

## Ministry opens doors to troubled pregnant women

By Patricia Lefevere

Ramsey, NJ

You're pregnant, unmarried, a teenager. You're pregnant with an abusive spouse. You're pregnant, living without a man and already have children whom you can barely feed, clothe and shelter.

You've seen the bumper sticker: 1-800-No-Abort. You make the call. The person covering the 24-hour hotline assures you there is an alternative to aborting your baby. She tells you about Several Sources Foundation, which has been helping women just like you for 24 years. She asks which part of the country you're calling from and offers to send a list of shelters in your area.

You're not sure. You think you'll still opt for an abortion. Your mother/boyfriend/husband thinks this is the best solution. Still you're not sure. The person listening to your story asks your name and address. She wants to send you something.

The next day you receive a large packet from Several Sources in Ramsey, N.J., delivered by FedEx. In it are two videos — one about the organization's shelters for pregnant women and their babies, another titled "The Silent Scream," which graphically details the embryonic life of a fetus and what happens to it during an abortion. The packet also contains testimonials from women who have chosen not to abort.

That curious pink plastic object in the packet — you discover when you unwrap the paper around it — is a model of an 11- to 12-week-old "pre-born" with a card describing its size, weight and its capabilities at this stage of development.

Every month some 200 kits go out to women who have called the hotline or found Several Sources on its Web site. Though many of them may yet choose to have an abortion, others decide not to. Some will find a shelter in their locale. A few may come to one of the four maternity shelters in New Jersey run by Several Sources. Here they can stay during their pregnancy and up to a year after giving birth.

When Kathy DiFiore, founder of Several Sources Foundation, opened her home to a single pregnant woman in 1981, she had no idea she was starting a ministry that has now served some 500 women and their babies. Gazing over those years, DiFiore estimates the group has counseled more than 50,000 women and aided over 15,000 babies around the country and as far away as the Philippines.



Kathy DiFiore

When DiFiore was in her 30s, working as personnel director of a chemical firm and teaching religion in her local parish, St. Paul Church in Ramsey, she knew she also wanted to do "more with my life, something for God." DiFiore had just left an abusive marriage and was on her own.

She sought discernment by reciting the "Peace Prayer" of St. Francis. She also found herself reflecting on the 25th chapter of St. Matthew: I was hungry, thirsty, alone, naked, ill, in prison and you cared for me. It was the same passage that provided guidance to Francis when he was making a career move from rich man to helping the poor, she noted.

All roads of ministry seemed to lead to pregnant women. She found them most in need of food, clothing, shelter and support, and began to take them into her home. DiFiore's family didn't approve. Today, her family members are "my benefactors," she said.

Within three years, DiFiore was fined \$10,000 for violating a state law against running an illegal boarding home. The fine drew media attention and prompted State Sen. Gerald Cardinale to sponsor a bill exempting nonprofit groups from the legislation.

When the Senate looked unlikely to budge on the bill, DiFiore contacted Mother Teresa, who was in New York to accept an award at the United Nations. Mother Teresa's letter of support convinced lawmakers to reverse their stand. The fine was removed and Several Sources became legitimate.

The group added a second home in Ramsey in 1989 and another in 1994 in Mendham — gifts from benefactors. Msgr. Thomas McCarthy and parishioners of Our Lady of Good Counsel in nearby Washington Township offered their convent as a maternity shelter in 1990.

Residents at the four shelters don't just sit around and wait for labor pains to begin. Throughout their stay they participate in weekly workshops on parenting, education and setting five goals: spiritual, educational, financial, personal and family.

Some of the residents have been abandoned when their parents or partner learned they were pregnant. But once the baby is born, many families can't wait to invite their daughter back home, DiFiore said.

Several Sources personnel encourage the women to continue their education. Many attend local community colleges, take computer classes or learn skills for working in a medical office at a training facility nearby. In the shelters they follow rules and participate in daily prayers, discussion groups and scripture study.

"They get a structure in their lives where there's been none before," DiFiore said. "Lots of our women don't know how to make sound judgments."

A mainstay of not repeating behavior that may return them to a shelter or cause them to seek an abortion is the weekly workshop on chastity. DiFiore and her staff have run the workshop for 15 years and have also taken it to schools and youth groups. Girls, whether in school or pregnant in the shelter, learn about the Chastity Pledge — a promise to not have sex before marriage. If they decide to take the pledge, they are given a ring to wear, symbolic of their commitment.

"We don't preach and we don't use scare tactics," she said, but the girls do learn about sexually transmitted diseases and about "the heartbreak and risks" to their physical and mental health that could result from their behavior. They are taught how to resist temptation and encouraged to develop a value system that will keep them chaste. Boys also take the chastity classes and often the pledge. For the young women in the shelters, the chastity ring is given after their babies are born.

In 1997 Several Sources opened a daytime shelter for homeless women in Newark, N.J., known as "Ladies Rest." The shelter — comprising 20 rooms in the former convent of St. Patrick's Pro-Cathedral — offers a refuge to women who would otherwise be on the streets, as they must vacate the city's nighttime shelters by 7 a.m. Not only do the women find a safe house at Ladies Rest, they also receive clothing, financial aid for medicine, transportation to a job or help to obtain social services if they are unable to work.

## 12a MINISTRIES

Under a program lead by Charlotte Florentino, they are urged to become independent and self-sufficient. Florentino and her assistant offer spiritual support and guidance and involve the women in daily prayer and Bible study.

“We try to give a message of hope, assuring them that God loves them. We work to create a sisterhood of compassion,” Florentino said.

They count several success stories: Many women have been helped with temporary rental assistance. Last year Florentino took two women through the catechumenate program and saw them enter the church at Easter. She has helped to unite a mother and her 11-year-old daughter, who were separated because the mother had become suicidal while living with an abusive spouse.

Recently a Haitian woman whose husband had stolen all her documents found herself homeless. So did a woman with Alzheimer’s. A benefactor found the pair an apartment in Newark where the Haitian is “lovingly caring for the woman with Alzheimer’s.” Such matchmaking is the work of the Holy Spirit, DiFiore said.

DiFiore is looking to the Holy Spirit to guide her in keeping Several Sources afloat.

The organization gets its name from the several sources that maintain the foundation. The name “makes it easier for adolescents to approach us,” she said. When DiFiore lists the several sources, she includes the angels and saints along with benefactors, volunteers and the staff of 23, most of whom are full time.

“When I get to heaven — if I make it — I want to ask God to put up a wall and on it to display pictures that he thinks are most significant in our lives,” DiFiore said. “I want to see through God’s eyes what in my life’s work has been most important to God.”

**RELATED WEBSITES:**

[www.severalsourcesfd.org](http://www.severalsourcesfd.org)

[www.lifecall.org](http://www.lifecall.org)

[www.thechoicegame.com](http://www.thechoicegame.com)



Several Sources housemother Sara Moran with Manouchka Milien and her newborn daughter, Jeanay. Moran spent 26 hours at Milien’s side during her delivery.

## Real-life scenarios ground educational game

For 24 years Kathy DiFiore has been working with pregnant women who were only a telephone call, bus or car ride from an abortion. The Several Sources Foundation that she began in Ramsey, N.J., has, by her accounting, “saved” more than 15,000 babies.

Besides counseling girls as young as 13 and women as old as 43 to not have abortions, she has also listened to hundreds of stories of what caused these women to get pregnant when they didn’t expect to, didn’t want to or more likely didn’t know how to say no.

Six years ago when considering whether to open a fifth maternity shelter, DiFiore took a detour and decided to invest some of her resources in the prevention of unwanted pregnancies.

The result was “The Choice Game,” an interactive CD-ROM curriculum that deals with pregnancy, substance abuse, the media, peer pressure and communication skills.

The game won three National Telly Awards in 2004 for creativity in visual arts.

Several Sources received \$2.3 million from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to be used exclusively for creating the game. The grant stipulates the faith-based foundation can make no mention of abortion in the curriculum. Proceeds from the game cannot be used to fund any of the shelters or programs run by Several Sources and the game itself cannot be religiously based.

That part was not difficult, DiFiore told *NCR*. The game uses scenarios she has heard described by unwed teens for years. In the game, students enter real life situations where they are faced with tough temptations. Players also experience the possible outcomes of their choices and see how injudicious decisions can have devastating results. The game operates on psychologist Albert Bandura’s social learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of observing and modeling the behavior of others, DiFiore said.

Some 10,000 students in Newark’s public and Catholic high schools are using the game, and requests for it have come from schools and agencies in 12 other states. E-mails from users indicate the game treats “straight up” issues that confront teens every day, such as the threat of HIV/AIDS, ads that push costly name-brand clothing, and friends that invite them to drink, take drugs and have sex.

DiFiore has been asked to create a version dealing with violence and gangs, as well as a version in Spanish and one with a Christian viewpoint.

Although comprehensive sex education with emphasis on contraception and condoms is mandatory in New Jersey public schools, “The Choice Game” doesn’t mention “safe sex” or contraceptives.