

New Fort Collins homeless day shelter, counseling center opens Monday

BY TREVOR HUGHES • TREVORHUGHES@COLORADOAN.COM • FEBRUARY 26, 2009

Workers are putting the finishing touches on a new \$2.5 million day shelter and counseling center that aims to help Fort Collins and Larimer County residents find and keep homes and jobs.

The Sister Mary Alice Center for Hope brings together a variety of existing services provided in Larimer County, from counseling to employment and housing assistance, and parenting services. The idea is to better connect homeless men, women and families with the services they need to get them back on their feet, said center program director Zachary Penland.

"Nobody likes the fact that there's a bunch of homeless people hanging around Library Park every day," Penland said. "It's definitely not that easy to go out and get a job."

According to experts, many of the chronically homeless have underlying mental illnesses, which leads to alcohol or substance abuse, which makes it hard to hold down a job or pay for an apartment. The center is at 242 Conifer St.

"If you don't have an address and a phone number, you won't get that job. And without that job, you can't get that apartment," Penland said today during a break from preparations. "And if you haven't been able to have a shower for a week..."

Sister Mary Alice Murphy is a longtime advocate for the homeless in Fort Collins, helping found the city's first soup kitchen and homeless shelter. She remains active in the community, recently helping recruit volunteers for a temporary homeless day shelter in Old Town.

United Way of Larimer County spearheaded construction of the 10,000-square-foot center, which officially opens on Monday under the management of the Larimer County Center for Mental Health.



Jesse Martens and Delmus Garber install fence posts outside the nearly completed Sister Mary Alice Center for Hope in Fort Collins. The fence will enclose a childrens' play area. (Coloradoan/Trevor Hughes)