

Brattleboro Reformer

Brattleboro's Winston Prouty to move to Austine Campus

Purchase of bankrupt property finalized

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BRATTLEBORO — The U.S. Bankruptcy Court approved the purchase of the former Austine campus by Winston Prouty Center for Child Development. The Austine School, which was part of the Vermont Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, closed at the end of the 2014 school year. VCDHH, which included a number of support and educational programs, closed in September and the organization declared bankruptcy.

Rather than pursue a long-planned \$2.4 million expansion of its facility, including an early education center and community-based services, which is located across from Living Memorial Park, Winston Prouty decided to use its financial resources to purchase the former Austine campus.

"It would be great to have space where we could not only meet our needs but also collaborate with other nonprofits that might need space," Chloe Learey, Winston Prouty executive director, said, "This will create an exciting opportunity to work together in new ways."

Winston Prouty's winning bid was \$2.75 million. It is anticipating a loan of about \$500,000, depending on the sale of the current building and capital campaign. Brattleboro Music Center has signed a purchase and sale agreement for Winston Prouty's existing facility.

The Winston Prouty Center for Child Development provides inclusive education and family support to promote the success of children and families. It is comprised of the Early Learning Center and Community Based Services, which includes Children's Integrated Services, the state of Vermont's program for providing support to young children (prenatal to 6) and their families; the Early Education Initiative collaboration with Windham Southeast Supervisory Union; and Family Supportive Housing, a program to help families with young children who are homeless find and maintain housing.

The Early Learning Center offers early care and education for children age 14 months through five years. Children's Integrated Services includes early intervention, family support, early childhood family mental health, nursing, and specialized child care.

Currently Prouty serves about 50 families in its facility on Guilford Street. Moving to the former Austine campus would allow it to add 15 or 20 more families. In its community-based programs, Prouty serves another 150 families on any given day.

The move also will enable Winston Prouty to add infant care to the Early Learning Center and allow some of Prouty's partner agencies to work together under the same roof.

"That will be more efficient and make collaboration better," said Learey.

Prouty's vision for the former Austine campus is to create partnerships with other organizations that buy into the campus and would be similar to a condo association. Currently, High Five Adventure Learning, INSPIRE School for Autism, Garland School, UVM Extension and New England Center for Circus Arts are among the organizations renting space on the campus.

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