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Lomita has new toy loan center

By Nick Green, Staff Writer
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On Wednesday, 4-year-old Shelby Coleman of Lomita got a new Barbie doll dressed as a princess, while her 3-year-old brother Endicott got a truck.



Three girls check out the selection of dolls and other playthings available through Los Angeles County's Toy Loan Program, now with a loaning center in Lomita. Children ages 1 to 10 can borrow a toy for one week on Wednesdays from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Lomita Park Preschool, 24428 Eshelman Ave. (Robert Casillas/Staff Photographer)

They get to keep them for less than a week.

The pair was among the first participants of Lomita's new Toy Loan Program, which began Wednesday.

The free program works much like a library: kids can choose a toy and then return it the following week for another (although the loan of a particular toy, like a library book, can be renewed).

"I thought it was a neat idea to give them the opportunity to have new toys," said Lisa Coleman, mother of Shelby and Endicott. "It's a good teaching opportunity. (They're) responsible for taking care of the toy and being honest if something happens to the toy."

Kids are given a satisfactory mark if they return the toy on time and in good condition. Accumulate enough good marks and the newly minted honor borrower, as they are known, gets to choose a toy from the honor cabinet they can keep - for good.

The toy loan program is designed to teach seven principles: honesty, patience, courtesy, promptness, cleanliness, cooperation and responsibility.

"I was really inspired by it," said Raquel Temblador, the teacher of the Lomita Park Preschool, which is administering the program.

Although new to Lomita, the program has a long history in the county. It began in 1934 when the manager of a Los Angeles dime store caught a couple of boys

shoplifting small toys.

He turned them over to authorities who discovered they had good school records, but their families couldn't afford many toys at the height of the Great Depression. Determined to ensure kids wouldn't turn into juvenile delinquents, staff at the county Probation Department came up with the Toy Loan Program.

It began in a garage in 1935 and has remained basically unchanged ever since.

Today the program operates 44 Toy Loan Centers with 45,000 toys in circulation serving more than 30,000 kids a year, said Marcia Blachman Benitez, toy loan program coordinator for the county's Department of Public Social Services. The department administers the program with the Toy Loan Advisory Board, a nonprofit group.

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Toy Loan centers already operate in Lennox and San Pedro and another is scheduled to open next month in Hawthorne, Benitez said.

"I've been trying to expand the Toy Loan Program throughout the county and this was one of the pockets we were targeting - the South Bay," she said. "We want to get the community involved and use the Toy Loan Centers because it's there for them."

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Toys are donated - El Segundo-based Mattel is among the corporate contributors - and are always needed. Crews also clean, repair, paint and assemble used toys.

The organization's winter toy drive is under way now and a truck will pick up toys for free.

"We never turn down a toy," Benitez said.

The program is not limited to disadvantaged children. Any child from any city can join almost any of the programs. All that's needed is a membership card signed by an adult.

In Lomita, the program set for 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. every Wednesday is geared toward kids ages 1 to 10. The preschool is at 24428 Eshelman Ave.

Not every parent is convinced the program will work for their offspring, though.

Krystal Carr of Lomita wandered into the preschool Wednesday to take a peek.

"It's a little difficult for my kids," said Carr, the mother of 3-year-old twins. "With their toys, they kind of demolish them."

nick.green@dailybreeze.com

FIND OUT MORE

For more information about the Toy Loan Program or donating toys, or to find a Toy Loan Center, go to www.ladpss.org/dpss/toyloan/default.cfm or call 213-744-4344.

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