

Bristol Town Administrator

From: Tasha Ball <tballwillowell@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, November 30, 2022 2:30 PM
To: Alison Thompson DaBica; Ian Albinson; Darla Senecal; Kris Perlee; knight@gmavt.net; Bristol Town Administrator
Cc: matthew schlein; Leanne Ruell; Suzanne Young
Subject: ARPA Funds
Attachments: Willowell ARPA Bristol.pdf

Hello Friends on the Bristol Select Board and ARPA Funding Committee,

I'm writing to express our excitement and optimism for the growth of the Wren's Nest Forest Preschool here in Bristol. Our commitment to the proposal submitted to the ARPA Committee last February remains.

The Wren's Nest Forest Preschool is a thriving and vibrant program, *but* we must secure our own property to remain sustainable for the long term. Wren's Nest Preschool needs its own property for a host of reasons, not least of which is the costly overhead of rent. We are currently in our eleventh year as a licensed preschool (previously one day a week), and our fifth year as a full time program accepting ACT 166 funds and state subsidy for low income students.

I'm writing today to let you know that we plan to apply for matching funds from the [Community Recovery and Revitalization Program](#) (CRR) that just opened this week!

We have identified a property just outside the village that we are interested in purchasing and hope to build a modest and practical building on that site where our school can remain and thrive. We are in communication with the land owner and they are ready to sell this spring. The \$200,000 we have requested from the Bristol ARPA funds would be used as a match for the large sum we apply for from the CRR program (we are able to apply for up to \$1,000,000 if not in excess of 20% of the overall cost).

The budget and proposal previously submitted to the Bristol ARPA committee (see attached) did not accurately take into account zoning costs, septic, and building supplies, but with these matching funds, we feel the funding could have a very real and meaningful impact on early education in Bristol.

We would be happy to create some sort of contract that gives enrollment priority to low income children and Bristol residents. We would also be happy to resubmit our budget and proposal taking into account the possible CRR funding and the current expanded scope of the project.

Securing our own property would also allow us more freedom to run summer programming throughout the year-- a very real need in the area as seen by our waitlisted camps the past two years.

Please keep me up to date on future meetings, and let me know if I can answer any other questions as you work to allocate this funding.

With Gratitude,
Tasha and the Willowell Team

PS please share this email with other members of the committee. I do not have everyone's contact. Thank you!

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Tasha Ball
she/her
Administrative Director

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Proposal Title:

Keeping High Quality and Affordable Pre-K Programming in Bristol

Contact:

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Amount Requested:

\$100,000 - \$200,000

Proposal Summary:

The Willowell Foundation seeks to continue running our Wren's Nest Forest Preschool in Bristol, Vermont. We are asking the Bristol ARPA committee to consider allocating funds from the relief funding for this project. We have been running the Wren's Nest Forest Preschool at Wild Roots Farm (in Bristol) for the past year, and plan to continue into the 2022-2023 school year. This well respected and high quality program is in its 10th year. Although the site at Wild Roots is wonderful, we feel we are at a juncture where we need to acquire our own land and space to run this program. We feel welcome at Wild Roots Farm, but we are not sure it is our long term, sustainable answer to our forever home. There are multiple challenges associated with renting from a working farm and homestead. We believe keeping this high quality preschool in Bristol will benefit the community by assisting young families, attracting new residents to the town, help strengthen the workforce, and support the youth in our community. We ask the Bristol ARPA Committee to consider allocating some of the funds coming to Bristol to helping Willowell secure a long term, permanent location for our program. We also run summer programming— much of which is waitlisted and in high demand for this age group (3-6 years old).

Organization Description and History:

Wren's Nest is a licensed, nature-based program for preschool-age children. Our current cohort of 21 students at Wren's Nest learn by interacting with the natural world through a hands-on, evidence-based curriculum. The preschool is a program of the Willowell Foundation, a non-profit organization serving Addison county (and beyond) for the past 21 years with outdoor programming for youth ages 3-19. Willowell programs integrate the sciences, arts, and humanities into place-based and outdoor enrichment programs, schools, camps, and after school programming. Currently Wren's Nest is located on the Wild Roots Community Farm in Bristol and runs Mondays through Fridays, from 8:00 a.m.- 2:30 p.m., with an extended programming option from 2:30-4:30 p.m.

Wren's Nest is in its 10th year as a licensed 4 STAR¹ program. We are a Specialized Care Provider² meaning that our staff are trained and prepared to work with children from all backgrounds. As a Specialized Care Provider, low income or struggling families are able to receive state subsidies to cover all or some of their tuition. If the Act 166³ funding or the State subsidy does not



¹ STARS (STEP AHEAD RECOGNITION SYSTEM)

STARS is Vermont's quality recognition system for child care, preschool, and afterschool programs. Programs that participate in STARS are stepping ahead — going above and beyond state standards to provide high-quality professional services that meet the needs of children and families.

(<https://dcf.vermont.gov/childcare/providers/stars>)

² Specialized Child Care provides vulnerable children and high-risk families with quality child care and specific supports that help meet their needs, strengthen their families, and promote their children's development. Specialized Child Care (SCC) is part of the continuum of coordinated services offered through Children's Integrated Services (CIS) in Vermont communities. SCC offers an array of services and supports to families and children with identified specialized child care needs. Specialized Child Care also supports child care providers and CIS specialists working with families to assure that these children experience success in child care settings that meet their needs. Specialized Child Care providers have made a commitment to providing the best quality care to vulnerable children in their care. They agree to continuous professional development that targets the social emotional development of children to enhance and improve their skills in a safe and supportive environment. (<https://dcf.vermont.gov/childcare/providers/specialized>)

³ What is Act 166?

Act 166 of 2014 provides access to publicly-funded prekindergarten education for Vermont students. All prekindergarten education programs, including Head Start and public school-operated programs, must meet specific requirements to operate in Vermont. The State Board of Vermont created administrative rules to guide Act 166 implementation by the Agency of Education and the Agency of Human Services.

What is High-Quality, Effective Prekindergarten Education?

What defines Vermont Universal Prekindergarten Education is the implementation of high-quality, effective instruction by licensed educators who use evidence-based practices within intentionally designed early

cover a family’s needs, the Willowell Foundation offers scholarships to make all of our programs financially accessible. Wren’s Nest tuition reflects the per-hour rate that the state has allotted to support pre-k education for families. This tuition allows us to run a quality program and pay our staff a fair and livable wage. We are therefore able to hire and retain licensed, seasoned, and caring educators who remain with the program over time.

Our program aligns with the MAUSD school district calendar, observing all holidays and summers. We are open from 8:00 am - 4:30 pm and we enroll children ages 3-5. We have a high teacher to student ratio with an average of four teachers and 15 students per day. We currently have a total of 21 students enrolled this year, with 15 students attending per day. By keeping the program in Bristol and finding a new site, we could potentially offer 3-5 new spots (bumping our daily enrollment to 18-20). Should we receive these funds, we would also prioritize enrollment for Bristol residents. We would come up with a long term sustainability plan so Bristol knows they’re investing in something sustainable, durable, and for the residents of *this* town.

Below is a sample of our out-of-pocket tuition (the copay billed to families after the state pays the Act 166 pre-k money) for the 2022-2023 school year. Please note that all students who are income-eligible will receive a state scholarship subsidy for all or part of their tuition. Each year Willowell also provides scholarships to students who show need but do not meet the state's income threshold.

Number of Days Attending	Annual Cost	Monthly Payments (9 total)
2	\$1,097	\$122/month
3	\$3,474	\$386/month
4	\$5,852	\$650/month
5	\$8,229	\$914/month

For extended programming rates and other details please see the attached sample application.

Project Background:

learning environments. Early educators align curriculum with the Vermont Early Learning Standards while adapting experiences to support the full participation of each and every child to realize their full potential and promote successful outcomes.
 (<https://education.vermont.gov/student-support/early-education/universal-prekindergarten-act-166>)

There is a large childcare gap in all of Addison County. According to a study by Let's Grow Kids, 19% of preschoolers who need care in Addison County don't have access, and 48% don't have access to high quality (4-5 STAR) care. Luckily, with the State of Vermont's ACT 166 legislation implemented in 2014, the state will pay for the first ten hours per week of preschool for every 3, 4 and 5-year-old child in Vermont. The problem then becomes finding a suitable place to send children. There are more children in need of care than spaces available. Additionally, there is a shortage of quality programming to fulfill the existing need. With limited choices and far commutes, many parents opt to stay home with their young children even if they would prefer to work outside the home. This is a key part of the systemic workforce shortage we are seeing across Vermont.

Wren's Nest is a thriving and well-respected preschool in its 10th year of serving children ages 3-5 with innovative outdoor programming. Since fall of 2021 Wren's Nest has been located at Wild Roots Farm in Bristol. The previous three years we were located in New Haven, where we believed we would stay indefinitely, but were forced to move due to the pandemic.

Since our recent move to Bristol, our program has continued to thrive and our rosters are full with a waiting list. With the requested ARPA funds we plan to move Wren's Nest to a permanent home in Bristol, where we are the sole tenants or land owners and our future is more certain. This move would allow us a stable foundation from which we can expand our program to more families in the Bristol area. Should we receive these funds, we will give enrollment priority to Bristol residents while also opening the program to children from surrounding towns.

Project Description (Program Narrative):

The Willowell Foundation seeks \$100,000 to \$200,000 to help keep Wren's Nest in Bristol. Between permitting costs, infrastructure, and staffing costs associated with the move, we estimate that keeping the program in Bristol will cost upwards of \$500,000 over the course of 1-2 years. Once the program is open and running at our permanent location, it is a sustainable non-profit business model that will not need further town support. The Bristol



Selectboard will have little to no responsibilities associated with the project. Willowell will do all the work and there will be no further actions needed by the Selectboard to keep this preschool in Bristol. With no work for

Bristol, and large gains in supporting the community, attracting young families, and strengthening the workforce (both through parents being able to return to work *and* through possible employment opportunities at the program), awarding these funds to Wren’s Nest will be dollars spent on a long term and sustainable investment in the community. Without the funds, we risk needing to move the program to a new town.

The lack of child care in Addison County (and throughout Vermont) impacts **all of us**. Without high-quality, affordable child care, children miss out on crucial early childhood development opportunities, parents cannot get to work, and businesses struggle to recruit and retain employees. The percentage of children under the age of nine with a behavioral, emotional, mental health, or developmental condition has been increasing over time, while the utilization of services has remained the same or decreased. If children have access to high-quality early education, support can be made available at earlier ages with marked success. Finding outlets for children's feelings is a great way to build resilience and promote social emotional learning. Help the state lead the way in this effort by showing your support for these initiatives in Bristol.

Timeline:

Wren’s Nest Preschool is currently enrolling students for the Fall of 2022 class at Wild Roots Farm where we rent. Should we receive these funds, Willowell will step into action securing (or building) a safe and suitable structure to become the permanent home of this school. Pending all zoning, licensing, and permitting deadlines, we hope to start serving families in the Fall of 2023 or 2024.

Budget Narrative:

The Willowell Foundation does not currently have the infrastructure to house this program at the property where many of our other programs take place in Monkton, and it does not look to be sustainable for us to remain at Wild Roots for more than a couple of years. Our largest expense for this project will be to build or purchase a building that is up to code, safe, and will pass DCF licensing requirements in terms of septic capacity, fire safety, and child wellbeing measures. We realize the housing market is incredibly limited right now, but should we secure the funds, we estimate the total cost of a property for this program to be in the range of \$350,00.

In 2021 when we moved Wren’s Nest to Bristol we totaled \$18,000 in permitting costs (attorneys, septic



designs, and parking improvements). We anticipate needing a reserve of \$130,000 over two years in staffing costs to oversee the move, license the program, and hire the staff needed to open the program.

Should the Bristol Selectboard grant the requested funds, the remaining \$300,000 required for the project will be funded by other grants and a possible capital campaign, as well as a loan from the Vermont Community Loan Fund. We recognize \$100,000– \$200,000 is a large ask for the Town of Bristol, but we hope you will see the long-lasting and positive sustaining impacts this project will have for everyone in our little town (not just those with small children).

Estimated Project Budget

Item	Description	Cost
Building	Purchasing or constructing an appropriate and licensable preschool building.	\$350,000
Staffing	Oversight of permitting, licensing, and legal aspects of the building; creating avenues of PR to spread the word to Bristol residents who want enrollment priority; hiring staff to run the program; overall project management and oversight.	\$130,000
Permitting	Hiring attorneys and consultants for septic design, environmental impact, etc.	\$20,000
TOTAL		\$500,000

In Conclusion:

The Wren’s Nest Forest Preschool encourages young children to love the natural world through an immersive approach to nature-based, child-directed, and inquiry-driven curriculum. This program helps to ignite young humans' sense of belonging in natural and human communities. Wren’s Nest creates a warm and caring place for children to embody their natural sense of wonder, and care for all living creatures. We aim to foster children’s independence and understanding of the world through a joyful, play-based, and emergent approach to learning. We hope by keeping this fully outdoor and immersive curriculum in Bristol we can help foster the next generation of young citizens into well-rounded, inspired, humans who care about the environment, the people around them, and their engagement with the community as a whole.

Please do not hesitate to reach out directly to Tasha Ball (tballwillowell@gmail.com) should you have further questions or comments regarding this proposal.

