

# *The* METRO WEST DAILY NEWS

## Willis House playspace opens in Hudson to laughs, excitement



Program Director Janice D'Amico helps Lamaria Brison, 3, cut the ribbon for the new playroom at the Willis House, Tuesday afternoon in Hudson.

Daily News Staff Photo/ Marshall Wolff

By Jeff Malachowski, Daily News Staff

Feb. 5, 2014

HUDSON – The echoes of children laughing, playing and reading filled the halls of Hudson's Willis House Tuesday, as a new long-awaited playspace opened for the first time inside the downtown homeless shelter.

After years without a designated playspace for the children living with their families at the shelter, Program Director Janice D'Amico and her staff worked with Horizons For Homeless Children to design a room for the 14 toddlers living at the shelter to play and complete arts and crafts.

"It's extremely important because many of these kids aren't in daycare and don't have a real playspace," D'Amico said with a smile. "This is much-needed. It's all educational items."

A handful of the youngsters, including Lakeitha Alston's child, joined D'Amico, state Rep. Kate Hogan, D-Stow, Executive Assistant Thomas Moses and Willis House staff during a ribbon cutting ceremony Tuesday before playing with their new toys.

"It's nice," Alston said while watching her child investigate the new playroom.

Along with providing books, toys and art supplies, Horizons For Homeless Children will also send volunteers to the Willis House for two hours each week to read to the children, allowing their parents time to search for jobs and complete school work.

"It gives parents a chance to go on the computers and job search," said D'Amico. "In the kids coming here it gives parents free time."

Alston, a resident of the shelter for a few months, is attempting to find a job and said the extra time her child is active in the new playspace is time she can devote to searching for a new job to benefit her family.

"It will be a little stress relief," said Alston. "I will get a break once in a while to work on school and find a job."

The shelter, which is operated by the South Middlesex Opportunity Council, provides housing and food for 14 local homeless families. Along with housing and food, the staff at the Willis House helps the families set up bank accounts, complete their schooling and find jobs and apartments.

"We encourage them to get back into the flow of life," said D'Amico, who noted a typical stay at the shelter lasts between three months and a year. "That's what we do."

The playspace will provide children an opportunity to develop their skills and have fun while their parents work to better their lives, said Hogan.

"It's wonderful to see this playspace here for the kids and families," said Hogan. "It provides a safe haven for them in their transition."

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