

# Brattleboro Reformer

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## Brattleboro's Winston Prouty finishes move to Austine Campus Former Austine Campus now home to child development center

By Maddi Shaw

**BRATTLEBORO >>** After just three months of renovations, the folks at the Winston Prouty Center for Child Development are nearly all settled in to their new digs and gearing up for one of their newest program additions.

Starting Monday, July 25, the center will provide infant care, an offering that is rare to come by in many Vermont towns according to Winston Prouty Center Executive Director Chloe Learey. Approximately three babies will begin the new program on Monday, and there is a max capacity of eight infants in terms of group size with two teachers in the classroom.

"In our community there's very little regulated infant care," said Learey. "Many people leave infants with family members, there are options, but not licensed regulated options, so we felt that was a community need.

Learey noted there are several people on the waiting list, including pregnant mothers.

In early January of this year, the U.S. Bankruptcy Court approved Winston Prouty's purchase of the former Austine School for the Deaf campus. By April, renovations began and then around the first week of July the center moved from their old building across the street from Living Memorial Park to 209 Austine Drive, the former Austine Campus. All offices and classrooms officially re-opened on July 11.



Winston Prouty moved into Vermont Hall at the Austine campus in early July 2016. (Kristopher Radder — Brattleboro Reformer)

The Winston Prouty Center decided it wanted to expand the facilities in 2013 after it conducted a strategic plan. Space was its main concern and staff were initially ready to pursue a \$2.4 million expansion of its facility, but ended up relocating at the former Austine Campus after their a winning bid of \$2.75 million was approved. But given the opportunity to lease other buildings out to interested parties and having landlord positions over the present tenants, Learey and her team took the opportunity.

"Not only could we help revitalize a great community resource, it would financially be more beneficial to the organization to have this asset than to build on our own little plot of land," said Learey.

There are two former dorm rooms at approximately 5,000 square feet available for rent or purchase on the campus. There is also the lower floor of the Vermont building that is about 12,000 square feet in size that is ready for rent or purchase and then the second floor of the Vermont building that is for purchase as well. Both rooms offer views of Wantastiquet Mountain.

In addition, the former Austine Campus cafeteria, which has access to a commercial kitchen, may be rented for events. For questions on these properties and other at the campus, email Chloe Learey at [chloe@winstonprouty.org](mailto:chloe@winstonprouty.org) or by phone 257-7852 x301

Learey asked that locals support this and perhaps even join them.

"My hope is that people really understand that we need the community support with this project and campus. While we are happy to take the lead in making sure it just didn't wither away like so many campuses have, I'm really glad to be apart of revitalizing it, but we cannot do it alone. Whether it's eventually financial support and the campus campaign, I want people to know it's a resource for the community."

Despite the vacant rooms, many children filled the classrooms with playful laughter and smiles. Children ages 3 to 5 followed instruction from their teachers to the game of "head, shoulders, knees and toes," or played in the sandbox or with the playhouse kitchen or train set.



Sarah Bemis reads while Ava Cota, 3, left, and Steven Patrick, 5, listen at the new Winston Prouty Center for Child Development on Friday. (Kristopher Radder — Brattleboro Reformer)

According to the Center's website, 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 (0 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.

While lack of space and a desire for expansion was the main desire for the move, Learey noted another benefit to the children — outdoor space, which allows for access to trails, the woods, ponds and more.

"We were fortunate to be across from Memorial Park and now we have our own park," Learey said with a chuckle.

Currently the former Hilltop Montessori School playground stands at the campus and workers are in the process of removing it to make room for the playground equipment that is fit for Prouty kids. Learey said this will involve a tree crane transporting items such as the sandbox and other structures from the old location to Austine Drive.

Lastly, Learey said her team is in the process of deciding what to do with another new addition classroom. In the Strategic Plan that Winston Prouty designed, it discussed what might the need be for its clients and the community. Learey said they have discussed providing a classroom that would allow biological parents to visit their kids that are in child protection. Another thought is to provide an inclusive classroom that is more focused on kids with special needs. They are also exploring the option of providing a toddler program. Learey says she hopes to come to a decision by September of this year.



Victoria Nelson, 5, left, and Dory Lyford, 5, right, play in sand at the new Winston Prouty Center for Child Development on Friday. (Kristopher Radder — Brattleboro Reformer)

every dollar invested in high quality early education and care is helping to ensure a more prosperous future for the entire state."

The purpose of the community forum is for the Blue Ribbon Commission to learn from Vermonters about their child care needs and challenges, and to answer the following three questions: 1. What would help you the most with respect to accessing high-quality child care? 2. What are the responsibilities of Vermont to help ensure all Vermonters have access to high-quality child care? 3. What should we do to make accessible, high-quality child care more affordable in Vermont?

To follow up, contact Winston Prouty executive director Chloe Learey at 802-257-7852 x11 or [chloe@winstonprouty.org](mailto:chloe@winstonprouty.org).

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Winston Prouty executive director Chloe Learey sits in the infant room that will open to the public on Monday, July 25. (Kristopher Radder — Brattleboro Reformer)

Currently the children are mixed into classrooms by different abilities, economic backgrounds and gender. Learey said she is keeping this balanced mix in mind for the infant program as well.

In addition, this upcoming Tuesday, July 26, Learey will facilitate a forum on behalf of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High-Quality Affordable Childcare. The community forum will take place at the Vermont Hall from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.

The Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High-Quality Affordable Child Care was formed because the state recognizes Vermonters' need to access high-quality affordable childcare. According to a press release, 90 percent of brain development occurs in the first five years of life and more than 70 percent of Vermont children under age six have all available parents in the labor force, making high quality programs available to all children in Vermont.

"Such programs are crucial to giving children a strong foundation for future success in school, relationships and life," the press release states. "Additionally, easing childcare challenges for working parents creates a stronger, more stable workforce. Moreover,