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Libraries to become family resource

■ The program will focus on early development.

BY SARA PLUMMER
World Staff Writer

Four branches of the Tulsa City County Library System will adopt the Family Place Libraries model by 2014 to become centers for early development and family resources.

"Parents can see the library as a place to learn about child development," said Lenore St. John, TCCL's child services coordinator.

The program focuses on children ages 0 to 3 years old and their parents or caregivers, and will use age-appropriate toys and books, parenting materials and can connect people to community resources, said Suanne Wymer, library deputy director.

"You are your child's first teacher," Wymer said, and Family Place Libraries aim to give parents a better opportunity to take part in their child's development.

Hardesty Regional, Herman and Kate Kaiser, Martin Regional and Owasso libraries have been chosen to become Family Place Libraries.

TCCL was one of 15 library systems to receive a three-

year \$20,000 grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services to set up the family place program. The Tulsa Library Trust and George Kaiser Family Foundation have also donated funds for the implementation of the program.

The children's areas at each of the four libraries will change somewhat to accommodate the program, fund additional resources and consolidate materials.

Child development books and materials, that now are scattered throughout each branch's collection, will be moved to the children's area so it's more accessible to parents, Wymer said.

Last month Wymer, St. John and the children's librarians at those four branch-places "went through an intense training program," Wymer said, in Centereach, N.Y., to learn about age-appropriate toys and books, what parenting materials to have available on different child development subjects and how to conduct the parent/child sessions that will cover varying topics.

The sessions will take place over five weeks, each with a different focus, where stations will be set up by age with developmentally appropriate toys for children and their parents to play with.



Hardesty Library is one of four branches adopting the Family Place Libraries model. Children are shown playing a Candy Land game at Hardesty last month.

Tulsa World file

An expert on that week's topic will walk around and talk with parents and answer questions.

"It a relaxed environment where they'll feel comfortable," Wymer said. The five sessions will cover orientation and literacy; speech, hearing and languages; child development; nutrition; and music, play and health.

"We do a lot of these things already. This (program) is just formalizing it and focusing on it," she said, and that

includes connecting parents with outside resources if needed, such as the Parent Child Center or Tulsa Autism Center.

Having space and time dedicated to child development also allows parents to interact with each other, St. John said.

"Parenting is tough, they can talk about that. How to deal with meltdowns and that biting is normal," she said. "It gives parents social interaction as well as children."

The Family Place program will kick off in January and for the remainder of this year the four libraries will work behind the scenes to get ready to launch the program by getting space ready, ordering supplies, toys and furniture, lining up child development experts and making connections with area child and family organizations and resources.

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INSIDE TODAY

NEWS

On the trail

More trail improvements are in the offing for River Parks. **A9**

Sale proposal

The Tulsa school board will consider a "letter of intent" offering a purchase option on old Roosevelt Elementary School. **A9**

SPORTS

Three of a kind

After J.W. Walsh and Josh Stewart, a third 2011 graduate of Guyer High School in Denton, Texas, aims to make an impact for OSU. **B1**

Kenseth edges Kahne

Matt Kenseth outlasts Kasey Kahne to take the win at Kansas Speedway. **B2**