

HowardCenter

A decorative graphic consisting of a thick, textured teal line that starts on the left, dips down, then rises to form a wide, shallow arch that spans across the width of the page, ending on the right.

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HowardCenter Announces Change in its Child Care Program

HowardCenter announced its plan to transition the operations of its Pine Forest Children's Community child care program to another non-profit or private-public partnership by August 31, 2010, while turning its focus to specialized therapeutic services for very young children and their families.

"This decision was made following an extensive planning process and adopted with the support of the agency's Board of Trustees," said Catherine Simonson, Director of HowardCenter Child, Youth & Family Services that oversees the operation of Pine Forest. She explained that planning for the future of Pine Forest began in April 2009 and involved Pine Forest staff, parents, and seven other stakeholder groups. Simonson explained, "In light of anticipated reduced mental health funding and changes in our treatment structure, we will not have the same level of revenue that has been a significant component of the financial support for Pine Forest. We are confident under a different structure Pine Forest could be managed in a sustainable fashion."

Pine Forest is a 5-star, NAEYC accredited child care program. Simonson said the challenge has been to maintain a mainstream child care program at the same time as demand increased for therapeutic programming. Currently, Pine Forest, located on Flynn Avenue in Burlington, has 70 childcare slots and employs 30 staff members.

According to Simonson, HowardCenter is actively seeking another organization to operate Pine Forest, ideally in its current location. Preliminary discussions are underway. Simonson said that HowardCenter's specialized therapeutic services for very young children and their families will be further developed in partnership with the county's children integrated services initiative. "Our mission is to work with our community's most vulnerable children and we are committed to providing the best possible therapeutic support to these children," Simonson emphasized.

"Although it would have been ideal to have negotiated a transfer to another organization before making this announcement," said Simonson, "We felt strongly that we needed to first notify parents and staff. We also determined to maintain the current structure through August, as some of the children at Pine Forest will move to public school in the fall and summer options for childcare are more limited."