



## **Kerry commemorates new center**

By Meghan Bard

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LANCASTER -- Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., invoked the namesake of the Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps at the opening of its new residence and family center on Monday.

"We're living out his words here," he said. "Every child deserves the opportunity to grab that brass ring and make it happen."

Kerry and other officials turned out for the unveiling of the new building, which is the first part of a \$14.5 million, two-phase renovation project on the Lancaster campus of the Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps.

"Everything we do and think about begins with children," Kerry said in his remarks before the ribbon-cutting ceremony. "That's what it's all about."

The Action Corps has been in existence for 37 years and serves "the most seriously vulnerable kids in our Commonwealth," according to Philip W. Johnston, founder of the Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps.

"We really didn't want (Kennedy's) legacy to end on June 6, 1968," Johnson said, referring to Kennedy's assassination. "We really didn't question that a living legacy would have to do with young people."

The children housed at the Action Corps are in the care of the state Department of Social Services or the state Department of Youth Services, said Val Paen, principal of the Robert F. Kennedy School, which is part of the Action Corps.

"They're the kids that have a lot of emotional or behavioral issues," she said.

Kids stay at the facility for between six months and a year, Paen said.

"Our goal is always to reintegrate them with families," she said.

Students spent their first night in the new facility on Monday. But prior to that, several Victorian-era buildings housed the Action Corps.

The new facility has air conditioning and non-steam heat. It is also much larger and allows more students to have their own rooms.

Each of the building's four wings has its own common area and small dining room around a central, two-story kitchen.

State Rep. Jennifer Flanagan, D-Leominster, called the facility impressive and stressed that children in the care of DYS and DSS deserve help.

"This gives them that chance," she said.

State Rep. Jamie Eldridge, D-Acton, credited the town and noted the Perkins School, which is also housed in Lancaster.

"The town is very supportive of these social services that don't exist elsewhere in the state," he said.