into a culture of life and I want to help them have a better life," DiFiore explained.

The main concern of the young, expectant mothers at the shelter is embarrassment due to social stigma and the judgment of others. "The family is also embarrassed and feel ashamed," she said. "However, when the baby is born, the young woman's family usually reconciles. The older mothers (those over 18) are concerned with their education and are worried that they can't finish school."

Across the demographic, the young mothers face economic constraints as well as unsupportive boyfriends or husbands. "The young fathers usually do not want to have a child. I wish there were more young men who are responsible. The women also say 'I can't afford this baby now' or 'it isn't the right time.' I have been in this business for 28 years now and I have heard just about everything," DiFiore said.

Unconcerned with statistics, DiFiore says she works in her own "microcosm" and does not focus on demographic trends, but treats each woman as an individual. "I hate the word 'dysfunctional'. Every baby and mother is a child of God. The day I think about statistics and I put these young women in categories, then I should get out of the business; then I won't be doing it from my heart. I never want to be a bureaucrat in the pro-life movement. I want these young women to reach out to me as a friend," DiFiore emphasized.

Since she opened the shelter, DiFiore believes the title of "unwed mother" is less stigmatized and parents are open to being more compassionate. However, some parents are harsh with their daughters, forcing them out of their home. This negative reaction to unplanned pregnancy can be related, DiFiore surmises, to parents who have had abortions in the past.

"Some mothers are self-actualizing and, because they had an abortion, see no reason why their daughters can't go through with it," she said. "This mean-spiritedness is the mother confirming to herself that she did the right thing in her own life."

When the young women come to the shelter, it is an adjustment. There are no cell phones and the young women shop and cook for themselves while supervised. They also see weekly outside counselors to help "stabilize relationships" to help them cope with stressful, life-altering situations.



# The Catholic Advocate

Vol. 57, No. 21

November 26, 2008

## Shelters

Continued from page 3

Each residence forms a complex community, a family of women facing the same issues.

"The young women form a 'sorority' of life. There is a common bond. Each house has a different personality depending on who lives there. Each shelter is a whirling dervish, a smorgasbord of ethnicities. There is no way to keep up with it all," DiFiore said with a laugh.

After the women leave the shelter, some stay in touch, even though this is not a requirement of the program. During Mother's Day and Christmas, DiFiore receives letters and pictures of the mothers and the children they helped save. "We encourage them not to forget about us."

Good Counsel Homes shares the mission of Several Sources Shelters and is an advocate on behalf of single mothers and their children. Co-founded in 1985 by Father Benedict J. Groeschel, C.F.R., and Christopher Bell, more than 3,500 women and children have been helped by the organization.

Today, Good Counsel operates five homes in New York for young mothers and their children. Although there is no longer a shelter in Hoboken, mothers in need are given material goods such as food, diapers and clothing from the main office. The young women are also referred to their shelters in New York.

Good Counsel Homes offers a life-skills program that prepares the mothers for independent living and career development. Chris Bell, executive director, said 20 percent of the mothers in residence are from New Jersey and about half of the women already have a baby. Those women who are pregnant typically are at the end of their second trimester. The average mother in the shelter is 21 years old and many have not graduated from high school. Good Counsel Homes lets them continue their education to further their academic and employment goals.

Many of the women in the shelters have had at least one abortion. Bell said some did not know they had an option to go to a crisis pregnancy center. "They think of abortion as an 'unpardonable sin' and they cannot be forgiven. There are places to go for healing the emotional and spiritual scars."

Good Counsel Homes has a post-abortion counseling and referral program,

Lumina (1-877-586-4621) that helps to heal the painful scars. He said most of the women are at the shelter with an "atonement baby," as a way to atone for a previous abortion. Like Several Sources, the young women are allowed to stay at the shelter for a year, but some chose to stay longer.

*Women who go against the tide and keep their baby become their baby's hero. I can't help but admire them. They are changing the culture of death into a culture of life.'*

— Kathy DiFiore

The Holy Spirit is at work in all of the homes, Bell believes. "I take no credit for it," he said. "With God's help and prayer, we do the right thing. We can witness miracles everyday, whether it is a baby being born or a young mother studying for an exam. God is speaking with us all the time."

Bell cites an increasingly "decadent culture" for the numbers of unwed mothers in the country. Sexually transmitted diseases (STD) also have been on the rise since the inception of the organization. "A horrible, growing trend is the epidemic spread of STDs. About 80 percent of our young mothers have or were recently infected with at least one STD," Bell said.

Despite the many challenges, he believes that there are people fighting for the lives of young women and their children. "I believe that where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more. The strength of the faithful helps Good Counsel Homes continue."

Father Joseph Meagher, the director of the Archdiocese of Newark Respect Life Office, believes that crisis-preg-



Submitted photo

Maria, who came to the Several Sources Shelter at age 15, holds her six-month-old daughter, Lucia.

nancy shelters provide a great service to young women in need. Last year, Fr. Meagher spoke at a luncheon to benefit Birthright of Essex County ([www.birthright.org](http://www.birthright.org)), a non-profit crisis pregnancy center in Bloomfield (see *The Catholic Advocate*, Feb. 21, 2007). Birthright provides free, confidential community and social services such as maternity homes, pre-natal care programs and free baby clothes.

Crisis pregnancy homes give women the opportunity to choose life that they would not have otherwise, according to Fr. Meagher. "These homes offer choice in the midst of a great challenge these women face," he said. "Once a child is conceived, there is a whole new reality. The pregnancy shelters are a concrete expression that God is always with them. The baby becomes as it always is—a blessing."

Earlier this year, in his *Respect Life* column (see *The Catholic Advocate*, Jan. 9), Fr. Meagher decried the "holocaust" and toll of abortion: 48 million "legal" surgical abortions since 1973.