

Millers River Educational Cooperative
Case Statement: An Educational Campus for Practical Living
THE VILLAGE SCHOOL
&
CAMP CARAVAN CENTER FOR CONTINUOUS EDUCATION



Dream and Vision for the Village School

The world needs compassionate inclusive leaders who lead by example, who live the principles they believe in. These leaders begin as children, cultivated by parents and schools who understand the task of preparing emotionally and intellectually strong individuals to serve the future of humanity and this planet.

With this task in mind, the Village School opened in 1989 with the mission of preparing children for the present and the future, developing their potential, strength and adaptability. As the school grew into a thriving institution, the need arose for a permanent home for the school.

Our dream and vision is to establish a permanent home for the Village School on a campus dedicated to continuous education, situated at Camp Caravan in Royalston, Massachusetts, serving Northwest Worcester County and northeast Franklin County.

Our Story

We are a group of parents, farmers, scientists, writers, and local business people, who incorporated in 1989 as the Millers River Educational Cooperative, Inc. (MREC), a non-profit organization dedicated to serving the educational needs of the North Quabbin region of Massachusetts. Many of us were inspired by studying in England in the early 1970's with John G. Bennett, philosopher, scientist, and educator.

We recognized the need for balance in education: for the physical body, the emotional life, and the mental capacities to work together in harmony, through a direct connection to the earth. This educational approach is the cornerstone of today's Village School.

Opened in 1989 as a preschool, today the school offers a comprehensive and tested preschool through sixth-grade education to more than sixty children.

Celebrating over 27 years of learning and growing

The Village School Mission

To create an educational model for children in rural areas, cultivating a direct contact with nature that connects children to their essential selves and awakens a sense of meaning in their lives.

Highlights of the Village School education

- **EMOTIONAL LEARNING**—singing, playing instruments, all of the arts, social engagement, cooperation, and kindness
- **INTELLECTUAL LEARNING**—rigorous and challenging academics, creative thinking, cultural studies
- **PHYSICAL LEARNING**—dance, yoga, large motor activities, and fine motor work, such as knitting, weaving, and carpentry
- **A DIRECT RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE**—the foundation that supports meaningful learning through daily outdoor recess, forest walks, gardening, farming experiences, and science classes

Why parents choose the Village School

- Many parents choose the school because they share our philosophy and approach.
- Others find us because their child has not thrived at their previous school and their child can thrive here.
- The affordable tuition and strong financial aid commitment make the school a viable option for most economic levels.
- Our alumni attend Bard, Berklee College of Music, Colby, Columbia, Hampshire, Harvard, Olin, R.P.I., U.C. Berkeley, Union, Yale, W.P.I and more, all programs that recognize and seek out the inquiring capable minds and leadership qualities of Village School graduates.

As we move towards our dream of a permanent home for the Village School, we completed Phase I of our goal, including the purchase of the Camp Caravan property, the renovation of existing buildings, and completion of architectural plans and site work for the new school. Join us now in funding Phase II.



Demand for hands-on, balanced education is high.

Phase II:

We need a new building to house the Village School!

Space needs are critical for the Village School, housed in the Royalston Town Common's old public school building for the past seventeen years.

- The number of students has more than doubled since the early years.
- Children are turned away because of lack of space.
- Our four-classroom rented building is outdated and significantly beyond capacity.
- Math groups meet under the stairs, music classes are held in hallways, and parents' meetings take place outdoors.
- The current lease expires September 2018 and the town requires the building for its own uses.

Responding to the need for a permanent home for the Village School and to fulfill the vision of offering continuing education to the greater community, we purchased the 55-acre Camp Caravan property in Royalston in 1998.

- This property can serve the educational program in its entirety.
- The new Village School building will serve 75 to 90 students, with spaces suitable for dance, drama, woodworking, pottery, and after school music lessons.
- The new school expands community resource programs including summer programs for children, seminars for teachers, after-school programs in the arts and environmental science classes for all ages.

In 2008, MREC began a \$3.4 million building campaign. Phase I raised \$1.2 million. Now Phase II, raising \$1.8 million, will build and complete a new home for the Village School.

We begin building our new home this Spring!

Your help is needed to complete the building of the school and finish Phase II.

Our decision to commit to The Village School was the best thing we've ever done as parents. This is an extraordinary school, with its emphasis on academics and nature and the arts, and kindness. Our children thrived at the school, and they learned hundreds of different things a day.

Sarah Briggs, Village School past parent

Phase III

Fulfilling the Long-term Vision Camp Caravan Center For Continuous Education (CCCCE)

Meeting weekly at Camp Caravan since 1998, the MREC Founders continue to renovate the buildings, working towards the goal of creating an integrated campus. Along with annual ten-day seminars, these meetings are also the source of our curriculum development. This work is emerging as the foundation for Camp Caravan to become a center for whole-life education, beginning with the Village School, and continuing through the teen years, middle age, and old age.

The Center for Continuous Education will provide:

- **Practical skills and craft for young people (ages 18-30)**—carpentry, cooking, gardening, weaving, woodworking
- **Programs for “centering” and to develop attention**—art, dance, meditation, yoga
- **Service opportunities**—community garden, companionship for elderly, work with children
- **Gap Year** for college bound students—living in cabins on the campus for a three-month immersion course in all of the above
- **Education seminars** for teachers
- **A retreat center for adults**—a facility for meditation retreats, week-long seminars in the practical application of the teachings of J.G. Bennett, artists’ retreats
- **Elder day care**—providing intergenerational activities and a natural setting of the highest quality

When the new Village School building is completed, the MREC focus of the next five years will be the development of the Center for Continuous Education.

See insert for building renovation accomplishments at Camp Caravan to date.

While working to improve the property, I feel it is I, myself, who is being transformed. I am more connected to the community because of the sustained continuous education Camp Caravan provides. It’s exciting to realize the property’s potential to serve people at every life stage.

Debra Strick, MREC member



Village School science class studying pond life at Camp Caravan



The renovated Auditorium building at Camp Caravan will be able to host community events, as well as the annual Village School play.



Arts workshop for adults at a summer seminar in one of the renovated buildings at Camp Caravan



MREC members working on renovating one of the five cabins on the Camp Caravan campus

Campaign Overview

Three-phase Goal: \$3,400,000

Phase I: \$1,200,000—Already Achieved

Phase I accomplishments include the purchase of the Camp Caravan property, renovation of the dance studio and large auditorium, installing a commercial kitchen, rebuilding three residential cabins, completing an eight room dormitory, installing a new well and septic system, and completion of the architectural plans and site work for the new school.

Phase II: \$1,800,000

\$1,000,000 Already Raised!

New Village School Building

Construction begins spring 2017

The frugal 10,000-square foot building, located on the Camp Caravan campus, will be the permanent home for the Village School. The building plans include room for additional expansion to accommodate future needs. With the new five-classroom building we can serve 75 to 90 full-time students, an ideal number for our school community and educational approach.

Phase III: \$400,000

Fulfilling the Vision: Completing the Campus

This phase includes completing the renovation and winterization of three nearby buildings that will have immediate use by the school:

- Arts & Crafts building
- Large Auditorium building with a stage
- Dance studio

These buildings create spaces suitable for community gatherings and the Village School and for dance, drama, pottery, wood-working, and after-school programming, none of which are possible with our current facility.

Phase III also includes:

- finishing the last 2 cabins for additional dormitory space

All of Phase III spaces will be used for the Camp Caravan Campus for Continuing Education programs for teenagers, young adults and adult seminars.

For more information please contact:

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Millers River Educational Cooperative is uniquely poised to meet the practical educational needs in the area. Only through the commitment of our supporters and friends will we realize this important vision. We ask for your support as we work together to make the dream a reality.



Snapshot of our Dream *A day 20 years in the future*

At the Village School, in the Early Childhood wing, the K-1 class is hosting a theme share for their parents

Third and fourth-graders are in the woods with their instructor for an art lesson

Greek gods and goddesses are emerging from the fifth and sixth-grade annual play rehearsal in the Auditorium

Preschoolers are feeding the chickens and collecting eggs

Parents linger after drop-off to chat, and some are knitting together in the continuing education center

A master craftsman supervises teenagers making tables on one side of the Arts & Crafts building, while in the next room, two elders teach weaving to young parents

A lively group of elders are enjoying a visit together in the single-story light and airy dining hall

Attractive paths, manageable by foot and mobility devices alike, connect the buildings

Engaged in their seminar on classroom techniques, student teachers from around the world are forming lifelong bonds while earning course credit

Camp Caravan and the Village School are now the largest employers in Royalston, bringing additional economic resources to the region. They are in good fiscal shape, with a well-invested endowment that allows for scholarships, maintenance, and fair compensation for staff. The local community views the Center for Continuous Education as an essential resource for community gatherings and events.