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Home for Little Wanderers to sell JP property, move some services to Walpole

Posted by Matt Rocheleau August 16, 2011 06:23 PM

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OUR NEW BUILDING—FROM SOUTH HUNTINGTON AVE.

(Courtesy: The Home for Little Wanderers)

A historic photo of The Home for Little Wanderers most well-known facility built in 1914 along South Huntington Avenue in Jamaica Plain.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

A prominent local child and family service nonprofit plans to sell a landmark 97-year-old special education school building and the 3.5-acre Jamaica Plain property it sits on, officials at the organization announced today.

In a move anticipated for the fall of 2012, [The Home for Little Wanderers](#) will relocate some programming and services from its oldest and most-well known facility, the [Knight Children's Center](#), located between South Huntington Avenue and the Jamaicaaway, to a section of its 166-acre site at [Longview Farm](#) in Walpole that is undergoing \$19-million in new construction.

Home for Little Wanderers, a 212-year-old nonprofit, has held other programming at other sites, including on former farmland in Walpole since 1940.

The Jamaica Plain campus comprises 55,000-square feet of buildings that house a year-round residential and day school treatment program for youth ages 5 to 13 with a range of emotional, behavioral, educational and psychiatric needs.

"The time to move the children to better conditioned settings has never been more urgent," the service agency said in a statement.

Around three or four years ago, the organization was discussing plans to

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redevelop facilities at its aging Jamaica Plain campus, but that idea fell through about two years ago amid funding constraints, the organization's executive vice president and CFO Kenneth E. Hamberg said by phone Tuesday.

"Despite our best efforts to keep the KCC program in the area, we were unable to redevelop the existing campus to accommodate the size and scope of the services we provide within our budget," the organization's board chair John Hailer said in the statement.

Pam Herbst, head of the agency's board real estate committee, added: "We could not ignore the fact that the Home will enjoy a million dollar annualized cost savings by consolidating the KCC program onto the Longview Farm Campus in Walpole."

The Jamaica Plain site, assessed by the city at \$8 million, is being marketed through an outside brokerage company, but there is no set asking price, Hamberg said. Instead, the organization is soliciting bid offers.

Officials said that while some of the programs at the Knight Children's Center will relocate, the agency itself has long-term plans to keep its administrative headquarters in Boston and the majority of its overall programming will continue to be run within the city.

Heather MacFarlane, spokeswoman for the Home for Little Wanderers, also said by phone Tuesday that the organization is looking for another site within the Boston for three programs – intensive foster care, adoption and preschool outreach programming – that are all housed in one wing of the Knight Children's Center.

Hamberg said the organization hopes to keep the Jamaica Plain campus running its normal operations until as close to the move as possible so the programming and services moving to Walpole can transition there in a relatively seamless manner.

"The Home is not leaving the Boston area and intends to remain a preeminent organization in the city for generations to come," the organization's announcement said. "The Home's presence is increasing in new ways as child welfare trends away from residential services."

The agency said it is often referred to in the community as "the orphanage in Jamaica Plain" and "the place that hosts the Toy Drive." The organization says it is the largest provider of mental health services in the Boston's public school system and operates 15 other Boston-based programs that offer community-based services in homes, hospitals and clinics.

"Throughout the Home's history as a leader in providing child welfare services to some of our state's most vulnerable children, we've always been committed to offering a safe and nurturing environment where youth can reach their full potential," the organization's president and CEO Joan Wallace-Benjamin said in the release.

"This is not the first time in its history that the Home has moved locations to better accommodate the changing needs in child care," she added. "When KCC opened in 1914 it was described as unique because it offered everything a child needed to thrive under one roof."

A new, state-of-the-art, two-story special education school and four new residences will be built at the Walpole site before the move, scheduled for sometime next fall.

When that \$19-million project that recently broke ground is complete, officials at the agency said the new facilities will allow them to offer services to more local children "through a consolidated and more cost-effective program;" provide "a far superior and healthier environment for the children currently being served at," the Jamaica Plain campus; and maximize the organization's

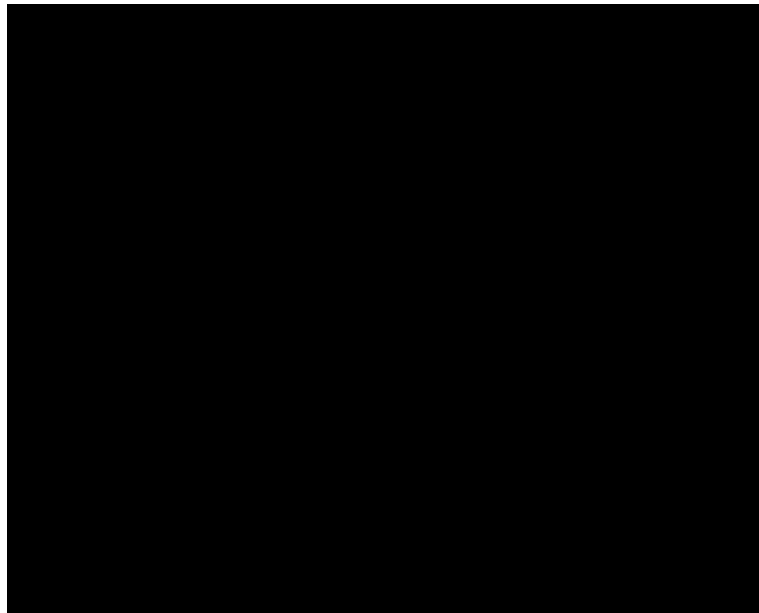
use of the former farmland – only a small portion, roughly 15 acres, of the Walpole site is currently being used.

That site, around 20 miles southwest of Boston, offers residential treatment for emotionally disturbed boys age 10 to 17 and the private, special education Clifford School. The facilities there presently include four classrooms, a computer lab, a resource room, a gymnasium, and a pre-vocational shop area for training in small engine and automotive repair, woodworking, and electricity.

With roots tracing back to the 1799 founding of an orphanage, The Home for Little Wanderers says it is the nation’s oldest and one of New England’s largest nonprofit child and family service agencies. With 20 programs run in the eastern part of the state, the organization staffs around 600 and provides services to more than 7,000 people through 13 locations in communities including Boston, Walpole, Waltham, and Plymouth.

“This is an exciting time for us,” president and CEO Wallace-Benjamin said. “The Home has developed a plan to fulfill a critical and changing need for expanded community-based programs ... Jamaica Plain is one chapter in our 200-year history. We look forward to beginning the next.”

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(Courtesy: The Home for Little Wanderers)

A virtual tour of plans for The Home for Little Wanderers' Longview Farm campus in Walpole.



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