

# THE RIDGEWOOD NEWS

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## Opening hearts, doors to young mothers

By Diana Oliviera  
Staff Writer

Maritza Christian was 21 years old when she found herself in a dire predicament: she was pregnant and homeless.

“I didn’t want to have a child of my own when I wasn’t ready,” recalled Christian. “My parents kicked me out and they didn’t want anything to do with me.”

She thought she had nowhere to turn and contemplated having an abortion. But soon she found solace in Several Sources Shelters in Ramsey, a safe haven for young, pregnant mothers that is devoted to the right-to-life movement.

Two years later, Christian and her son, Zamir, were on hand to witness Ridgewood High School students and First Presbyterian Church Nursery School team up to assist other young mothers and needy families. The collaboration resulted in a mock baby shower - the second consecutive year high school teacher Tina Gagliano and her Child Development students hosted this kind of event. Last Thursday’s philanthropic affair was a much bigger production this year, however.

“Sandy Schultz, who is in charge of First Presbyterian Church Nursery School, joined



MARION BROWN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

**Catie Keating reads a story to children during a mock baby shower last week at Ridgewood High School.**

in,” explained Gagliano, “And the parents from the nursery school as well as my students and staff members have donated to Several Sources.”

The donations consisted of gifts purchased off a wish list that the maternity shelter provided. Newborn baby essentials such as clothes, diapers, bottles and pacifiers were gathered on top of a large display table. The overflow of gifts and activity forced Gagliano to conduct the baby shower at the high school’s campus center, a vast change from the classroom setting the previous year. And though this event is mainly bred and organized by Gagliano’s Child Development classes, it was

further enhanced by the aid of all her Family and Consumer Sciences students.

“Child Development students planned all the activities,” said Gagliano, “But my Foods students helped with the preparation. They cooked up a menu that is geared toward preventing birth defects for pregnant women, so the menu is very healthy.”

The buffet consisted of mostly finger foods - chicken nuggets, pigs in a blanket, fruits and vegetables - for the children, but there was an array of health-conscious foods like pasta, sushi and pita bread targeted for expectant mothers.



MARION BROWN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

**Tina Gagliano and Kathy DiFiore speak to the attendees of last week's mock baby shower.**

The baby shower couldn't be complete without decorations. Decked out in baby blues and pinks, the campus centre was fashioned to the ongoing theme of the event. Gagliano's Interior Design students contributed a string of painted onesies, which were hung above the gift table, and a wishing well, which served as the table's centrepiece and carrier for smaller gifts. Streamers and other little accessories adorned the room throughout.

Stations containing age-appropriate lessons and activities were also set up. A partnership was forged with the nursery school in 2013 by

Ridgewood High School Principal Tom Gorman, in which Gagliano's Child Development classes walk over to the nearby nursery school and participate in a professional education setting. Gagliano used this baby shower event as an opportunity to apply the same idea.

"All my students prepared a thematic lesson plan because that's what they do in nursery schools," said Gagliano. "Everything's thematic, so it's repetitive. It increases cognitive development."

And while the toddlers were being entertained with crafts, puzzles and books, the high school students were seeing

their lesson plans work and reaping the rewards.

"I love working with kids," said Catie Keating, a junior and Child Development student. "I want to be a teacher, and many of us want to be teachers, and we really just wanted to have a hands-on approach in teaching the kids so they can learn what they're doing."

Despite the heavy planning, her desire to continue events like these was her desire to continue events like these was evident. "If it's for a good cause, then yes," said Keating. "It's fun and it's worth it."

The good cause was delighted to see the event well

put-together and appreciative of all the effort and care shown by the more than 50 participants.

Kathy DiFiore, founder and president of Several Sources Shelters, stressed the fact that none of the donations will go to waste.

“We have three shelters,” said DiFiore, who runs two houses in Ramsey and one in Washington Township. “plus, we help out people not just in the local area. If we get other things that we can help them with, then we send care packages just to help them get started.”

That is something DiFiore has done since 1981, when she took her first pregnant teenager into her own home. For 34 years, DiFiore has had women who are pregnant and/or homeless stay with her until typically a year after the baby is born, she said, or whenever the grandparents welcome their child and new grandchild back home. Christian now works at Several Sources’ “Our Gift of Hope” Sonogram Centre in Englewood,

educating women on the shelters and saving babies from termination in the process.

But helping young mothers like Christian stand on their feet wasn’t always smooth-sailing. In 1984, DiFiore was fined \$10,000 by the State of New Jersey for “running an illegal boarding house,” an act that garnered media attention. She sought out Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who graciously wrote a letter of support and convinced the state to revoke the penalty.

DiFiore’s work henceforth earned an invitation to the White House, where she was honoured by President Ronald Reagan. Her accomplishments are numerous, and they continue to get recognized. Director and screenwriter Ron Krauss approached DiFiore about making a movie based on her shelters. The Result - 2013’s “Gimme Shelter” starring Vanessa Hudgens and Rosario Dawson - was better than DiFiore could ask for.

“I never looked for publicity.” said DiFiore. “I was

concerned about twists in the movie, which you can’t control. But a third of the movie is filmed right at our shelter. All of the babies - 23 babies - are our babies. Four of the mothers are our mothers.

And when she went on the film’s promotional tour, she got to see the emotional impact it had on moviegoers.

“People would come out, grown men crying - it touched people.” she said.

The movie, along with DiFiore’s book “Gimme Love, Gimme Hope, Gimme Shelter: The True Inspiration Behind the Movie Gimme Shelter” is available on her organization’s website, [severalsources.net](http://severalsources.net) or Amazon. Galliano made the love and hope message an imperative throughout the baby shower event.

“A lot of love went into this,” she said. “Someone once told me - and I tell my students this - that if you have to do something, do it from the heart or don’t do it at all.”

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