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Acclaimed Architect Frank Gehry Designs a Safe Haven for Kids in Watts

One of the world's greatest architects has designed a safe haven for Watts' most vulnerable.

Frank Gehry, the genius behind Walt Disney Concert Hall in downtown Los Angeles and other masterpieces, recently unveiled his vision for Children's Institute, Inc.'s \$35-million two-acre Watts Campus, scheduled to break ground in 2018.

"Children's Institute is an incredible organization with a vitally important mission," said Gehry, who worked on the design pro bono. "I am honored to be part of this project."

Resembling stacks of colorful boxes topped off with gleaming sheets of metal, the design is intended to house supportive services for about 5,000 children and families, helping them recover from trauma, violence and poverty to lead healthy and productive lives.

That's more than double the population currently served at the Institute's interim facility on 1522 E. 102nd Street in Watts.

"We have provided critical social services from leased facilities in Watts for the past seven years, and we've been active in the area for much longer," said the Institute's president and CEO, Mary Emmons. "The opportunity to expand and build upon the work we've accomplished here is one of our main areas of focus."

It was on separate motions by Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas in 2011 and 2012 that the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors approved granting the Institute a gratis lease in Watts, with the option to purchase.

“The Institute has long provided a safe haven for our most vulnerable, and now it is joining forces with the legendary Frank Gehry,” Supervisor Ridley-Thomas said. “I am excited to see this new campus rise in Watts, as it will elevate the community on so many levels – from protecting children to creating a new architectural gem for the neighborhood.”

Headquartered near downtown Los Angeles, the Institute provides services to more than 24,000 children and families across the county every year. It was founded in 1906 by Minnie Barton, Los Angeles’ first female probation officer.

The blueprint for its new campus in Watts includes rooms for individual and group counseling; a community meeting space; indoor and outdoor areas for after-school activities, early childhood education, and childcare; areas dedicated to youth development programs such as art and computer training; and spaces for family support services and classes.

“We are proud, through our services and through this new facility, to be part of a bigger change in Watts,” said Nina Revoyr, the Institute’s executive vice president and chief operating officer.

www.childrensinstitute.org.

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