

Right on schedule: Keys to Hope readying to open next month



Jessica O'Brien

Keys to Hope

Ed Blakley, standing, and Guy Meska help paint the interior walls of the Keys to Hope Resource Center, slated to open for business next month.

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By JESSICA O'BRIEN Staff Writer

MICHIGAN CITY — The Keys to Hope Resource Center is on schedule to open next month, with progress moving along in the renovation of its 1802 Franklin St. location.

Keys to Hope is the latest project of Citizens Concerned for the Homeless, which currently offers services to the needy through Sand Castle Shelter for Homeless Families and Grace Learning Center.

With more than 3,000 square feet of space, this new resource center offers daytime service to not only the city's homeless population, but the needy and disenfranchised as well. The goal is to help these people get off the streets, find jobs and better their lives.

Jim Musial, executive director of the Sand Castle Shelter, has been overseeing much of the Keys to Hope project ever since Citizens Concerned for the Homeless has taken over the reins on this project, which was originally created by a group of local pastors looking to end homelessness.

Musial said Keys to Hope will be a "centralized access point," directing those in need to a number of places around town to receive assistance – soup kitchens, food pantries, resume writing classes, overnight shelters, health care and other programs.

"Part of our 10-year plan to end homelessness is to give people a daytime place to go," Musial said of the Keys to Hope center. "But the key component is to have a place to find jobs."

Contractor for the project Tonn and Blank has been working the past couple of months to remodel the Franklin Street location, which was most recently occupied by a church, but has stood vacant for a few years.

Construction work included a complete overhaul of the roof and adding three shower stalls, one of which is handicap accessible. Other additions to the building include lockers for homeless to store their belongings, a computer station with at least five computers, a main hall with tables and chairs, restrooms and a kitchen area.

The resource center will only be open during daytime hours and does not offer overnight accommodations for the homeless population, although one of its goals is to put the homeless in touch with the city's shelters.

Keys to Hope operates on the idea of offering the "ABCs of self-sufficiency," Musial said. The ABC stands for appearance, behavior and case management.

Helping in the area of appearance, are the center's showers, toiletry supplies and laundry facilities.

"We recognize a big correlation between how people look and how they act when it comes to looking for jobs," Musial said.

Focusing on behavior, Keys to Hope will offer wellness clinics, smoking cessation classes and emotional resiliency therapy, in addition to several grant-based programs brought into the center by other local foundations.

Case management, Musial said, begins with understanding and compassion and leads to structure and accountability - giving Keys to Hope clients the "courage to change."

Foundations who have made contributions to help the Keys to Hope Resource Center are the Barker Welfare Foundation, Duneland Health Council, United Way of La Porte County, Unity Foundation and a Community Development Block Grant through the City of Michigan City.

Those wishing to donate to the Keys to Hope Resource Center can contact Musial at 219-879-2552 or visit www.citizens4homeless.org.