

North of Tampa >>

Donation will keep family center open

NORTH TAMPA | The Children's Board gives \$350,000 to the Family Justice Center.

BY JACKIE RIPLEY
Times Staff Writer

A last-minute save by the Children's Board of Hillsborough County has made it possible for the Family Justice Center to continue helping families in crisis, at least through the end of the fiscal year.

"This gets us through Sept. 30, which is the end of our fiscal year and also our two-year mark," said Nikki Daniels, executive director of the center at 9303 N Florida Ave. "We're very hopeful because it gives us time to build the support we need."

The Family Justice Center, which has more than 20 offices at its one-stop shop in the old Floriland Mall, opened in October 2006.

In that time it has helped more than 2,300 families in crisis by providing a spectrum of services, from food stamps to emergency medical care to housing.

But when the money ran out early this year, it looked as if the domestic violence center would have to close.

Enter the Children's Board. "Our job is to take care of kids

and families, and any time there is a threat to that, I see it as our job to make sure the threat goes away," said Luanne Panacek, the Children's Board's chief executive officer.

The Children's Board contributed the \$350,000 the center needed to stay open through September.

"It's a huge sense of relief to be able to be here to serve the thousands of people we know are coming," Daniels said. "There was also an internal kind of relief, personally, for the staff about to lose their jobs."

In addition to carrying the center through the end of its fiscal year, Daniels said the donation will take the center to its two-year-mark, a milestone needed to qualify for more grants.

But the reprieve is temporary.

"We're hopeful because this gives us time to build support," Daniels said. "We still need the community, and folks willing to support us."

Jackie Ripley can be reached at ripley@sptimes.com or at (813) 269-5308.