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Satellite health center opens at HOPE community

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Joseph Christopher is uninsured, homeless and in need of medical care.

Christopher, 37, has been living at HOPE Community, a transitional housing facility for homeless men, women and families, for the past three months. He has Type 1 diabetes and is wheelchair-bound after an accident last year. Without transportation, he's struggled to get to the Lincoln Neighborhood Service Center in Frenchtown for free health services.

So, Monday's opening of the Kay Freeman Health Center is going to make life a little easier for Christopher, as well the other 400 homeless people living at HOPE Community each year.

The center is the vision of Freeman, former Big Bend Homeless Coalition executive director who served from 2002 until her death in 2008.

"If Kay was here today she would excitedly say 'we did it,' " Big Bend Homeless Coalition board president Ron Garrison said. "This is an integral part of the continuum of care of the homeless and what was missing was health care and now we have it."

The health center, a 1,400-square-foot portable on the grounds, is a satellite office of the Bond Community Health Center and was made possible by federal stimulus money under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

U.S. Rep. Allen Boyd, D-Monticello, who helped secure the money, joined several Tallahassee leaders for the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Leon County Commission Chairman Bryan Desloge stated, "we can't rely on the federal money. It's a great kick start, but it's up to us to take it from there."

J.R. Richard, CEO of the Bond Community Health Center, said the Freeman facility is receiving \$500,000 for two years under the federal Health Care for Homeless Program.

"The funding can continue again depending on Congress as long as the program is successful," Richard said. "After two years, the program will fall under the funding of the main (Bond) health center."

The center is open from Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. to all people who have experienced homelessness in the past six months or who are currently homeless. Patients must bring a letter from The Shelter or a transitional housing facility where they are currently living. Pricing is determined on a sliding scale, depending on the patient's income. Those without any income will still be treated.

Overseen by Director Ingra Garcia, services provided by the staff of eight will include comprehensive care, screenings, prenatal, social services and medical education.

Additional Facts

Kay Freeman Health Center

- What: Medical services provided for people who have been homeless in the past six months or who are currently homeless. Patients must bring a letter from the shelter or transitional housing facility where they are currently living.
 - When: Open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.
 - How much: Sliding scale according to income. Medical care will still be provided if no income is available.
 - More information: 575-5293.
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