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REDWOOD CITY

Child care facility opens at Elco Yards

Learning Links in Redwood City will take up to 74 children



by **Miranda de Moraes**
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Learning Links celebrated the opening of its inclusive early childhood education center at Elco Yards, one of Redwood City's newest mixed-use developments, with a ribbon-cutting on Thursday.

With support from San Mateo County Supervisors Lisa Gauthier and Jackie Speier, the county awarded AbilityPath, the nonprofit that operates Learning Links, a $200,000 grant for furniture and other materials.

"Gauthier and I are a duo on the issue of child care because we are grandmothers," Speier said. "Childcare is a workforce crisis that starts in the crib."

Gauthier underscored the importance of the center to the community.

"I am proud to have helped champion the creation of this facility," Gauthier said, "to provide quality early education for all children while reducing the financial burden for working parents."

Located at 200 Lathrop St., the center is open year-round from 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, and can accommodate up to 74 children ages 6 weeks to 6 years old, including those with developmental disabilities. Currently, four students are neurodivergent, according to Carol Miller, Learning Links' executive director.

At least 10 California State Preschool Program subsidies are available to students, reducing enrollment costs. Learning Links is a program of AbilityPath, a nonprofit serving children and adults with developmental disabilities that has operated in the Bay Area for more than 100 years.

"There should not be another housing development built in San Mateo County that doesn't have childcare. Period," Speier added.

She highlighted the county's separate $10 million commitment to child care, which will fund an online portal that lets county residents find child care providers in their ZIP code, compare costs and check for openings. The money will also support a Tri-Share program, in which the county will match employers' financial contributions toward child care for their workers.

"Redwood City will be our fifth inclusive preschool site on the Peninsula, furthering our focus on the critical early years of a child's development," said AbilityPath CEO Bryan Neider in a press release.

Christine Padilla, director of Build of San Mateo County, a nonprofit that expands access to early childhood care and education in the county, spoke at the ribbon-cutting about the planning required to establish the center.

"You need the right classrooms, plumbing, bathrooms, outdoor areas, teacher workspaces, places for strollers, places for babies to sleep," Padilla said. "Every detail is just thought out completely to every little edge that is in a corner, so that no one bumps their head."

Jenn Greely, a mother of a 3-year-old with a learning disability, said more than 40% of her income went to child care before enrolling her son at the center. Within three weeks, she noticed he wanted to use words more often and was better able to communicate through body language.

"The biggest thing is that he feels safe," Greely said, "and he like wants to come."

The program is meant to be tailored to each child's individual needs, the AbilityPath news release said. Each Learning Links location has a developmental specialist who coaches teachers to provide classroom support that benefits the whole class.