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## Rhinelanders Children's Center Eyeing New Space as Sale Looms

By [Ben Fractenberg](#)



Rhinelanders Children's Center has operated at 350 E. 88th St. since approximately 1891.  
DNAinfo/Victoria Bekiempis

MANHATTAN — The [Rhinelanders Children's Center](#) is eyeing a new space "within walking distance" of its current East 88th Street location, which is set to be sold, the center's co-founder said.

The early-education center, which has been at 350 E. 88th St. for nearly 25 years, was forced to find a new home by June 2014 after its parent organization, the [Children's Aid Society](#), put the townhouse on the market for \$20 million.

"For me, personally, it's heartbreaking," said Ellen Santoro, who co-founded the center's current programs in 1989 as a single, working mother. "It grew into four classrooms with close to 500 children."

[The center is trying to raise \\$250,000](#) — down from its original request of \$750,000 — by mid-January to secure a new location and keep its programs intact, Santoro added. She said the center is about a quarter of the way toward reaching the fundraising goal and is planning to launch a Kickstarter campaign to help raise the rest.

The fundraising goal was lowered because the initial space Santoro was looking at, located six blocks from the current address, needed a gut renovation, she said. Rhinelander is in talks about moving into the other space, she said, without elaborating on specifics of the possible deal because of ongoing negotiations. She added, however, that the money needs to be raised by mid-January for the deal to go through.

Rhinelander is also in the process of getting nonprofit status separate from the Children's Aid Society, Santoro said.

The center will retain its toddler, preschool and after-school programs through at least June, while its Saturday program for deaf and hard-of-hearing children will move to the Society's East Harlem location, Santoro said.

However, Rhinelander's summer camp will not operate in 2014, but will be back for the following summer, she said.

The Society said it decided to sell the building to focus its services in communities of greater need.

"The Rhinelander Center has contributed valuable programs and support to Yorkville families, but the area is no longer a high-needs community," said spokesman Anthony Ramos. "We are selling the property to apply these assets to the four neighborhoods where we work today — the South Bronx, Washington Heights, East and Central Harlem, and Northern Staten Island."

The organization is also considering starting a similar toddler program farther uptown, Ramos added.

CAS is working with brokers Cushman & Wakefield and the Tavivian Sporn Team at Douglass Elliman to sell the property, [The Real Deal](#) reported. The building opened as an industrial school in 1891.

Santoro is hopeful Rhinelander can stay in the neighborhood for families who depend on its services.

"It rescued me, a single mom," she said. "It let me stay in community."