The Central Library didn’t open until 11 a.m. on Thursday, but by 10 a.m. a dozen people were waiting outside its doors. One of them was a 9-month-old baby named Avayah. It was 10 degrees and snowing. The security guard opened the door.

Avayah’s mother is homeless and staying at a shelter. On Thursday morning she dropped her older daughter off at pre-K and took the bus to the library.

Many homeless people make the same decision each day, seeking warmth, safety and clean bathrooms. The library has increased the services offered to its homeless patrons, including on-site medical and dental care.

“They don’t need a book on how to take care of their teeth,” said Jennifer Bynum, the library’s division head of science and history. “They need a dentist.”

A couple of months ago, Rochester Regional Health started sending its mobile dentist unit to the library to provide homeless patrons with cleanings, extractions and other needed dental procedures. It joined a variety of organizations that send service providers to assist homeless patrons.

During certain months, University of Rochester medical students staff a station at the library, offering glucose monitoring, eye checkups and other medical services. To fill the gap when they are unavailable, Bynum recruited her mother, Barbara Best, who is a retired nurse. This week Best started volunteering to staff a medical station in the Central Library on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Midtown Plaza was once a go-to place for homeless people who were looking to stay warm downtown. When the mall closed in 2008, the library saw a tremendous influx of homeless visitors. “The Central Library became the only source of public restrooms and warmth,” said Library Director Patricia Urru.

Library staff don’t know how many homeless people visit the library on an average day. They do know that there are always people outside waiting for the library to open. The security guard is allowed to let them in early to wait in the front vestibule.

Baby Avayah’s mother, Shakea Watkins, who was let in about 30 minutes before opening time on Thursday, was happy for that policy. Once inside the vestibule, she removed the stroller cover so that Avayah could look around and the baby’s bright eyes peeked out from under a furry hat, puffy coat and big blanket. “I try to keep her bundled up,” Watkins said.

She had been homeless for about a week. Living with Avayah’s father had not worked out and she had come to the library hoping for some help finding shelter for herself and her two children. “I am just looking for something to call home for me and my kids.”

Housing help can be found on the third floor, in the Library Resource Out-