

New Resource Center Building Welcomes Families into the Community



Written by Suki Wessling



The new Community Bridges Live Oak Family Resource Center on Seventh Avenue is more than just a new building to house the many community services that will be located there.

This new building is putting a center to a map defined by the absence of a city government.

"This building is the manifestation of the community's desire to have a 'there' there to Live Oak," explains Elizabeth Schilling, Program Director for the Live Oak Family Resource Center. "It's a dispersed community—it's not a city, and it doesn't have a central point. This corner, by having this building and this amount of energy and programming in it, is going to further define Live Oak."

It's a tall order for a little community organization.

The building is the culmination of many dreams and a lot of hard work. Since 1977, Community Bridges has been serving the needs of a more and more diverse community, offering Meals on Wheels for the elderly and disabled, the state and federally supported Women, Infants, and Children Nutrition Program, and Life Line transportation, among many other programs.

The program that most families with young children will recognize is the Family Resource Center, housed until last month in a cute little Live Oak bungalow. The Center offers a wide range of family-oriented services, including childbirth classes, parent/child classes, mentoring for teens, mental health advocacy, ESL classes, and Family Futbol Night.

The staff knew that in order to do their job right, they needed new facilities, and right from the earliest planning stages, that the facility needed to be designed for families.

"Jackie Lowe (the architect) observed us programmatically, watching how adults and kids came through the center," Schilling explains. "It's been amazing how the use is reflected in the design of the building."

The building features indoor space connected to outdoor space designed with children in mind. When adults are at meetings in the rooms downstairs, they will be physically close to their children who are being cared for in the next room, and will be able to observe through one-way glass.

The lobby of the building was designed to create over a dozen informal meeting spaces for small groups to chat or break away from larger meetings. The facility has a kitchen, which will be used for culinary events.

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"Parents shouldn't have to choose between community involvement and their kids," Schilling explains. "It can all happen in one place. We have an ongoing series of Positive Discipline classes and [in our former location] when we taught that course we couldn't provide childcare. Ironically, you'd have to go to a parenting class and leave your child at home."

The Center expects increased participation in their existing programs, all of which will be able to expand into the new building. And they are already planning new programs inspired by the space. Adding to the existing nutrition and diabetes counseling programs, for example, the Center will host Wholesome Wednesdays, a food tasting program featuring healthy food cooked onsite.

Other programs just coming into shape are teen and youth summer programs and new evening hours for teens.

The new building inspires another sort of learning: how to live in better harmony with the Earth. As the first platinum-level, LEED-certified non-residential building in the county, the building is a showcase for "green" living. From recycled materials to low energy usage and parking for electric cars, the new Center encourages responsible use of resources.

The new building has its own "green" passport for kids, with a treasure hunt that teaches more about the building's construction. The Center is hosting tours of the site, and offers it as a new fieldtrip destination for schoolkids.

Part of the initial fundraising push was to create an endowment big enough to sustain the building for thirty years. But Schilling says that for what's going inside the building, the effort has only just started. The Center's children's furniture and toys are fifteen years old and need to be replaced.

"Another thing that we'd like is to provide childcare for all of our events, which would mean paid childcare workers," she explains. "That's something that limits us now. "

Schilling cites the community's families for much of the motivation for change. "When you have people wanting to raise kids, everybody wants the best for their own kids," she explains. "You have a higher concentration of people thinking about what kind of community they want to create longer term. It is a cycle of improvement: the community is improved, kids and families are improved, and then community is improved."

And at this new building, the improvement is only beginning.

For more information about Community Bridges Live Oak Family Resource Center, visit their website at CommunityBridges.org. Call 476-7284, extension 110 to arrange a group tour. For other inquiries, call Elizabeth Schilling at 476-7284, extension 105.

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