

Casa Familia: Expanded emergency shelter helps those in need get lives back on track

By Dennis J. Carroll | The New
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Mountain time

Zora Fields, Jeana Black and her
10-year-old son, Sebastian, are
among the newest residents of the
newly expanded Casa Familia
shelter in central Santa Fe.

"It kind of feels like home," said
Black, who moved into the center
on June 5 after she and her son
were left homeless when a
housemate arrangement went bad.

Fields settled into Casa Familia a few days ago and is nearing her 90th day of sobriety from alcohol and cocaine.

She said the shelter, at 1604 Berry Street near Cerrillos Road and Second Street, "is so centrally located" that she can walk to several important locations in her life, including her counseling center and the Recovery Bible Church.

In addition, Fields said, the shelter provides a roof and life's necessities while helping residents get their lives back on track, offering a road to counseling and other social services.

About 50 community service workers and advocates joined community luminaries and officials on Sunday to dedicate the new emergency shelter for homeless women and families with children.

Deborah Tang, executive director of St. Elizabeth Shelter, Casa Familia's parent agency, said the shelter originally opened its doors in

November 2009 as a winter-only facility, but that demand proved to be so great that St. Elizabeth purchased the former teen center and turned it into a year-round shelter.

From November through May, Casa Familia has provided 135 women and children with 4,123 bed nights of shelter and 8,246 meals, according to St. Elizabeth officials.

Currently, the address is a temporary home — up to 30 days for single women and 45 days for the families — to 10 single women and three moms with a total of six children. The women are allowed to stay longer if they are close to achieving immediate goals.

The home currently opens its doors from 3:30 to 8:30 p.m. weekdays and is open from 3:30 p.m. Friday until 8:30 a.m. on Mondays.

"We would like to stay open 24 hours a day," Tang said. "Our biggest need now is operating funds."

She said St. Elizabeth Shelter was able to obtain a mortgage from Wells Fargo Bank on the building after receiving \$105,000 in contributions from the Frost Foundation and the Thornburg Charitable Fund, a promise of \$23,500 from the city, and other donations. The total cost of the building was \$315,000.

St. Elizabeth officials have said that prior to the opening of Casa Familia, there were only six beds for homeless women and one room for a single family available year-round for all of Santa Fe and Northern New Mexico.

Casa Familia has 16 beds for single women, five rooms for families that can accommodate up to 25 people, a large kitchen, dining room, TV room and outside patio.

In addition to offering the immediate necessities of food and shelter, the home's goal is to help the women return to independent living as soon as possible through

intensive case management and counseling.

Fields said she is thankful for the home's services while she awaits hospital treatment for a liver problem.

Black is taking classes at Santa Fe Community College with an eye on a microbiology degree from Arizona State University, and then returning to work in Santa Fe.

Sebastian, meanwhile, is involved with the Boys and Girls Club, and Sunday was on an outing with his big brother from Big Brothers, Big Sisters.

"They were supposed to go swimming," Black said. "I hope they didn't get rained out."

Anyone wishing to donate money, clothing or other items to the shelter is asked to call St. Elizabeth offices at 982-6611. The shelter also is looking for volunteers.

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ON THE WEB

- www.steshelter.org

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