

## Help seekers inundate new Hope center

BY HALLIE WOODS • HALLIEWOODS @COLORADOAN.COM • MARCH 19, 2009

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Just two weeks after it opened its doors, the Sister Mary Alice Murphy Center for Hope has seen a flood of people seeking its services.

The homelessness resource center at 242 Conifer St. estimates it has served 40 people each day and has provided assistance for 150 families and individuals since it opened March 2.

"We figured that it was going to take a couple of months to get up to this level of people we have been serving, but the very first day, we had people lined up 45 minutes before we opened because there is such a huge need for these types of services," said Zach Penland, program supervisor for the day center.

The center, open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, provides a number of resources to help those who are homeless or on the verge of being homeless get back on their feet.

Resources include housing assistance, laundry services, showers, storage, homeless gear, HIV and Hepatitis C testing, mental health and substances abuse services, and the women's resource center.

The center provides snacks and some access to food but does not prepare food as some of the shelters in town do.

Marcelina Rodriguez and Justin McBride have used the center for a number of services, including looking for a new apartment.

The pair moved from Denver to be closer to family after the restaurant Rodriguez worked at shut down and put her out of work.

"It's just hard because of our income," Rodriguez said, peering over McBride's shoulder as he searched for apartments on Craigslist. "All of them want so much for the deposit."

Staying next door at the El Palomino Motel, the couple walks over to the center each day to receive help with emergency food stamps, getting new identification and apartment hunting.

The United Way of Larimer County spearheaded construction of the 10,000-square-foot, \$2.5 million resource center. It was named for Sister Mary Alice Murphy, a longtime advocate for the homeless in Fort Collins who helped create the city's first soup kitchen and homeless shelter.

Penland said the center, which had been planned for some time, opened just in the nick of time as the economy took a turn for the worse.

"The majority of the people we've been serving are people that are either newly homeless or we have been fortunate enough to serve (those who) are not yet homeless," he said. "We are in the middle of this whole situation, and there are definitely a huge number of people needing these services."



Barbara McMillen and granddaughter, Anastasia Crow, 3, snuggle Wednesday at the Sister Mary Alice Murphy Center for Hope, 242 Conifer St. The pair and the girl's mother are homeless and are receiving support at the new center. McMillen said she wanted to 'get as many resources as we can to get going again.' (Rich Abrahamson/The Coloradoan)