

Family Eldercare Begins Summer Fan Drive

By Stacey Frank

Family Eldercare was established in 1982 by a gerontologist and a psychologist who saw the need for a source of information and support for families caring for aging relatives. They began by providing a support group called *As Parents Grow Older*, a four-week educational support group for family caregivers. The organization then identified a need for guardianship services for elders without family who were incapacitated in Travis County and, with the support of the Travis County Probate Court, established the Guardianship Program. Kendra Peters, the Director of Consultation and Service Coordination, met with me to discuss the programs and needs of Family Eldercare. Family Eldercare serves older adults, people with disabilities and the people that care for them. Their programs reflect the importance of providing support to caregivers and supporting elders and people with disabilities to live independently in the community, while reducing the incidence of abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Each program that Family Eldercare provides is either designed to prevent premature institutionalization, stabilize former homeless clients, or prevent homelessness. One of their most popular programs is called *Summer Fan Drive*. In 2003, this program distributed over 5,000 fans through approximately 24 community agencies to low-income elderly, people with disabilities, and families with young children. Ms. Peters said that many people would be surprised to find out that there are a number of people that live in Austin without air conditioning or even fans. This event kicked off on June 1. In order to distribute these fans, volunteers from all over Travis County deliver the fans and answer phones at the Family Eldercare office that is located at 2210 Hancock Drive. To volunteer or request a fan, call the Family Eldercare Summer Fan Drive Hotline at 512-459-4FAN.



Another program offered is called *Bill Payer/Money Management Services*. The idea of this program is to prevent financial exploitation and neglect of elders and people with disabilities by providing assistance with bill paying and budgeting. Ms. Peters discussed the importance of volunteers for this program because Family Eldercare matches volunteers with the clients to provide monthly assistance with bill paying. This program is provided in collaboration with AARP. This program also provides *Representative Payee Services*. This service provides an additional level of supervision, in that Family Eldercare becomes the Representative Payee through the Social Security Administration for clients who have been assessed as unable to manage their funds. Volunteers are also matched with these clients, assisting these folks in remaining independent in the community and preventing exploitation.

In-Home Care and Respite Services is another program that provides support to seniors living at home and to their caregivers. It offers assistance with personal care and homemaker services, as well as offering respite care for exhausted caregivers of homebound elders and people with disabilities. Before it became its own program within Family Eldercare, it was originally its own nonprofit organization in 1984 by a caregiver who had cared for her mother and found help to be too expensive for her to afford. After her mother died, she organized her friends and created *Senior Sitters Service*. Several years later, the small organization was at risk of losing its United Way funding. Family

Eldercare agreed that this program needed to be continued and took it on as another one of its programs. This program is the only in-home care provider that operates on a sliding fee scale, allowing seniors who meet certain asset qualifications a lower hourly rate based on their monthly income.

Eldercare Consultation and Service Coordination is an additional program that works on a sliding fee scale. It provides Consultation to family members regarding eldercare services and benefits to elders and their families. They work with families to give guidance and also to figure out a viable care plan for the family member. They also provide Service Coordination on-site at senior housing developments, including Heatherwilde Retirement Community in Pflugerville and The Lodge at Merriltown. For those seniors that are living independently in these properties, Family Eldercare provides referrals and support.

Elder Shelter is a transitional housing program for people 62 years or older or for those that are over 55 with a disability. It provides temporary housing for low-income elders who are facing a house crisis or who are in an abusive situation. Family Eldercare provides case management to ensure clients achieve permanent and affordable housing. The shelter has 8 beds total, 4 for men and 4 for women. There is no staff present at the shelter, and if the client has a mental illness, they require them to be compliant with their medication.

Family Eldercare is now in the process and near completion of a 54-unit shelter called *Lyons Garden*. It is located in East Austin across from *Rosewood Zaragosa Health Clinic*. Ms. Peters states that this is truly affordable senior housing and the rent is no more than 30% of their income. This project will include collaborative agreements with community organizations to provide a supportive community and service coordination.

Ms. Peters described the ongoing need for volunteers for all of Family Eldercare's programs. Volunteers are needed for the Guardianship Program and for the Bill Payer/Representative Payee program. She stated that it is a great way to become personally involved in someone's life. There is also always a demand for mature in-home care workers, which is a paid position. Training is provided for all volunteers as well as in-home care workers. Family Eldercare staff supervises volunteers. If anyone is able to put forth their time for any of these programs, please contact Pamela Kinney, Family Eldercare's Volunteer Coordinator at 483-3569.