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## Library offers special haven for kids who relish books

BY JOE RODRIGUEZ  
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An invitation to read

Library offers special haven for kids who relish books

Five years after it opened, The Opportunity Project Learning Center-South now has an on-site library. On Thursday, the early education program for low-income children ages 12 months to 6 years old dedicated its Learning Center Library, inside the TOP building at 4600 S. Clifton in Oaklawn.

"The library is another piece of being able to move into having high-quality, center-based care for young children," said TOP executive director Janice Smith.

In the \$136,000 library project, the school transformed one of its three tornado shelters into a room that resembles a forest. The walls are painted with animals, trees and streams. A three-dimensional tree sticks out from the top of the room in one corner. A small theater, used for puppet shows and children's performances, is set up in another corner.

With the library, the learning center now has a central location for its 2,000 books. The books had been spread out throughout the building. Now, the children will have a book check-out system.

Center leaders hope it will get kids and their families even more excited about reading and learning.

"We are trying to give them skills that they'll (need to) be successful in elementary school, and reading is such a critical part of that," said LeAnn Kruckenberg, TOP program director. "We want to encourage them to have a love of books and we want them all to be lifelong learners and lifelong readers."

Smith, the executive director, said the library is an important component in serving the children in the program. TOP-South has an enrollment of about 185 children, and nearly 100 of those are at the center about 10 hours a day, she said.

"We want a highly developed, what we call extended-day curriculum, so that every hour is a quality hour for children here," Smith said.

"The research over and over and over points out that if young children who are low-income have access to high-quality, center-based education, then they do excel."

Reach Joe Rodriguez at 316-268-6644 or [jrodriguez@wichitaeagle.com](mailto:jrodriguez@wichitaeagle.com).

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