

Friends Center for Children

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Friends Center for Children to Open Additional Free Teacher Housing as Solution to Increase Educator Compensation Without Burdening Students' Families with Unaffordable Tuition



NEW HAVEN — As one early childhood care and education program prepares for the new school year, two of its teachers and their families are getting ready to move – but they will be living rent-free – in brand-new housing now under construction.

Through a groundbreaking program, the new housing brings Friends Center for Children's current total of teachers housed to six, or 20% of its current teachers. By 2027, the innovative early childhood education provider aspires to provide 30% of its expanded 80-teacher workforce with this salaried benefit. Friends Center's Teacher Housing Initiative was first made possible in 2021 after the school was gifted two properties, as well as their refurbishing and furnishing.

Today, Allyx Schiavone, executive director of Friends Center for Children, showcased the newest teaching housing, still under construction. In her remarks, she highlighted that while the housing solution increases educator compensation, it is but a first step by a single child care provider in addressing the national child care affordability and access crisis, and the poverty wages paid to early childhood educators.

"Friends Center for Children's Teacher Housing Initiative represents a bold economic solution for the early education industry's workforce crisis by drastically reducing educators' living expenses and providers' operating costs – and it can be replicated anywhere," Schiavone said. "Early educators are essential to Connecticut's economy and the health and well-being of our youngest learners. But for too long, our industry has forced teachers to scrape by on poverty-level wages. By relieving teachers of the significant burden of paying rent, our Teaching Housing Initiative presents an original model for how communities can compensate educators with the wages and long-term support they deserve."

The new housing currently under construction, slated to open later this fall, was designed and is being built as part of the Yale School of Architecture's Jim Vlock First Year Building Project. Since 1967, this program has provided first-year architecture graduate students the opportunity to translate their classroom experience into real-world projects that serve pressing societal needs.

The partnership with the Yale School of Architecture is slated to lead, over the next five years, to in total, the design and building of four houses each housing two teachers and their families. The five new houses will be adjacent to each other and are being built next to existing Friends Center teacher housing, creating a community and shared social environment.

"The Yale School of Architecture's Jim Vlock First Year Building Project was created with innovative solutions to social challenges in mind," said Deborah Berke, dean of the Yale School of Architecture. "We are honored to partner with Friends Center for Children to create more opportunities for teachers to live in the communities they work so hard to support. I hope other institutions nationwide will see this as a model."

Friends Center's teacher housing is available for educators to offset living costs. Residents are encouraged to set personal financial goals, such as buying their own home, purchasing a car or pursuing higher education. They are provided a financial coach to help them save for the future and achieve those goals. Eligible participants must fall into one of the following categories: Annual salary of \$38,500 or less for a single adult, annual salary of \$64,000 or less for one adult with children, or annual household income of \$79,000 or less for two adults with children. As a transitional housing program designed to set residents on a path toward financial stability, participants may continue to live in teacher housing by reapplying annually.

The Teacher Housing Initiative expands Friends Center's leading-edge efforts to address a national challenge across the child care industry – high staff turnover and poverty-level wages – using free housing to transform how early educators are compensated by their employers and supported by their overall school communities. In Connecticut, early child care educators earn on average \$16.47 per hour. According to the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment's most recent Early Childhood Workforce Index, published in 2020, which uses 2019 Bureau of Labor Statistics data, when state-by-state cost of living is accounted for, Connecticut ranks 36 out of the 50 states plus the District of Columbia.

"Before I began working at Friends Center, I was constantly stressed out about finding a safe and affordable place for my family to live," said Kristen Calderon, who has been a teacher at Friends Center since 2018. "The free housing program has been a lifesaver. For the first time in his life, my son has a yard to play in, and we don't have to worry about being on the streets anymore. These new houses will make more teachers' lives better, just like our home improved ours." - Friends Center teacher



Friends Center teacher Kristen Calderon and her son enjoy new proximity to work and river views in their Front Street apartment, one of – as of fall 2023, six – units that provide teachers rent-free housing as a part of Friend Center's Teacher Housing Initiative.



One of Friends Center's first teacher houses — a picture-perfect single family on Howard Street — is a rent-free home for a preschool teacher and her family as part of Friend Center's Teacher Housing Initiative.



Friends Center for Children provides early childhood care and education for children ages three months to five years. Our year-round, full time program offers a child-centered learning experience, values-based curriculum and a community of care that includes skilled and dedicated educators, family participation, and a comprehensive emotional well-being program. Our mission is: educate children, empower families, inspire teachers, engage community, embrace diversity, embody equity.



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