

Tulsa World editorial: Opening of Tulsa County Family Center for Juvenile Justice offers building with hopeful tone

By World's Editorial Writers Nov 26, 2019

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Tulsa families and youths in crisis now have a more comfortable, safe and welcoming building for sorting out their legal challenges and trauma.

After years of fighting for funding and searching for space, the Tulsa County Family Center for Juvenile Justice opens next week at 500 W. Archer St.

About 6,000 youths a year go through the center for issues including adoption, child custody, juvenile offense and child abuse or neglect.

The facility replaces the former Juvenile Bureau that had become an antiquated, cramped building void of basic needs such as jury deliberation rooms, adequate courtroom space and separate processing rooms for juveniles. It was prone to power blackouts and other crumbling infrastructure problems. Hallways, an atrium and closets had been turned into offices to handle the growing need.

That kind of environment only heightens anxiety among families and children already facing difficult situations.

The 1995 defeat of a county tax to replace the building did not deter advocates who pushed Tulsa County residents to do better by its vulnerable residents.

Leading the charge were County Commissioner Karen Keith and former District Judge Doris Fransein, who also served as chief judge of the juvenile court. We thank them for their devotion to this cause.

The facility would never have been built had it not been for their hard work, persuasiveness and perseverance.

In 2014, county voters approved a 15-year, .041 sales tax to build the \$39 million center.

Rising property prices and opposition from neighborhood residents were challenges in locating a site. Leaders landed a deal on the former Storey Wrecker site three years ago.

The two-story facility brings all family and juvenile services to one place. It has a striking entrance with spacious rooms and natural light spilling into areas for the youths.

Six courtrooms have been built equipped for trials with four jury rooms. The detention center has a gym, library, classrooms and an outdoor recreation area more than twice the size of the old one. Offices are available for supporting agencies.

Building architecture often sets a tone, and this one is hopeful and respectful.

We are proud that Tulsa County prioritized families and children in need.