

New Childcare Center in South Loop aims to promote early reading for tots two to six years old

Women's Business Development Center helps owner sharpen financing skills and gain start-up loan

Grant Park as a giant outdoor playground, early literacy programs that encourage a love of reading, and an airy, pastel indoor space, are some of the incentives Kimberlee Burt offers families at her new "A Child's Space, Early Literacy and Learning Center" in Chicago's South Loop.

Opening mid-August, in a 5,200 square foot loft at 1020 S. Wabash Ave., (312) 431-1234, "A Child's Space" will use a research-based curriculum, plus children's love of play to promote early reading. "Reading aloud, singing, nursery rhymes, poetry, and storytelling will be some of our everyday activities," Ms. Burt said. "along with computers and foreign language discovery in English and French."

Finding Financing for Her Business

Before she opened the doors to her new business, Ms. Burt recognized she would need a start-up loan to help with construction costs and to purchase the type of unique equipment and furnishings she envisioned.

So to polish her financial skills

and learn how to apply for the loan, Ms. Burt turned to the Women's Business Development Center (WBDC). "I had the philosophy, vision, and dream," Ms. Burt said, "and Teresa Prim had the financial expertise and resources to help make the dream a reality."

Teresa Prim is a Finance Specialist for the WBDC and it's her job to help clients secure funds for start-up or expansion of their business. This service, offered for free by the WBDC, is one of the most popular programs of the 17-year-old nonprofit organization

"Ms. Burt is a smart and aggressive woman, and it was easy to help her achieve her goal," Teresa Prim said. "She acknowledged her weakness in financials, and together we developed a realistic start-up budget."

Ms. Prim's assistance clicked, and Chicago's ShoreBank, the country's oldest and largest community development bank, recently granted Ms. Burt a \$75,000 loan backed by a SBA (Small Business Administration) guarantee.

Ms. Burt's Childcare Philosophy

"We believe that each child, when given the opportunity, has the capacity to achieve unlimited

academic and social success," Ms. Burt said.

An important element in "A Child's Space" is what Ms. Burt calls "a community of learners."

"We want parents to truly participate in the center, to become part of our community. We won't be a place to just 'drop off and pick up,'" she said. "We'll hold workshops where parents can learn from child development experts and find more ways to connect moms and dads to their child's daily learning experiences."

Another different kind of program is called "All About My Friends"—an opportunity for families to share their histories and a cultural meal. Each child will create a story page based on the experience. The page will become a part of a personal book created for each child and will be used to help us learn more about each other and appreciate differences."

Along with the rich curriculum, Ms. Burt expects the design of her center to impress families. "Each classroom area is complimented by a color that soothes the mood of a particular age group. Ocean blue for two-year-olds, teal green for three and four-year-olds, and lavender for the four, five and six-year-old

group." Rainbows, fluffy clouds, and sky scenes also decorate the open space plan.

Determined to recruit top staff, Ms. Burt pays higher-than-average wages and requires all teachers to have significant course work in child development and to share her philosophy of early literacy and learning.

The South Loop Site

Ms. Burt selected the South Loop for her site "because it is a rapidly growing residential area and the need for quality, affordable child care is already here. (Weekly fees range from \$90 to \$205 depending upon the child's age and whether he or she is en-

rolled full-or part-time.) "Also, we're in walking distance to museums, the Art Institute, Grant Park, the Sculpture Garden, and other enriching attractions. It's like we're in the midst of one of the best and largest cultural playgrounds."

Ms. Burt's Background

The 31-year-old business owner was born in Chicago and attended Providence St. Mel High School. She received her bachelors in English from Northern Illinois University and her masters in Early Childhood Education from Howard University.

Before launching her childcare

(Continued on page 18)

New Childcare Center in
(Continued from page 10)
 business, Ms. Burt worked for five years as an educational consultant and trainer for Scholastic, Inc., the world's largest publisher and distributor of children's books.
 The Women's Business Development Center
 The WBDC provides women with entrepreneurial training, individualized consulting, financial coun-
 seling and assistance, business and strategic plan development, and Women's Business Enterprise (WBE) certification and procurement opportunities. The Center is located at 8 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 400, Chicago, IL 60603 with a satellite site at Bank One in Little Village, 3856 W. 26th St., Chicago.