

THE NEIGHBOR

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— Julie Kavanaugh, Visitation Valley Community Center executive director

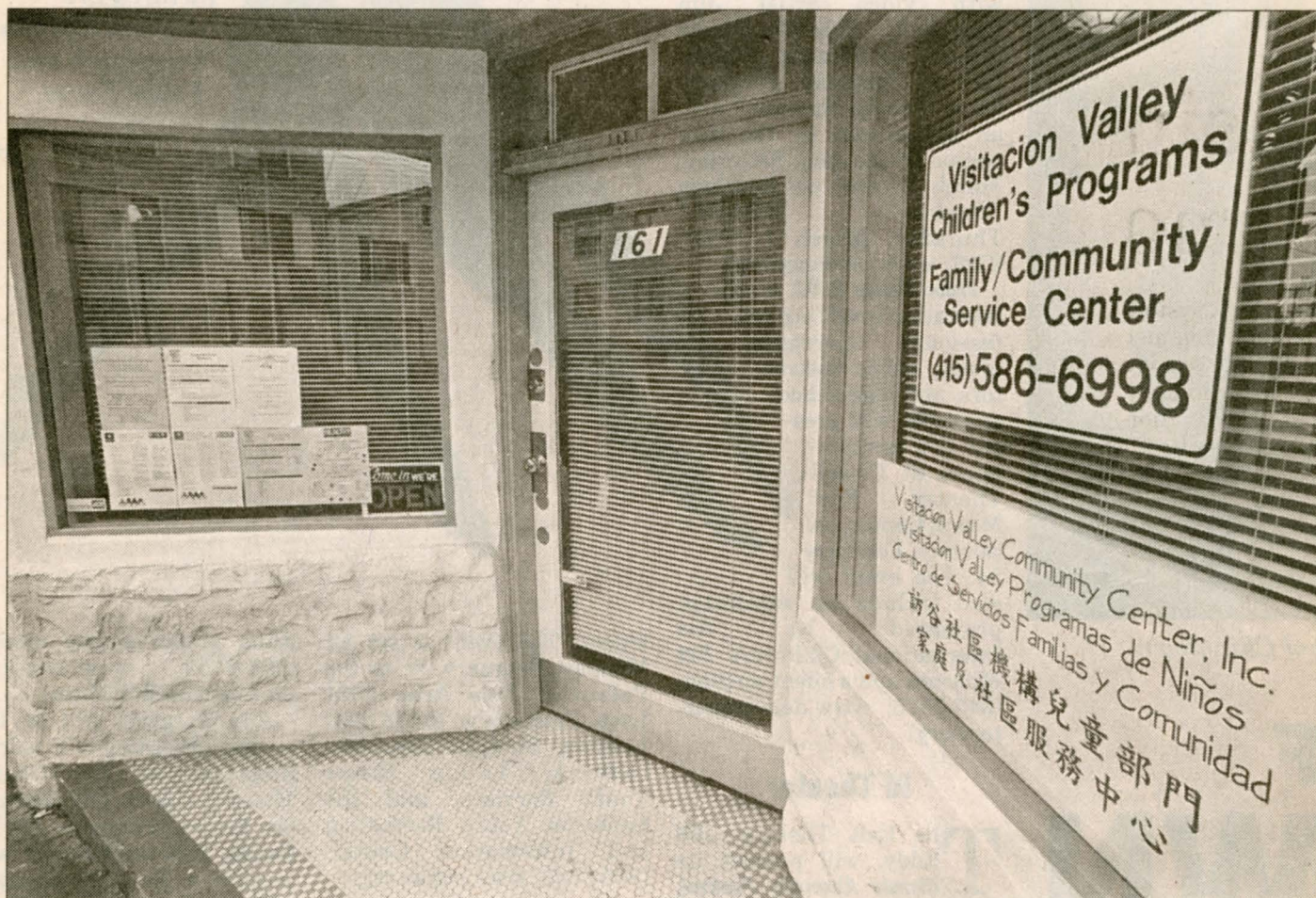


PHOTO: RORY McNAMARA

The Family Community Services, located at 161 Leland Avenue in the Visitation Valley Community Center, offers several programs for local residents. Programs offered include job placement services, health insurance information, child care assistance, and family service assistance.

AREA CENTER OFFERS SOLUTIONS TO COMMUNITY

Visitation Valley Community Center fills void left by city

By Jean Choung
NEIGHBORHOOD REPORTER

A center focused on serving the various needs of families has opened in the Visitation Valley area, one of the neighborhoods with the highest population of children in the city.

The Family Community Services Center, located at 161 Leland Avenue, opened earlier this month.

The center was created in response to the many families who came to the Visitation Valley Community Center asking for help with various issues, such as finding a job, receiving emergency boxes of food, and applying for government-funded health insurance, said Brenda Lopez, former VVCC director of children's programs. Lopez originated the idea of starting the family service center.

The Family Community Services Center is a division of the VVCC, which offers various programs at seven different locations within an eight-block radius. Currently VVCC operates three child care facilities.

"Our children's program is the largest provider of child care service

in the neighborhood," said Julie Kavanaugh, VVCC executive director.

Many families who use the center for child care would ask for help with other services, Kavanaugh said.

"People constantly came into my office asking for help and I couldn't say no," Kavanaugh said. Kavanaugh was often bombarded with questions from families because there was not any designated staff to help them, but the family service center can help the families or refer them to another agency, she said.

Assistance at the family service center would be available in different languages, including Mandarin, Cantonese, Spanish, or English, said Lopez, director of the city's Department of Children, Youth and their Families.

Irene Chan, FCSC family community-service coordinator, said the new center, which is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays, would serve mostly as a referral service.

"We'll bring them in when we can," Kavanaugh said. "A child psychologist who's not on-site could be brought in for consultation," she said.

A counselor from San Francisco City College will also be available on-site to help childcare workers plan their future goals and recommend classes to take, Chan said.

Chan expects more services to be offered on the premises when funding increases, she said. Increased funds would also allow the center to increase staff to extend hours from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. and also create some open hours on Saturdays, Chan said.

Currently Chan and two part-time employees operate the new center, she said.

According to Lopez, the center has no designated funding source.

"We pasted it together from various funding sources," Lopez said.

Some families, looking for help at the new center, may find the help they need through programs implemented at VVCC, such as an ESL class for adults, Kavanaugh said.

"Anybody can go because it's taught all in English," Kavanaugh said.

The VVCC may also offer help in other ways. The VVCC currently

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allows homeless families to use its address for various reasons, including employment, Kavanagh said.

The open house celebration for the family center is scheduled from 1 to 3 p.m. February 28. Community members are invited, Chan said.