

Proposal for Expanded Childcare Facility on Otter Creek Child Center Site

1. Childcare Needs in Vermont and Addison County

The State of Vermont is struggling to fill the demand for high quality, full day, year-round early care and learning programs. In February 2022, Let's Grow Kids produced its latest biannual report on the state of child care in Vermont, titled "Stalled At The Start, Vermont's Child Care Challenge: An Analysis of the Supply of and Demand for Regulated Child Care for Children Birth through Five in Vermont." In the most general terms, the report concludes that "there have been statistically significant changes in the percent of infants and toddlers likely to need care who do not have access to regulated child care programs." In fact, for infants and toddlers more than 6,043 slots would need to be added to meet the demand for children likely to need care. In Addison County, 471 infants and 240 toddlers—711 total—are likely to need care, and yet current capacity can only provide slots for 148 infants and 111 toddlers. The report also shows an estimated need for 148 additional preschool spots to meet demand.

Anecdotally, over the last 15-17 years, we have lost nearly 50% of licensed child care programs in Addison County (including nine in the past two years alone), two school-based programs closed at the end of 2020-21 school year, and we expect that another private program will close shortly, which will eliminate approximately 20 slots. The overall stress on the existing programs makes staff retention an ongoing challenge and physical plants are typically small, awkward retrofits of former residences that are not candidates for meaningful expansion. To increase stability and predictability of service to families across the region, the time has come to build a new facility to better serve future generations of Addison County.

2. Otter Creek Child Care Center/College Street Children's Center

Otter Creek Child Center (OCCC) was founded in 1984 and is a private, non-profit organization serving children ranging in ages, 6 weeks to 6 years. OCCC currently employs 16 teachers and has a licensed capacity to enroll 45 children. OCCC is based in a renovated turn-of-the-century farmhouse. College Street Children's Center (CSCC) was founded in 2001 and now operates under the 501(c)(3) designation of OCCC. CSCC currently employs 9 teachers and has a licensed capacity to enroll 24 children. CSCC is based in a renovated private home. Both Otter Creek and College Street centers are classified as Specialized Child Care Providers; this status allows the centers to partner with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to provide care for children who are in foster care. OCCC is governed by a 10-13 member board, with committees for Long Range Planning, Nominating, Expansion, Program and Personnel, and Building and Grounds.

In 2000, an agreement between Middlebury College, United Way of Addison County, Inc., Addison County Child Care Services, Bristol Family Center, Inc., Mary Johnson Children's Center, Inc. (MJCC), and Otter Creek Child Center, Inc. (OCCC) created the Middlebury Early Care and Education Consortium. This consortium was the first step in formalizing a joint effort to support the provision of high-quality early care and education resources within the community. The consortium resulted in the creation of the College Street Children's Center in 2001. Though the agreement and a subsequent MOU formally expired in August of 2017, Middlebury College has continued to contribute significant funding to these local childcare centers.

The original consortium agreement was not intended to be a long-term solution, especially given the need for expansion. Also, OCCC's and CCCC's facilities cannot be renovated to accommodate growing programmatic needs. As such, it became clear several years ago that the better long-term strategy would be to combine those centers into a single new facility that increases the number of available spaces for infant, toddler, and preschool care in our area, and creates a replicable model for successful, sustainable childcare centers in other towns across the state. The new center will double the capacity of the childcare slots of current offerings, with increases in all age groups. Continuity of care is recognized by multiple organizations as a strongly recommended practice and most parents prefer it. Therefore, the new center would allow infants to stay until they are school age.

Currently, to address the long-term childcare needs in Addison County, childcare experts and others in the Addison County community have formed the ***Community Childcare Expansion Team (CCET)***, which is focused on building a new childcare facility in the Town of Middlebury that would double the capacity of OCCC and CCCC. The team includes the following members:

Middlebury (town) participants:

- Cheryl Mitchell, PhD, Early Care and Learning Partnership, Inc. (ECLP), founder of Addison County Parent Child Center, and later of two other Addison County childcare programs, 10 years in the Vermont State Agency of Human Services, founder and president of the Early Care and Learning Partnership, Inc.
- Johana "Jody" Brakeley, M.D., Developmental Behavioral Pediatrician recently retired; ECLP board member.
- Linda January, Executive Director, Otter Creek Child Center; Board Member, Early Care and Learning Project
- Doumina Noonan, Children's Integrated Services, Specialized Child Care Services Coordinator, Board Member of OCCC
- Holly Moriglioni, Champlain Valley Head Start

Middlebury College participants:

- Sue Ritter, J.D., Special Assistant to the President, Associate Secretary of the Corporation, Director of Community Relations.
- David Provost, Executive Vice President for Finance and Administration, & Treasurer
- Matthew Curran Director of Business Services
- Trish Dougherty, Academic Coordinator, Educational Studies, Board Member of OCCC

Others Involved in the Project:

- [Early Care and Learning Partnership, Inc.](#) Board Members including:
 - Darla Senecal, Regional Director, Addison, Bennington and Rutland Counties, Building Bright Futures
- Sherry Carlson, Chief Programs Officer, [Let's Grow Kids](#)
- [D.W. Arthur Associates Architecture](#), Waltham, MA. Lead: Dogan "Woodie" Arthur. D.W. Arthur Associates Architecture has significant experience in the design of childcare centers across the country, and they have received numerous design awards. Please see their [Early Education/Childcare Portfolio](#) and [Recent Recognition](#)

OCCC partners with Champlain Valley Head Start to provide services for children and families that promote school readiness, and include early education, health, nutrition, mental health, and services for children with special needs, and services for parents that promote family engagement, and include parent leadership and social service support.

Early Care and Learning Partnership, Inc. (ECLP) has been working to build capacity through workforce development initiatives such as creating a Master’s Degree program *The Policy and Practice of Nurturing Care*, in collaboration with Castleton University to encourage and nurture intermingling of disciplines, including but not limited to early care and learning and higher education, healthcare, social services, nursing, business sector, etc. ECLP also helped secure funding to support a collaborative course between the Patricia Hannaford Career Center and the Addison County Parent and Child Center. This course, entitled *Enhancing the Early Childhood Professional Workforce: Mindful-Mentoring to Equip both Entry-Level and Current Professionals with the Tools to Support Vermont’s Children and Families Today and Tomorrow* serves both entry level, pre-service candidates as well as current professionals in the early childhood field.

3. Proposed Childcare Capacity Increase

Currently, OCCC and CCCC serve 62 children a day. We anticipate that the new center will eventually serve approximately 139 children:

Age	Otter Creek Current	College Street Current	New Program Projected
Infants	8	6	24
1/2 year olds	8	6	24
2/3 year olds	9	9	27
3 year olds Pre-K	16	0	32
4 year old Pre-k			32
Total	41	21	139

CSCC and OCCC currently receive childcare subsidy and are specialized care providers; 52% of OCCC and 27% of CSCC enrollment are receiving Childcare Financial Assistance. To ensure that the new program continues to serve the entire Addison County area, 25% of the children enrolled must receive tuition assistance from the CCFAP. Both programs are enrolled in the Child and Adult Food Care Program and serve breakfast, lunch, and afternoon snacks. This will continue in the new facility.

It is important to note that both OCCC and CSCC are accredited through the [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#) (“NAEYC”) and are [5-STARS](#) (Step Ahead Recognition System), which is a quality standards program that works with parents to inform confident decisions about child care. Those statuses will carry over to the new facility.

4. Design of New Childcare Center Facility

The Community Child Care Expansion Project is a cooperative effort of families, Otter Creek Child Center, College Street Children’s Center, Middlebury College, the Early Care and Learning Partnership,

Champlain Valley Early Head Start, Let's Grow Kids, Building Bright Futures, area employers, educational institutions, and towns. It is a response to a decade-long concern by families and employers about the lack of high-quality affordable care. This project addresses an urgent need for infant and preschool-age childcare in our community and will provide an important boost to the local economy. The project includes:

A state-of-the-art, 12,000+ square foot building (part renovation, part new construction);

- ADA compliant;
- serving 139 children ages six weeks to five years;
- within a one-mile radius of the two largest employers in Addison County;
- serving a cross section of families of all income levels, cultures, and backgrounds;
- creating 28 new jobs;
- serving as a workforce development hub for the early care and learning industry; and
- a learning lab for high school and college students.

Many years in the planning, the project now has a physical location in the historic downtown district of Middlebury, site plans completed by Otter Creek Engineering, and conceptual drawings developed by D.W. Arthur Associates Architecture, Waltham, MA. We anticipate seeking permit approval in early 2023. That said, we have been in communication with the Town of Middlebury and they are in support of the chosen site. The project has a strong and diverse leadership team, a committed group of parents, and the enthusiastic support of community members.

The project is a renovation of the current Otter Creek facility with a substantial, attached, ADA compliant addition which will be constructed in the location of the existing barn (the barn would be removed). We plan to use the topography of the site to allow for two stories with ingress and egress on both floors. The new driveway and parking area adjacent to the Otter Creek facility will move traffic off the main road to provide greater safety for children and greater convenience for families. Expansion of the available play areas will provide dedicated areas for infants and toddlers and expanded nature-based education opportunities. The site slopes down to the Otter Creek and the footpath maintained by the community. The building is designed to conserve energy, provide a variety of state-of-the-art classrooms for different ages of children and many shared spaces (family greeting areas, kitchen and dining areas, a large motor space and an atelier).

Staff rooms, a community early care and learning library, a multi-purpose room/gross motor play space, and large and small conference rooms will enhance the use of the facility as a workforce development center for the community. Students from Hannaford Career Center, Community College of Vermont, Castleton University, and Middlebury College will have the opportunity for hands-on-learning of both child development and non-profit management.

The project timeline is designed to avoid disrupting services during construction. Once the new addition is completed, children and teachers will move into that space while the old building is renovated, and then a full complement of children will be enrolled.

This creative infill development project would increase the capacity of two existing childcare programs

while remaining in the Town of Middlebury core where this use contributes to the vitality of our state-designated downtown. The project also meets the intent of our Town Plan and 2020 Down Master Plan and has been well coordinated with Town staff.

5. Importance to Vermont/Replicable Model for Other Communities

The ability to provide adequate, affordable, and consistent services that support all children and families has been a state-wide concern in Vermont for over a decade. This project will create a replicable model for public-private partnership to address a chronic issue that is fundamental to the health and wellbeing of Vermont families, and crucial to economic growth and development in predominantly rural areas. Our goal is to demonstrate to other counties in Vermont that it is possible to engage large employers, land owners, NGOs, town governments, and others in efforts to create thriving childcare environments that will provide a positive return on their financial support and investment of relevant expertise. Middlebury College is planning to make an investment in the new childcare center and will work with other employers to join this important effort. Such an effort is not as simple as starting a business or building a facility – it is about designing a holistic programmatic response at a community scale for an issue that impacts the entire state.

The OCCC Board and leaders of partner organizations are committed to fundraising and grant writing to support the renovation of the existing Otter Creek Child Center and completion of the new facility. Because the new facility will continue to operate as a not-for-profit, creating systems and practices to cultivate donors for long-term financial support will be an important part of our fundraising strategy. OCCC received an initial planning grant in 2020, from Let's Grow Kids: Make Way for Kids Grant (MWFK); that was used to support critical preliminary architectural design work. In spring 2022, Otter Creek received another MWFK grant to support fundraising and development efforts. A third MWFK grant has been secured to support the planning and construction documents and the environmental assessment that will need to be completed.

While the primary focus of our project is on capital needs, we also recognize that the quality of any childcare experience is based on the interdependence of the physical environment and quality of teaching and service. As such, we envision our childcare facility as a living laboratory for training the future childcare workforce. Middlebury College will continue to facilitate placement opportunities for students who are interested in early childhood education, and we expect that those efforts will be readily transferable across the state.

6. Benefit to Local Community

As noted in detail above, the new center will offer an increase in child care capacity across a broader age range in a facility that is fully ADA compliant. In the 2019 Vermont Department of Labor and State Workforce Development Board's [2019 Regional Workforce Summit Report](#), an analysis for Addison County noted that "Lack of consistent, adequate childcare" was listed as a weakness, while "Explore partnership opportunities to address challenges in retaining employees (e.g., childcare)" was listed as an opportunity. The new center will have a direct and immediate impact on this persistent issue.

The center will also bring at least 28 new jobs to Addison County. Given the quality of the physical plant and the educational philosophy, we anticipate attracting outstanding teachers in a competitive

market.

	Otter Creek Current	College Street Current	New Program Projected
Full time Teachers	13	9	39
Part Time Teachers	3	0	13
Other Staff	2.5	2	7.5
Total	18.5	11	59.5

Comparison of the number of current jobs vs. the number of jobs once the project is completed.

Currently, both Otter Creek and College Street offer a salary scale based on experience and education that includes an automatic yearly increase, with a base wage of \$15.27 an hour (salary scale is attached). The following benefits are also offered; employer paid short-term and long-term disability insurance, employer paid group life insurance policies, employer paid AD & D insurance, generous combined time off (PTO), paid holidays and snow days, professional development support, Employee Assistance Program, and childcare discounts. Starting in the 2022-23 school year both centers will also offer the following; dental insurance, vision insurance, dependent care options, employer 2% contribution to a Simple IRA, docs by phone, and a tuition reimbursement payment of \$500 per year. The goal with the new combined program is to continue to increase wages and to offer a comprehensive benefits package that includes health insurance, which is a priority for recruiting and retaining qualified staff.

When positions are added depends on when the different phases of construction are completed. Based on current timelines we are hopeful to add the following positions:

Projected Start Date	Classroom	Position	Number of Hires	Education Required
April 2024	New Infant Room	Lead Infant Teacher	1	ECE Apprentice, CCV Child Care Certificate, Associate Degree. or Bachelor Degree in Early Childhood Ed. or Related Field
		Assistant Infant Teacher	2.5	Trainee, CDA, or up to 12 credits of ECE courses
	Center Wide	Supervisor	1	Bachelor or Masters in ECE
Sept 2024	New Preschool Room	Lead Preschool Teacher	1	Bachelor Degree or Masters in Early Childhood Ed. or Related Field and ECE Teaching License
		Assistant Preschool Teacher	2.5	Trainee, CDA, or up to 12 credits of ECE courses

April 2025	Expand 1 Infant room from 6 to 8 children	Assistant Infant Teacher	1.5	Trainee, CDA, or up to 12 credits of ECE courses
	Expand 1 Young Toddler Room from 6 to 8 children	Assistant Young Toddler Teacher	1.5	Trainee, CDA, or up to 12 credits of ECE courses
	New Young Toddler Room	Lead Young Toddler Teacher	1	ECE Apprentice, CCV Child Care Certificate, Associate Degree. or Bachelor Degree in Early Childhood Ed. or Related Field
		Young Toddler Assistant Teachers	2.5	Trainee, CDA, or up to 12 credits of ECE courses
	Expand staffing in current Older Toddler Room	Assistant Older Toddler Teacher	.5	Trainee, CDA, or up to 12 credits of ECE courses
	New Older Toddler Room	Lead Older Toddler Teacher	1	ECE Apprentice, CCV Child Care Certificate, Associate Degree. or Bachelor Degree in Early Childhood Ed. or Related Field
		Older Toddler Assistant Teachers	2.5	Trainee, CDA, or up to 12 credits of ECE courses
		Supervisor	1	Bachelor or Masters in ECE
Sept 2025	New Preschool Classroom	Lead Preschool Teacher	1	Bachelor Degree or Masters in Early Childhood Ed. or Related Field and ECE Teaching License
		Assistant Preschool Teachers	2.5	Trainee, CDA, or up to 12 credits of ECE courses

In April 2024, the current cook will go from 30 hours a week to 40 hours a week and we will discuss at that time if we need to bring in a part time kitchen support. The current administrative assistant will also increase hours from part time to full time. In September 2025, the chart above shows us opening up one more preschool classroom, we have the capacity to open up two preschool classrooms at that time and we will do so if the demand is there and we can fill another classroom.

7. Key Points

*Upon completion, this project will increase child care capacity in rural Addison County from 62 children to 139 in a modern, ADA-compliant facility.

*Upon completion, this project will create at least 30 new jobs for program staff, and improve compensation and benefits for all employees.

*Upon completion, this project will galvanize the corporate, higher education, and non-profit sectors to collaborate in new and creative ways to create a model for the rest of the state of Vermont to address a chronic problem that impacts each sector.