

Unwed mothers are accepted and helped at Marillac Hall

By YVONNE B. DEVLIN

The image of the home for unwed mothers is changing from one of repression and guilt to one of acceptance and help, says Gail Carter, a social worker at Marillac Hall in Farmington Hills.

"We've changed a lot in the past five years to accommodate the changes in society," she says.

Even with abortion, there are still young girls getting pregnant, she says.

"The girls that come here haven't told their parents that they were pregnant until it was too late to have an abortion."

Marillac Hall deals with girls of all ages but most are in their early to late teens, says Ms. Carter.

"A lot of the girls who come here know about birth control but they still wanted to get pregnant," she says.

The reasons vary but they may look at having a baby as a way to get school or maybe they're hoping that the parents will sign for them to marry, she says.

"I knew about birth control but I didn't use it," says a 17-year-old, nine months pregnant, Marillac resident.

"I didn't think I could get on the pill and everything else seemed too risky so we didn't use anything," she says.

The age of the girls coming into the hall is going down drastically, according to Ms. Carter.

"We now have a completely accredited school program that covers grades 6-12."

"Teachers were tutoring sixth graders here last year."

SOME OF THE GIRLS DON'T WANT to stay in public schools after they discover that they're pregnant, says Ms. Carter. Many may want to have their baby but not face their peers.

"There is a difference in the way a school may react to a pregnancy. Some take it lightly—like a broken leg—and some take it so bad that the girls don't want to remain," says Ms. Carter.

"Even though the law says that the girl can remain in school, some girls are being 'counseled' out. The school may feel liable if the girl is injured," she says.

Marillac does offer a day program for students if they still want to live at home, she says.

"I went to Pontiac Catholic High School and nobody said anything about my pregnancy," says the pregnant girl. There were three other pregnant girls in her class.

At school, the girl's sister who is 19 was asked a lot of questions and she got mad because she didn't think it was anybody's business.

"The first thing she said to me was 'Why can't it be me?' Then I can get married," she says.

More of the girlfriends are vating the girl, says Ms. Carter. With the parents' consent, the girls can still go out with their boyfriends.

"Some of these girls are planning marriages but this is for the future because they're too young now."

"We're still going together and plan on getting married in September," says the girl. The decision to keep the baby was made primarily on the assumption that they were getting married.

"A part of us will want and be a part of us when we marry," she says.

Many of the girls at Marillac have had an ongoing exclusive relationship with a fellow for a long time, according to Ms. Carter.

"They've been dating a guy for as long as three years and this is longer than some adults have been engaged."

Society has finally accepted the boyfriend and the term that is now used is "single parent" instead of "unwed," she says.

"The saying that prostitutes don't get pregnant is true," comments Ms. Carter. The pregnant resident and her boyfriend went together for one-and-a-half years before she got pregnant.

Some of the girls who come to Marillac are interested in co-fidelity and don't

want their friends to know, says Ms. Carter. There is also medical care and prenatal classes which the girls are required to attend.

"Every girl must have a pre-pregnancy visit before they come here to live, she says. We explain the program and answer questions. The girls are free to leave anytime, this isn't a lock-up."

MANY OF THE GIRLS at Marillac decide to keep their babies and Ms. Carter sees this as a trend started by the movie stars.

"We're not an adoption agency, we're neutral—not baby snatchers. Our only interest is in each girl making her own decision," she says.

"Here, there are no unwanted babies. There is a difference between wanting a baby and deciding to keep it," she says.

When a girl decides to give up the baby for adoption, she is not a bad mother but just thoughtful, says Ms. Carter.

Some girls aren't ready for full-time motherhood and they know it.

Parents may put pressure on the girl to keep the baby but Marillac helps the decision be strictly with the girl so that she can live with it, says Ms. Carter.

"Ten years ago this place was always filled (38 girls is the capacity) and there was a waiting list. Currently there are vacancies and no waiting list," she says.

But the need for a place like Marillac still exists as they average about 25-30 girls there at one time, she says.

"I came to Marillac because of the classes and having my baby here is cheaper. My boyfriend is paying for it through Catholic Social Services," says the girl.

"I like it here, there are few restrictions and it's a lot better than staying home."

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Pregnancy does not automatically spell out the end of the world if one is young and unwed, says Kay Finland, director of Birthright Inc. Alternatives exist which can help the woman have the baby and feel good about the decision.

"We never refer for an abortion. We're 100 per cent pro-life," she says.

Birthright, a non-profit, non-staffed organization, exists primarily to offer information and services to those who decide to keep the child, says Ms. Finland.

"Sometimes girls come in just wanting someone to talk to," she says.

"A 16-year-old girl will come in and tell me, 'My parents are going to kill me.' The advice we give them is to tell their mothers first and then let them handle it," she says.

Birthright offers free pregnancy testing and Ms. Finland suggests that the girl wait 41 days after the missed period so the test can be 90 per cent accurate.

"We never tell the girl if she is pregnant, just if the test is positive or negative," says Ms. Finland. Five registered nurses do the actual testing.

"AFTER THE TEST RESULTS we usually recommend they go to a doctor. If they don't have a doctor then we refer them to a pre-life doctor," she says.

If a test is positive the girl is asked to tell her parents, she says. Most of the parents will attack by the girl but sometimes they don't.

The age of the girls who come in to use Birthright services vary but they predominate in the mid to late teens, according to Ms. Finland.

"If a girl is kicked out of her parents' home and has nowhere to go we also provide housing. But we can't help minors because these homes aren't licensed."

Volunteers from Birthright will go with the 15-year-old to help straighten things out with her parents, but if the situation is deemed hopeless the minor is turned over to a social agency, she says.

"The homes that are provided for the unwed mother are usually owned by young married couples who may have a few children of their own," she says.

"The woman lives there for the duration of her pregnancy and will have her own room. Most homes pay her a small amount of money in exchange for light housework or babysitting."

In some of the homes they'll even take the girl for her examination and finally to the hospital for delivery, says Ms. Finland.

When an emergency occurs and a girl is put out on the street late at night, a volunteer will take her over to the Salvation Army in Detroit for temporary relief, according to Ms. Finland.

The Oakland County Family and Child Services also have 'instant' homes where a family will take a girl in for three or four nights," she says.

The girls don't really want to go to a home for unwed mothers, she says.

"Usually after the initial shock the parents will keep the girl at home."

"The kids who come in here are really good but this, (the pregnancy) just happened to them. Sometimes if you look into the girl's background there are family problems—perhaps a broken marriage or an alcoholic father."

Birthright does not provide the girls with birth control information, but instead tells the girl to talk with her family doctor, according to Ms. Finland. "Birth control is not our purpose."

"The boyfriend may have more rights to the baby but we've found that in most cases the boyfriend isn't in the picture anymore," she says.

THERE IS A TREND to keep the baby and it's not because of the long list of

alternatives, says Ms. Finland. There just aren't that many babies around anymore, she comments.

"I hate to see it happening but a lot of the girls are keeping the babies so they can get on A.D.C.," she says. Some can qualify for their own apartments on A.D.C. and this is spread along in their peer groups.

One way a girl may see to get out of a bad situation at home is to get pregnant, she says. Another reason they may give to keep the baby is "because it's mine" and they need something to love.

The wise mature woman knows that it's not going to be that cute little baby forever," she says.

"It's still very difficult for a young girl to raise a baby but we don't tell them this," she says.

"We're not here to judge, just to help them."

Statistics show that more and more girls are having abortions and Ms. Finland agrees that Birthright does lose a few women to abortion. "Big I still say that

their minds were made up before they ever came here."

Girls in their second pregnancy will come to Birthright after they've aborted the first knowing that they'll never go through another abortion, says Ms. Finland. "Some girls won't even talk about it."

The one part that makes Birthright worthwhile is when the girl brings the baby back, according to Ms. Finland.

"We say that we now have another grandchild."



Paths in destruction

A shovel-full of debris is cleared from the doorway of an abandoned home which was gutted by fire Thursday. The confetti-like debris blocked the path of firefighters. (Staff photo by Craig Newman)



Balloonist's spirit still riding high

Karl Thomas' trans-Atlantic balloon flight may not have proceeded as planned, but that hasn't stopped him from flying.

Thomas' return to the Troy area was delayed slightly while the 27-year-old adventurer stayed in Holland—so fly balloons.

"He said he can't wait to get up again," said Wally Clayton, a crew member, after talking to Thomas in Rotterdam Friday.

Thomas, who spent 3 1/2 days floating in a life raft in the ocean after his balloon went down, is expected to arrive home early this week. But his plans are "vague," added Clayton.

Thomas received a hero's welcome in Holland and was invited to spend the weekend in a country estate.

After his arrival in Holland, Thomas was thrilled listeners with his account of how he was forced to bail out of his balloon, the "Spirit of '76," after being caught in a storm.

Thomas suffered cuts and three fractured ribs in a 200-foot fall from the balloon.

Although he hasn't completely ruled out a future attempt to cross the Atlantic, some of Thomas' crewmembers say a second attempt is unlikely.



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