

# Catholic Family Center's Elder Line helps create 'connections'

## Telephone service fulfills seniors' information needs

By Lee Strong  
Senior staff writer

ROCHESTER — Carrying on a conversation with Diane Davison-Jannarone can sometimes be difficult.

She frequently has to stop to answer the phone.

But Davison-Jannarone is not simply answering calls from friends.

As director of Elder Line, she is on call from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Monday through Friday, to answer questions about services for seniors or their caregivers.

On one recent morning, for example, those calls involved questions about Medicare, senior housing and senior centers.

But one call that began as a simple request for information about where to obtain legal services turned into a 15-minute listening session as Davison-Jannarone asked several follow-up questions.

The caller was given words of comfort and support — and also a list of agencies that provide counseling, support and shelter for abused and battered women.

"Sometimes, I hear something in their words that's deeper, and I probe to make sure that they are safe," Davison-Jannarone said as she hung up the phone and sighed. "I have to listen underneath the lines."

"When I started here," she added, "I couldn't believe this is happening to the elderly."

But Davison-Jannarone has learned a great deal in the 16 months she has directed Elder Line, a Catholic Family Center program operating out of the Monroe County Office for the Aging, 375 Westfall Road.

The phone line was established in May of 1989 to provide seniors help with obtaining information on housing, financial assistance, counseling, legal advice and transportation in Monroe County, Davison-Jannarone



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor

As director of Elder Line, Diane Davison-Jannarone provides senior citizens with information on referral services. Elder Line is a program of Catholic Family Center and operates out of the Monroe County Office for the Aging.

noted. As part of her job, she has organized files and a large binder stuffed with phone numbers, newspaper articles and contacts.

She cautioned that Elder Line is not intended to provide the services themselves. The program is merely intended to tell people where to get assistance.

Davison-Jannarone acknowledged, however, that it is sometimes difficult to avoid becoming involved emotionally with callers.

"You go home and maybe you don't carry the specific problem, but you carry the tenor of it with you," she said.

Davison-Jannarone began learning about services for the elderly long before becoming the voice on one end of the Elder Line.

After her father suffered a stroke in January, 1982, she visited him in the hospital on a daily basis. She noted that her father was fortunate in that he did not suffer serious problems from the stroke and was soon able to return home. Her mother was able to provide support for him as well. Yet, because his speech was impaired to a large degree, her mother sometimes needed to get away for short respite breaks.

Over the next several years, however, both her father and mother suffered a series of illnesses, forcing Davison-Jannarone to learn more about what was available for seniors — and what was not.

"I was a basket case trying to care for them," she noted, adding that at the same time she was also working and trying to raise her own daughter.

Those experiences led Davison-Jannarone to create C.A.R.E.S — Caregivers for Aging Relatives for Education and Support — a support group for people facing situations similar to hers.

"Caregivers are usually in worse physical shape than care receivers," she said. Caregivers often need respite from the demands of caring for an elderly relative, she said. And in a growing number of cases, caregivers are themselves elderly, she added.

Indeed, she observed, approximately a quarter of the 15-20 daily calls made to Elder Line are from caregivers looking for help. The number of calls tends to increase during the holiday season, as relatives return home and discover that the needs of elderly family members have increased. She noted that in months such as January, she can receive as many as 55 calls per day.

Services for seniors have increased in recent years, Davison-Jannarone said, but it is difficult for people to be aware of these services — or what these services can and can't do.

Davison-Jannarone is there to help fill that information gap.

EDITORS' NOTE: The number for Monroe County's Elder Line is 716/274-8181.

### County agencies offer aid

Elder Line offers information for Monroe County seniors. The following is a list of informational lines for seniors in the Rochester diocese's 11 other counties:

- Cayuga — 315/253-1226
- Chemung — 607/737-5520
- Livingston — 716/243-7520
- Ontario — 716/396-4040
- Schuyler — 607/535-7100
- Seneca — 315/539-5655
- Steuben — 607/776-7813
- Tioga — 607/687-4120
- Tompkins — 607/277-0148
- Wayne — 315/946-5624
- Yates — 315/536-2368



Davison-Jannarone's primary reference is a binder she has filled with phone numbers and contacts.

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