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FRAMINGHAM



Ribbon Cutting For New Playspace at SMOC Shelter

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FRAMINGHAM – After ripping the paper chain across the door, the children could not wait to play with the firetrucks and puzzles inside the new “bright Spaces” play area in the South Middlesex Opportunity Council’s Pathways family shelter.

The shelter located north of Route 9 in Framingham is home to 14 families currently, and 12 children.

Yesterday, members of the Bright Horizons Foundation for Children® and South Middlesex Opportunity Council’s Pathways family shelter marked the official opening of the Bright Space® for children.

Bright Spaces are designed to provide children in crisis with a dedicated warm, enriching area to play and learn.

“At any given time we can have up to 14 families staying at the emergency congregate shelter,” said Pathways Director Kimberley Hicks. “That means on average we have 13-20 children

staying here and up until now they have had no designated indoor play space. This is a truly wonderful and much-needed gift for all the children and their families.”

According to The Bright Horizons Foundation for Children, studies have shown that children of all ages thrive when they have a safe place in which to explore the world around them, filled with books, toys and activities that are developmentally appropriate and provide an opportunity for them to discover the magic of childhood.

Children experiencing stress especially need access to child-friendly spaces.

In addition to The Bright Horizons Foundation for Children, the Pathways Shelter project has been successfully completed through a partnership between CrossFit New England and the non-profit, kettlebells4kids.

Bridget Riley, charity manager at CrossFit New England in Natick, explained that their gym members are always looking for local charities to support and the decision was made to focus this year on kettlebells4kids, an organization that raises awareness and funds to support the growing issue of child homelessness in the United States.

“In partnership with kettlebells4kids we were able to raise more than \$10,000 to use in our community toward programs that help homeless children in Massachusetts,” Riley said. “We then partnered with The Bright Horizons Foundation for Children to find a location to create a Bright Space. Together with Jane Gibbons from the Foundation and Amie Owens of kettlebells4kids, we were introduced to the Pathways Family Shelter – a place that we agreed could really use a great space for the children to play, learn and have fun.”

Owens explained that kettlebells4kids hosted its 2nd annual charity workout last year and CrossFit New England was their top fundraiser. “Our long term plan is to introduce gym owners and their members to local homeless family shelters to support active play and fitness programs,” Owens said.

Each year, together with The Bright Horizons Foundation for Children, kettlebells4kids allocates funds to shelters in states where the money is raised.

“We believe the power of fitness has the potential to build strong, confident children and create healthy, successful communities,” she said.

The Foundation and its partners agreed that Pathways Family Shelter was in need of a separate space where the children living in their temporary home could play with educational toys and games or read books with their parents.

“Most of the children in our shelter tend to be infants and toddlers so much of the space will be suitable for that age range,” Director Hicks said. “The space, which used to be a vacant office on the second floor, is a very good size and can easily accommodate a half dozen children at once.

“We have a very nice play area outside which is very popular with the children in the good weather,” Hicks explained, adding, “but this play space will be invaluable when the weather forces them inside.”

To convert the empty space into a welcoming play area, more than 20 volunteers from the three organizations worked over three days to help prep the room, paint the walls, install new storage units and stock the room with all new furniture and toys.

“Our Bright Spaces are not only wonderful rooms for children to play, but they also create a place for children where they can connect with other children, their family, and supportive adults who can provide needed services,” Ileen Henderson, National Director of Bright Spaces, in a press release. “Having a place for families to relax together helps them to build important bonds that strengthen the family during this difficult time.”

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