

Center helps people with disabilities

Program focuses on self-reliance

STAFF REPORT

PERTH AMBOY — Samara Vasquez of Perth Amboy has some difficulties learning and has been having trouble finding a good job that will allow her to support her two young daughters.

"I need help. I want to provide for them," said Vasquez, 21, of Perth Amboy on Friday while watching over her daughters, ages 1 and 3.

Vasquez is getting help from Alianza, a new federally funded program specially designed to serve teens and young adults with disabilities, as well as aiding their families.

Vasquez said Alianza, which is the Spanish word for "alliance," has helped her get into a program that will enable her to get a job that she can do well.

"They've helped me a lot," Vasquez said.

A career portfolio is being developed for Vasquez with a goal of getting her into college and the work force to create a better life for her and her daughters.

Alianza, located in the Raritan Bay Area YMCA, 365 New Brunswick Ave., held a grand opening celebration Friday, five months after initially opening. So far the program has about 10 clients, all through word of mouth, according to Illa Lourdes, program administrator.

The program is funded through a \$1 million grant

spread over five years from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. It is run by the New Jersey Institute for Disabilities in partnership with the Family Support Center of New Jersey.

Venus Majeski, director of development and community relations for the New Jersey Institute for Disabilities, said Alianza provides services to families throughout New Jersey with children 14 to 21 years old with disabilities who are in need of services.

Those services can include preparing for college or a job, as well as help with increasing self-esteem and learning to deal with bullies. The wrap-around program offers families strategies for success. All services are free and confidential.

The program also offers an emergency preparedness project, which provides personal in-home emergency planning, in the event the caregiver of a family member with disabilities becomes sick or injured or the family has to be temporarily relocated because of severe weather or other emergency. An additional \$100,000 grant provides for that service.

Majeski said the bilingual team offers planning for young adults transitioning from a school environment, information and referrals, family and teen support services.

"We bring together other service providers to sup-

port the family," said Majeski.

She said every member of the staff has personal experience with disabilities, with either a disability themselves or having a family member with a disability.

"So many families feel isolated and don't know help is available," said Majeski, adding the program is designed to help families feel more hopeful.

Additional information may be obtained by contacting Alianza at 732-442-8393.

