

## A GRAND OPENING FOR EL NIDO CENTER

# One-stop source of help ready

By Kevin Modesti Staff Writer

PACOIMA

**B**lanca Ventura came to the El Nido Family Source Center on Saturday to join other teenagers in painting fun designs on younger kids' faces during a grand-opening fiesta of music, games and food.

The 15-year-old Pacoima resident said she'll come back for more serious purposes.

"My family is not doing good right now," Ventura said softly, explaining that she, her four brothers and her mother — who is handicapped by arthritis — had to spend Christmas Day moving out of their house.

The El Nido center, she said, will be a place she can get away, avoid bad influences and try to improve her future.

"It means a lot to me and other people who are going through hard times," Ventura said.

Leaders say helping at-risk families like the Venturas is the aim of the new facility in the MEND building at 13460 Van Nuys Boulevard in Pacoima.

Helped by \$1 million a year in grants from the city of Los Angeles, El Nido (The Nest) Family Source Center is one of 16 such centers scheduled to open throughout the county in 2010.

It's one of 11 different social-services centers operated by El Nido Family Centers, the Mission Hills-based nonprofit agency that began 85 years ago as a nutrition program for mostly immigrant families and has tried to change with the region's needs.

City Councilman Richard Alarcón cut a red ribbon — to the cheers of many of the approximately 500 people who dropped by Saturday's festivities — to officially open the 7,000-square-foot center.

"This is not about ribbon-cutting, this is about bringing a community together and



Children take part in a dance exercise Saturday at the newly opened El Nido Family Source Center in Pacoima. The session is only one of the services offered at the facility, which provides a safe place for children and attractions for older family members, such as a nonprofit store and a computer center.

John McCoy  
Staff Photographer



Kids have their helmets in place and wait to ride their skateboards Saturday at the El Nido Family Source Center.

meeting our problems head-on," Alarcón told the crowd from a district where unemployment and foreclosure rates are high. "This is your project — let's make it work."

Alarcón called such projects one reason crime is down in Los Angeles.

"Maybe we're going through a transition," Alarcón said in an interview.

Inside, visitors found offices for social-services case managers and gang-prevention and independent-study programs; and a computer lab, a nursery and a nonprofit store selling donated baby clothes, formula and diapers.

Liz Herrera, El Nido Family Centers' executive director, said the organization tries to provide outreach by social workers and places where families can go to get help.

"All of our services are geared to strengthening family, to breaking a cycle of child abuse and neglect, school dropout, gang involvement and substance abuse — all the problems we see," Herrera said.

At the new center, El Nido oversees a coalition of nonprofit groups: poverty-fighting MEND (Meet Each Need With Dignity), Neighborhood Legal Services, the Woodcraft Rangers after-school program, and the Pacoima Beautiful and Tia Chucha's Cultural Center community agencies.

El Nido runs on private and public funding, and takes volunteers. The organization's Web site is [elnidofamilycenters.org](http://elnidofamilycenters.org). The El Nido Family Source Center in Pacoima can be reached at 818-896-7776.

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