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Company Donates Goods, Services To Upgrade Playground

By Carla M. Collado, Staff Writer

By the end of this week, homeless children throughout Long Beach will be able to enjoy a newly upgraded playground at Children Today's Play House North facility.

The Bovis Lend Lease construction company is donating supplies and labor this Thursday (Sept. 25) to help upgrade and beautify the playground at the facility, located at the corner of South Street and Cherry Avenue. A crew of 15-20 workers will spend from 10 am to 4 pm installing new play equipment, safety mats, landscaping, fence screens and additional shaded areas.

Children Today Executive Director Dora Jacildo said Bovis will "help us create a beautiful, natural and private space" for homeless children. Her organization has offered free services to homeless children and their families in Long Beach since 2000, mainly childcare services at Play House North and Play House West (located at the city's Multi-Service Center).

Opened in February 2008, Play House North is a licensed childcare and preschool facility for homeless children between 18 months and 6 years of age. It provides developmentally appropriate programs and individualized instruction, as well as meals, clothing and health care services, to roughly 32 children each day, Jacildo said. The goal is to provide the homeless children a safe, stable and nurturing environment while their parents take steps to find housing and rebuild their lives, she explained.

When the facility opened at the Glad Tidings Church, Bovis did much of the upgrade work on the building, but was unable to complete upgrades to the parking lot, Jacildo said. Since then, Children Today has used the parking lot as a play area for the children, featuring climbing structures, a rubber surface, a mural and a sandbox, she said.

"We've been wanting a green space for the children," she said. "I'm so honored that they (Bovis) would choose us again...When a company organizes to give back to the community, that's a great thing."

Jacildo said the new upgrades to the playground also will help shield the children and handle some of the noise pollution.

Play House West offers the same services as Play House North and also serves 32 children daily. In addition to preschool and childcare services for homeless children, Children Today offers various services to their parents. These include acute counseling by a licensed social worker, rental/move-in assistance and comprehensive special needs coordination. The latter means

that a Children Today representative acts as a liaison to families during meetings with agencies such as the Children's Institute, Harbor Regional Center, The Children's Clinic and the Long Beach Unified School District, according to Jacildo.

She said Children Today has grown over the years in its capacity to serve more families (it doubled that amount when it opened Play House North this year) and by improving the depth and quality of its services. She also explained that both of its facilities currently undergo rigorous quality assurance testing, and that in February, Play House West received its accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

For more information about Children Today, visit www.childrentoday.org online or call 432-1224.