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LITTLE VILLAGE

Child-care center unveiled

CAC facility serves low-income families



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The Community Action Commission, which provides low-income assistance programs to individuals and families, publicly unveiled the new location for its Santa Maria child-care program with an open house Friday.

The Little Village Toddler Center, formerly at 201 W. Chapel St. in Santa Maria, opened doors for parents and children in September at 219 W. Chapel St.

But the commission hosted Friday's event to celebrate the location change and educate the community about the services provided, including an Early Head Start Center and Home Base program.

The street-side facility of offices, child-care rooms and food-preparation spaces connects to a backdoor village of four structures where children play and learn.

"This is such a special place, and it's in a neighborhood that normally doesn't have a lot of these services," said Mattie Gadsby, a children services director.

A group of 16 students will use the facilities in a full-day Early Head Start program for toddlers.

Maria Douvia, a Community Action Commission program manager, said the commission serves pregnant women and children up to 3 years old, and uses federal dollars and community donations to help working families in need through a number of services and social events.

"It's about educating the parents and providing full-day services," Douvia said.

In the children's village, from the outside of four structures shaped like small cottages, signs for pretend ice-cream, optometry and general stores mark the buildings lined with flower pots. A small sandbox is planted between two buildings, and wagons and Little Tikes toy cars were clustered between two more.

Inside the structures, wooden cubby boxes filled with blocks, books and education materials framed the walls, and toddler paintings decorated them.

Gustavo Aldana, one of the founders of the Little Village, said in a news release about the event that he was inspired “to create a safe haven for children to feel comfortable and free to express themselves in a space that was designed just for them.”

“As a result, the adults have to enter the child’s world rather than asking the child to enter the adult’s world,” Aldana said.