

“A wealth of information”

Constructing Connections LA helps build child care centers

BY JESSINE FOSS

When Esther Torrez learned that South Central Los Angeles was a “high need” area for child care, she decided to convert a former funeral parlor into a preschool. But her development company, Community Enhancement Corporation, typically built affordable housing. They’d never tackled a child care center. So she turned to Constructing Connections LA, a program that helps people build and expand child care centers.

Constructing Connections provided a “wealth of information—they really put their arms around this project,” says Torrez. Constructing Connections helped her find lenders, develop a business plan, create financial documents, and post ads for a center director.

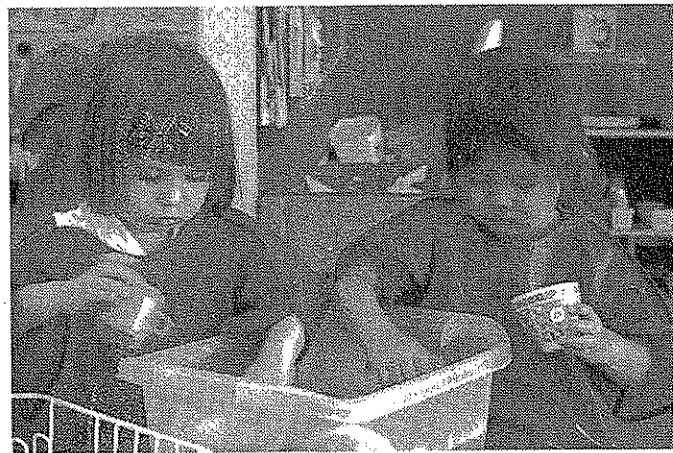
The preschool will serve 80-100 children and include a community health clinic that focuses on mental health and diabetes—key health needs in the community. The center will also offer nutrition, parenting, and health education.

Constructing Connections offers free help, including:

- **Individual meetings:** Project Specialist Kay Johnson—who works at Crystal Stairs, a child care resource and referral agency—answers questions and meets with people to review educational requirements and draft a business plan. “Many people who are great with children have no business sense,” she says. She also encourages people to open centers in underserved areas—and to offer infant/toddler care.
- **Workshops** on licensing, business management, and opening a center
- **Booklet** on starting a center in Los Angeles

The program also connects people with resources:

- **Community Care Licensing** for information about regulations
- **Real estate agents** that can help find buildings that would make good centers
- **Retired Community Care Licensing supervisors** who “go on visits and say, ‘This building won’t do because it’s next to a gas station’ or ‘Check into the parking situation,’” says Johnson
- **Architects** to provide advice—from what walls to move to what colors to use
- **Pro bono lawyers** who work with people having trouble with neighbors
- **“Child-care-friendly” lenders.** “People have no idea the kind of money they need,” says Johnson—and



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many lenders won’t offer loans for child care centers.

- **Community college courses** in business and child development

Constructing Connections brings building, safety, licensing, and health department staff together for meetings. Johnson also contacts city planning departments about including child care in their city plan.

Constructing Connections is a project of the Low Income Investment Fund. The project is funded by First 5 in ten counties (Calaveras, Kern, Los Angeles, Merced, Orange, Riverside, Sacramento, Santa Barbara, Solano, and Ventura).

- **Low Income Investment Fund**, 415-772-9094, www.liifund.org/programs/childcare/abcd/abcd_connections.htm
- **Constructing Connections LA**, 323-421-2643

NEW FUNDS FOR PRESCHOOLS

Legislation recently signed into law will provide

- \$50 million for preschool and family literacy programs and \$5 million for child care wraparound services for state preschool programs in areas with low-performing schools.
- \$50 million for loans to renovate, repair, and purchase new child care facilities.

For more information contact the Child Care Law Center, 415-394-7144