

Family of Ellenville

by Lisa Cavanaugh

Family of Ellenville is a community of people committed to helping people to help themselves. It is one of Family of Woodstock, Inc.'s many programs located throughout Ulster County and beyond, assisting people through a broad spectrum of programs. Although the scope of the agency has greatly increased over time, the intent remains to provide the support and the resources people need in order to cope with their own issues. We cannot solve problems for people but we try to give them support and information that can help them discover for themselves what they really want and how to get it.

Family of Ellenville has been located at **14 Church Street** for about 23 years. It was first located in the **WCTU Building in Liberty Square** in 1976, moved to a small space at 57½ Center Street, then in 1979 moved over to 130-132 Canal Street next to the old *Balotin's Pharmacy*, now a parking lot. A fire caused the move to the current location, which was purchased from Brenda and Sid Reiss with desks included – still the desks in use in the upstairs offices – and which are so heavy, and the stairs so steep, we may be tempted to leave them behind when next we move. In 1998, *Bio-Energy Systems* donated their building at **221 Canal Street**, a *D&H Canal*-era building, to *Family*, which will become *Family of Ellenville's* new site in the near future, when renovations are completed.

Family of Ellenville houses the southwestern part of Family of Woodstock's 24-hour crisis hotline, which has been answered continuously, day and night, for 33 years. Additionally, we offer individual counseling, information, referrals, case management, and the basic necessities of life. We have always operated primarily through volunteer workers, averaging 415 hours per month. The primary services we provide are: giving respect and space for expression and reflection, and giving information tailored to the specifics of the situation or issue.

We currently have 22 volunteers working weekly shifts on the hotline, in the free store, or with donations. The *UARC Dayhab* program assists us with food deliveries and bread pickups. We also have countless individuals who regularly donate clothing, food, and funds.

Family of Woodstock is committed to expanding its services to the Ellenville area and has placed representatives from the Child Care Council of Ulster County, Adult Case Management Services, and Domestic Violence Non-Residential Services at *Family of Ellenville*. When we move to our larger building at **221 Canal Street**, Family's Adolescent Services will also have office and group space in our building. This will complement Family's adolescent residential program, *Midway*, which is located at **3 Warren Street**. The new building will offer a large meeting space/community room, offering private space for daytime meetings. It will also put *Family of Ellenville* all on one floor (the second floor, accessed by street level at the Towpath) which will mean no more lugging of cases of food from the cellar or storage items from the attic! The first floor of **221 Canal Street** is already occupied by our tenant, *Canal Lodge Adult Care Center* which has been in operation since January 2002.


Enter our current building and you find a space somewhat to very disorderly (much of which we have addressed by design in our new space). You see boxes of

bread donated by *Shoprite* or *Stewart's*. A bookcase of books to choose and take home. Listing of jobs and rentals from the newspaper, Internet, government, and just observation of posted signs. A file of job applications. Boxes of assorted donations: dishes, knickknacks, and toys. Hot coffee and tea with sweet goods to go with it. People waiting their turn to look at clothing. Someone donating a vacuum cleaner or TV or playpen. People socializing. Virtually everything in use is donated, recycled.

In the hotline room, the staff who sit behind the desk are people with an immense variety of experiences themselves. They are ready to assist whomever calls or walks in next, not knowing what the need or crisis will be. In the clothing room, the free store staff patiently sort through many 30-gallon size bags of clothing a day, folding and hanging them up, hearing stories of children needing sneakers, people from warmer places needing coats, people needing clothes for a job interview or for a funeral. Upstairs, counseling and case management services are offered by appointment. All services are free of charge. 4000 calls are answered and 8000 walk-ins served each year, representing about 500 households, 1500 individuals.

We had a major change in administration this spring. Gladys Rubinstein worked with *Family of Ellenville* for almost 20 years, beginning as an UCCC student, then Community Education coordinator, Hotline coordinator, and finally, Assistant Director. She has passed the baton to Dianne Hart of Napanoch, who will begin the position of Program Manager on April 28.

Volunteers are always needed, especially on the hotline, which is one 4-hour shift per week, plus staff meeting. The 40-hour volunteer training is required, and includes crisis intervention and listening skills, and information on issues frequently encountered here, such as substance abuse, family violence, psychiatric issues, suicide, HIV/AIDS, and financial emergencies. The training itself is described by everyone who completes it as a growth experience as well as useful in all areas of their lives. An early summer training is in the works. Also needed are clerical and grounds help, and volunteers who like to organize and fundraise.

Family of Ellenville is a United Way agency and also a contract agency of many government agencies at all levels. Despite this smorgasbord of funding sources, we operate with a deficit and must also fundraise. We accept monetary donations at all times, which may be designated for a specific purpose. Our upcoming local fundraiser is a Penny Social on **May 3** at the **Norbury Hall**. Our current agency-wide fundraiser is the Big Money Raffle, with \$20,000 as the top prize. There is an early-bird drawing on May 3 and the major drawing on June 28. For information on our fundraisers, on volunteering, on our services, or to receive our agency-wide newsletter, we may be reached at our hotline number: **647-2443**, or by email at **FOE430@warwick.net**. 

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