

BELLA HOUSE

A place for expecting, single mothers to call home

By Cathy Harasta
The Texas Catholic

PLANO—In a quiet, shady cul-de-sac, a pretty house has been extending its welcome mat to expectant single mothers with nowhere to turn since last November.

Here, at the Bella House, they find not only comforting mentors but peace in their pregnancies and the skills to take on life eventually beyond the cozy home, where pastel-patterned quilts drape rocking chairs and house rules provide structure and security.

Katie Lunday, 29, played with her four-month-old son, Patrick, in the front parlor on a recent afternoon as the Bella House's organizers took turns crooning to the agreeable little boy.

"A lot of us have the same back story," said Lunday, who arrived at the Bella House in February. "My relationship was just really horrible. I had nowhere to go. In this house, God's love is so evident and all around me that it has re-directed me. When I came here, I wanted healing and change.

"The most important thing is the love."

Estelle Bouley, the founder and executive director of The Bella House, said that the ministry accommodates four expectant or new mothers at a time. Moms and their babies can stay until the babies are 6 months old.

"The Bella House became a mission out of the work done at



JENNA TETER/The Texas Catholic

Shadarian Johnson, at left, Toni Battle, middle, and Katie Lunday play with Lunday's newborn son Patrick at the Bella House on a rainy afternoon in Plano.

Birth Choice," Bouley said of the crisis pregnancy center where she previously served. "It was pitiful that so little was available for women with no place to go. There are shelters, but they don't cater to pregnant moms."

After researching concepts and models for the ministry, Bouley said that the Bella House, a non-

profit corporation, combined the best ideas.

"It's a community—a living community," said Lucille Payne, the housemother whose bedroom door often receives a wee-hours knock when one of the residents can't sleep and wants a few encouraging words. "If there are problems, we talk about them and

we solve them.

"They're so sweet and kind to each other. If one of the expectant moms has something taking her out of the house, the others say, 'We'll do her chores.'"

Counseling and on-site classes in parenting, life skills and financial planning help the women, most of whom are in their early-

to-mid 20s, to prepare for self-sufficiency. Most are in school and have part-time jobs nearby.

Bouley said that the Bella House has stayed full. Expectant mothers are referred by charitable agencies and others in the community, she said.

"I've had two moms say that they want to pursue a degree in counseling so that they can open a Bella House," Bouley said. "You know how the Lord works. People have been extremely generous."

Rose Lorenz, board president of the Bella House, said that the staff and merciful donations, including the house's furniture, have provided a nurturing environment for the journey into motherhood.

"It's homey," said Lorenz, who helped contractors renovate the house and installed much of the kitchen backsplash herself. "The Bella House was four years in the making."

Each Sunday evening, a visitor—perhaps a relative or family friend of one of the residents—brings dinner, which is followed by a prayer service.

"Lucille and Estelle are very Godly," said Lunday, who is taking college courses online with the goal of acquiring a counseling degree. "They've changed my life in so many ways. I love and trust them.

"When Patrick and I move out, we'll be back, bringing Sunday dinner to the Bella House."