

Nonprofit daycare builds housing for teachers in New Haven to fight high housing costs



Vincent Gabrielle

Aug. 15, 2023 Updated: Aug. 15, 2023 7:03 a.m.



Adam Hopfner of the Yale School of Architecture shows off a model of the under-construction house for preschool teachers that he is standing in with Allyx Schiavone, executive director of Friend's Center for Children during a tour in August of 2023.

Tucked into a leafy corner at the Friends Center for Children in New Haven, a Quaker-founded daycare and preschool is building a “village” of homes for their teachers. The nonprofit hopes to provide homes for 30 percent of their teachers by 2027.

“In Connecticut we are 35th with regard to wages for early education teachers relative to cost of living,” said Allyx Schiavone executive director of Friends Center for Children. “We are paying women poverty level wages in this state and we really feel we need to do better.”

The initiative began in 2020, when the school used a \$750,000 charitable gift to buy two properties for teachers to live in rent-free. In addition to one home under construction, four more are planned for the Fair Haven site.



Paris Pierce, a preschool teacher at Friends Center for Children stands in front of the home that the nonprofit is providing her and her family rent-free. In the next few years her neighbors will be other teachers employed by Friends Center and their families. Aug 14, 2023, New Haven Connecticut.

Eventually, they would like to have 22 units to provide housing for teachers. This fall, two early childhood educators will be moving into brand new homes.

Schiavone explained that current federal and state funding levels were not enough to raise teacher salaries and that most parents could not afford to make up the difference in tuition leading to chronic low pay. This fall, federal pandemic support for child care will end. Friends Center for Children surveyed their teachers for their biggest expenses and, perhaps unsurprisingly, housing was the biggest expense.

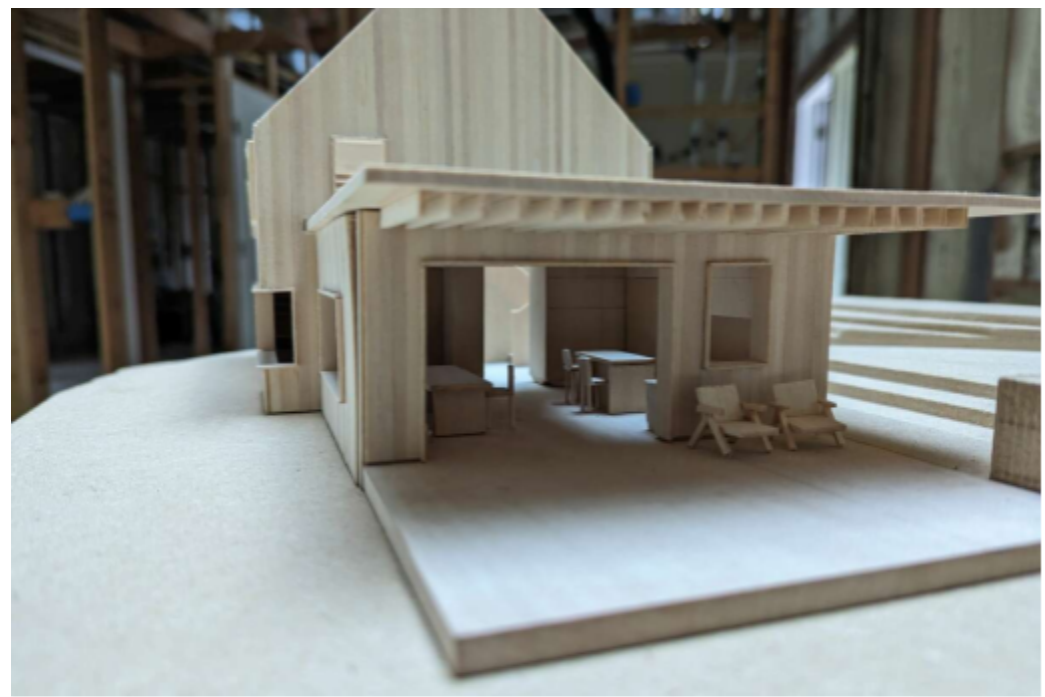
“Providing free housing for teachers is a much more economical way to look at raising salaries because you only have to raise the funds once to buy the home, then they can live there forever,”

said Schiavone, who hosted a tour of the construction site in the city's Fair Haven Heights neighborhood on Monday.

She explained that the money for the houses had come from donors and partnerships. The almost-finished house behind her was built in partnership with the Jim Vlock First Year Building Project of the Yale School of Architecture. First year students in the school of architecture designed and built the home around the needs of teachers and their families.

“We met with a bunch of Friends Center teachers and ... they talked with us about what their day-to-day lives looked like,” said Jessica Chen, a master’s student at the Yale School of Architecture. “What does it feel like to move through the house?”

The house was designed around parenthood. There are large storage cabinets, and closet space, for things like strollers and car seats. An expansive kitchen leads out to what will become a



A model of a home for preschool teachers built by students at the Yale School of Architecture is shown in the future kitchen during a tour of the building site on Aug 14, 2023 in New Haven Connecticut. The home will be part of a cluster of rent-free houses for teachers working at Friends Center for Children.



"Critical to this project is understanding that architecture isn't for architects," said Adam Hopfner director of the First Year Building Project at the Yale School of Architecture. He explained the care and communication that went into the design of the Friends Center for Children home, plenty of storage space and "near passivehouse" energy efficiency.

higher than the national average.

"It's a way of counterbalancing the broken system we're in," said Schiavone. "If you want to raise teacher salaries to a livable, professional wage you have to come up with those funds every year and we can't do that in the absence of state or federal funding."

Schiavone explained that the plan is to purchase and build housing near all Friends Center for Children schools in New Haven suitable for teachers at different phases of their lives including multi-family housing and single-family homes.

The goal she explained is ultimately to enable teachers to save for their own homes. Teachers are paired with a financial counselor who will help them save money for down payments on mortgages.

Paris Pierce, a teacher at Friends Center for Children and mother of three, is already living in one of the Friend Center's homes. Her home was purchased along with the two acres of land that the other houses will be built on.

terraced, partially-forested common greenspace.

"We have approval to develop additional dwellings on this site over the course of the next few years," said Adam Hopfner, director of the Vlock Building Project. "The notion is that these houses will form a community themselves. This shared greenspace where the teachers and their children can come together and help support one another."

In June of this year, CT Insider found that while rents statewide had closed the gap with the national average, that was more a function of other states catching up with Connecticut's high rents. New Haven rents are still roughly 8%



The brick house in front was purchased with two acres of land by Friends Center for Children as rent-free teacher housing. The grey house in the rear is a new home in what will be a cluster of five houses on the site. Aug 14, 2023, New Haven Connecticut.



A plan of the preschool teacher "village" built by Friends Center for Children as rent-free housing for preschool teachers and their families is displayed at a press event on Aug 14, 2023 in New Haven Connecticut.

“Once they showed me the house I was sold,” said Pierce, “My kids they couldn’t wait. Having their own rooms, they were like ‘What?!’”

She said that having the house was a massive relief to her as a single mother.

“It took such a burden off of me,” Pierce said. “To wake up every morning with that safety net is amazing.”

Pierce is planning on staying there as long as she can to save money for a house. Her kids can attend soccer and dance lessons for her young daughter and son. Her third child is one year old and attends Friend’s Center. Pierce said that both she and her kids were excited for the other teachers and their families to move in.

“I love that they have children,” said Pierce. “I guess that’s what I’m most excited about.”



Written By Vincent Gabrielle

Vincent Gabrielle is a reporter with Hearst Connecticut Media Group. He is an award-winning science journalist who has covered COVID-19, Manhattan Project legacy waste disposal, cryptocurrency miners and mountain snorkelers. Raised in western Massachusetts, he’s lived all over the country and worn a lot of unusual hats. You can find him on weekends looking for horseshoe crabs near New Haven.