

Ellen Brown and the Free Clinic

By Cornelia Perkins Zinsser '52

Ellen Apperson Brown '72 is the spearhead of a new and exciting health care project. Just as members of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Lynchburg, Virginia became interested in the idea of sponsoring a free clinic, Ellen was ready to make a switch in her life and she describes herself as "grabbing the reins of the steering committee," which had been formed by St. Paul's to determine the possible need for such a service in the city. She felt that her skills acquired in the development office at Lynchburg's Virginia Episcopal School (where she also taught German with her husband, Kirk) were appropriate to the task of launching the clinic. In June, 1987, the steering committee formed into a Board of Directors and promptly elected Ellen president. With what seems phenomenal speed, the Board opened the Free Clinic of Central Virginia, Inc., on September 15. Those must have been three busy months! A paid executive director and an all-volunteer staff (both professionals and non-professionals) were in place, including a cadre of 50 doctors lined up over the summer. These dedicated people, who give freely of their time, offer medical services to 20 to 25 patients each Tuesday and Thursday night from 5:30 to 9:30.



On a given night there are two physicians, three or four nurses, a laboratory technician, a registered dietician, a mental health counselor, four to six nonprofessional volunteers and the executive director on duty. In February, 1988, dental services were added to the clinic's program. There are also a number of physicians and dentists who schedule free office visits for patients needing more extensive care than can be given at the Clinic.

The Free Clinic provides health care for those who do not qualify for government-sponsored entitlement programs or do not have the financial resources to pay for medical care. These people – the working poor, the elderly on fixed incomes, one-parent families, seasonal workers and people who have suffered financial disasters – fall through the “social safety net.” The Free Clinic has been established for them; Ellen says that the mission of the clinic is to provide services which will keep patients out of hospital emergency rooms, on the job, and off the Welfare rolls. There are no patient fees.

Under Ellen’s leadership the Free Clinic hopes to become a member agency in the United Way in 1989. The Clinic’s finance committee has been successful in obtaining strong support from individuals, local churches, the local business community and United Way and is preparing for an individual direct mail campaign. Pharmaceutical companies have donated over \$12,000 in medications. The Clinic has received additional assistance from both Lynchburg General and Virginia Baptist Hospitals, which are contributing laboratory services free of charge for Clinic patients.

Although located in downtown Lynchburg behind the Westminster Presbyterian Church, in the basement of the church’s education building, the program reaches out into the counties of Amherst, Bedford and Campbell through contacts established with a number of agencies by

the director, hence “Central Virginia” in the Clinic’s title.

Ellen sums up the satisfaction which she draws from her work with the Clinic by saying that now she knows that you really can make a difference in people’s lives – and she is rewarded by that knowledge!



Ellen looks on as Nurse Linda Crowder checks blood pressure.

Ellen Brown majored in music at Sweet Briar, studied in Vienna following her graduation and has since studied voice with Professor Allen Huszti. Soloist in the St. Pauls’ Episcopal Church choir, she also has presented many concerts in the Lynchburg area. She sang at President Nenah Fry’s inauguration in April, 1985. A past president of the Lynchburg Alumnae Club, she is the daughter of Katharine Hill Apperson ’40. Ellen and husband Kirk have two children, Kate, seven and David, five.

