

TRAUMA INFORMED DESIGN TRANSITIONAL HOUSING FOR THE UNHOUSED FINAL PROJECT



PHOTO COURTESY OF SALAZAR ARCHITECT- LA PLAZA ESPERANZA

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TRAUMA-INFORMED DESIGN APPLIED PRACTICE
SP25_02_DHH3024_

WHAT IS TRANSITIONAL HOUSING FOR THE UNHOUSED?

Transitional housing is short-term housing (typically up to 24 months) designed to help individuals and families exiting homelessness find stability on their way to permanent housing. Unlike emergency shelters, it offers more privacy, consistency, and the time needed to rebuild. It often includes wraparound services like counseling, classes, or employment support.

Transitional housing should feel like a soft place to land—a warm reset button, designed for healing, grounding, and joy. It helps prepare people for the next chapter of their lives, and ideally supports a smooth transition into independent living or permanent supportive housing, with the tools and confidence needed to succeed.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SALAZAR ARCHITECT- LA PLAZA ESPERANZA

WHO IT SUPPORTS: POPULATIONS & TOXIC STRESS

Transitional housing supports individuals and families who have experienced complex trauma, housing instability, and long-term toxic stress. Toxic stress can result from repeated exposure to adversity—especially without consistent, supportive relationships. It impacts the nervous system, sleep, concentration, and the body’s ability to recover and feel safe.

populations may include:

- Survivors of domestic or partnered violence
- Veterans who may be navigating military trauma or PTSD
- Survivors of trafficking or institutional harm
- Individuals with a substance use disorder
- Young adults aging out of foster care
- LGBTQIA+ individuals who have experienced family rejection or unsafe shelter conditions
- Individuals living with insecure housing
- People who have experienced systemic discrimination or violence
- Individuals who may be navigating an intellectual, mental, or physical disability
- People experiencing generational poverty or other systemic structural barriers



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Designing with this in mind means prioritizing Trauma-Informed Design domains and SAMHSA principles that center safety, choice, and environments that support emotional regulation and healing. The goal is to create spaces that help people recover—and help them stabilize.

WHY I CHOSE LA PLAZA ESPERANZA



PHOTO COURTESY OF SALAZAR ARCHITECT- LA PLAZA ESPERANZA

I chose La Plaza Esperanza—a 16,593 sq ft, two-story community building located just outside Portland in Gresham, Oregon, designed by the Salazar Architect firm. The space already reflects several Trauma-Informed Design domains, including Community, Movement, and Play through its indoor and outdoor play areas, and aligns with SAMHSA’s principles, such as Cultural, Historical, and Gender Awareness, reflected in the building’s vibrant cultural murals. These foundations made it a strong fit for reimagining as trauma-informed transitional housing designed for healing and preparing residents for the next chapter of their lives.

The building features biophilic design, layered natural light, acoustic panels, and a layout with clear sight lines throughout. I also loved that it includes a school and early learning center, which supports multigenerational healing and community-rooted care. With flexible gathering spaces, enclosed offices, and a commercial kitchen already in place, the structure offers a strong foundation for a trauma-informed transitional housing transformation.

DESIGN CAN TRIGGER —OR IT CAN HELP PEOPLE REGULATE:



01 Design Can Trigger—or It Can Help People Regulate:
When someone has experienced trauma, the built environment can either support healing—or unintentionally activate the nervous system. Certain design choices, even when unintentional, can make a space feel unsafe or overwhelming. Understanding these potential triggers helps us design with more empathy and intention.

02

These aren't just comfort preferences. They're about whether someone can actually breathe in a space—whether they can calm their parasympathetic nervous system, feel safe enough to rest, and begin to heal. Trauma-informed design isn't about perfection. It's about reducing the need to stay in survival mode and helping folks get on a path to thriving—with choice, control, and consistent cues of safety that say: you're okay now—you're safe here.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SALAZAR ARCHITECT- LA PLAZA ESPERANZA

POTENTIAL TRIGGERS IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Common triggers in transitional housing may include:

- Loud or sudden noises (common triggers for veterans navigating PTSD or survivors of domestic violence)
- Harsh fluorescent or flickering lighting (can be overwhelming for individuals with sensory sensitivities, intellectual disabilities, or anxiety disorders)
- Lack of privacy or separation (especially difficult for survivors of trafficking, domestic violence, or people with PTSD)
- Windows or doors that feel exposed or unprotected (may increase hypervigilance for survivors of violence)
- Institutional materials that feel cold or clinical (can be retraumatizing for individuals who've spent time in shelters, foster care, or who are involved with the carceral system)
- Spaces with no cultural representation or sensory grounding (can alienate LGBTQIA+ individuals, people of color, or anyone disconnected from a sense of belonging)
- Overcrowded or echo-prone rooms (especially dysregulating for neurodivergent individuals or those navigating mental health challenges)
- Spaces with limited options—little seating choice, no moveable furniture, no quiet zones, no soft places to land (this can increase stress for almost anyone)

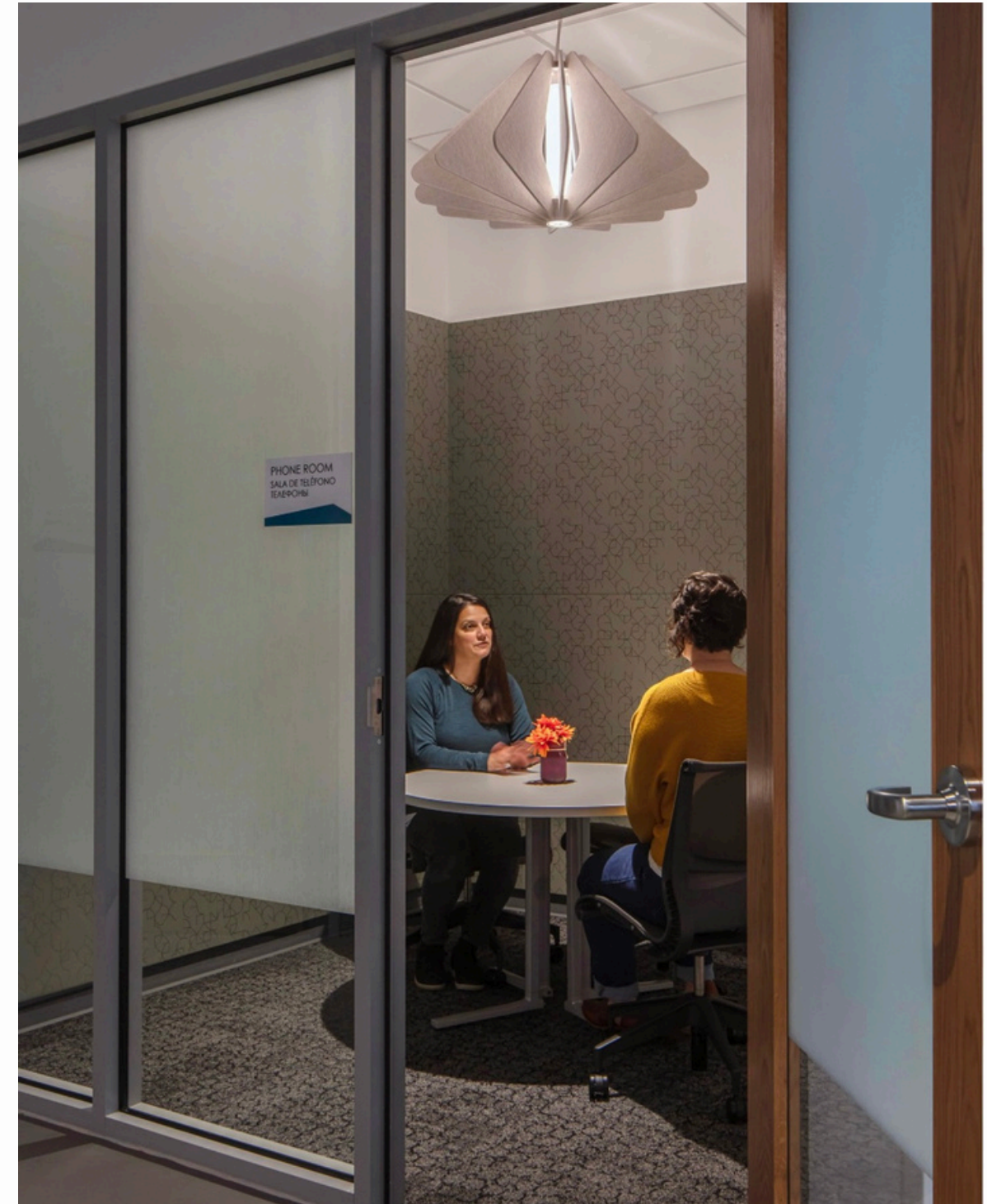
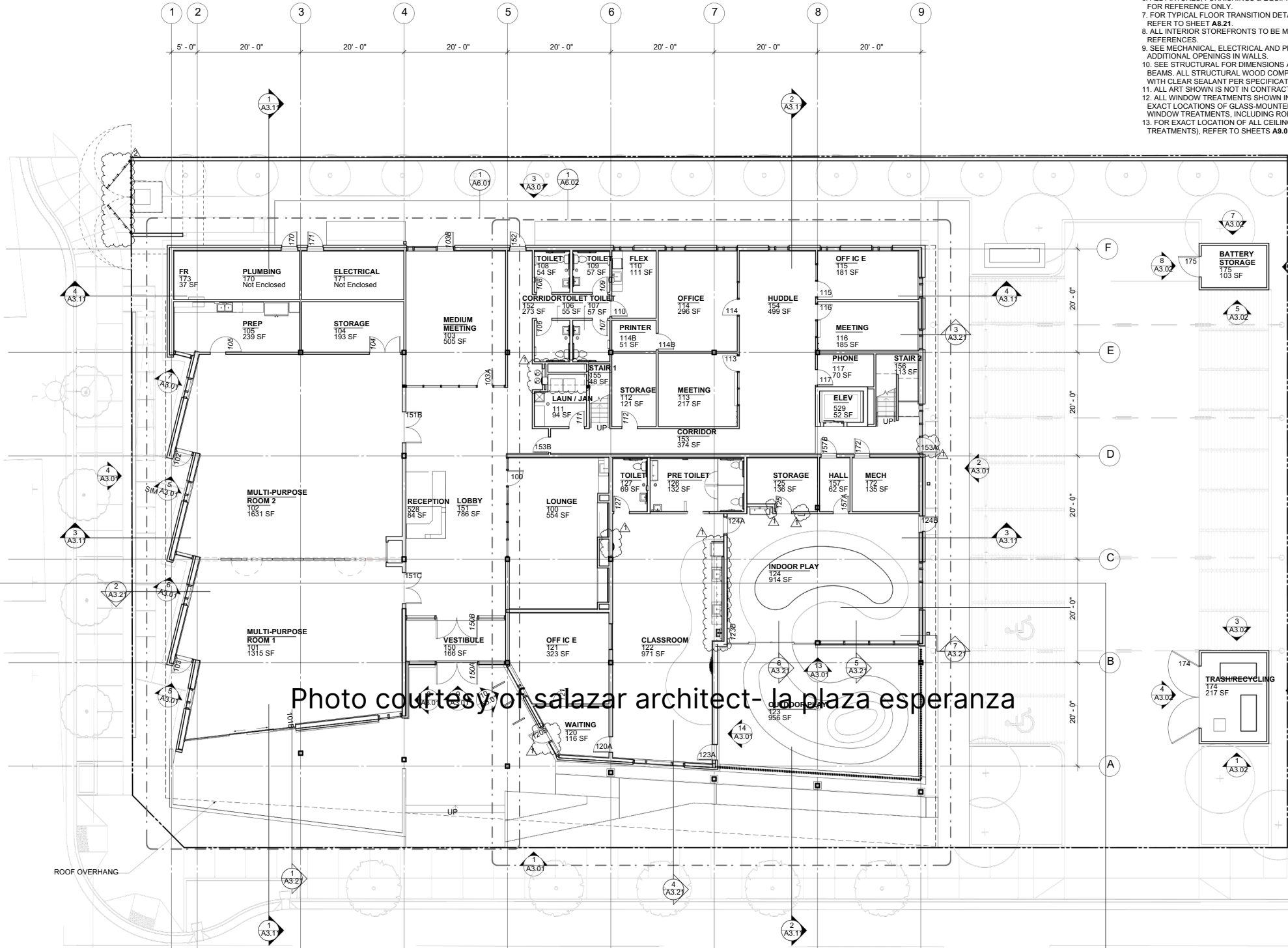


PHOTO COURTESY OF SALAZAR ARCHITECT- LA PLAZA ESPERANZA



1 PLAN, FLOOR -LEVEL 1
A2.01 1/8" = 1'-0"

GENERAL NOTES

1. SEE A7.00 FOR STANDARD ACCESSIBILITY REQUIREMENTS AND MOUNTING HEIGHTS.
2. ALL DIMENSIONS ARE TO FACE OF STUD UNO OR CENTER OF WINDOW OPENING.
3. ALL DOOR OPENINGS PERPENDICULAR TO A WALL ARE 4" TO FACE OF PERPENDICULAR STUD UNO.
4. ALL EXPOSED WOOD SURFACES, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO DOORS, CO
5. SEE A8.21 FOR PENETRATION REQUIREMENTS.
6. ALL FIXTURES, FURNISHINGS & EQUIPMENT NOT IN CONTRACT SHOWN HALF-TONED FOR REFERENCE ONLY.
7. FOR TYPICAL FLOOR TRANSITION DETAILS THAT ARE NOT KEYED ON ELEVATIONS REFER TO SHEET A8.21.
8. ALL INTERIOR STOREFRONTS TO BE METAL. REFER TO SHEET A8.11 FOR DETAILS AND REFERENCES.
9. SEE MECHANICAL, ELECTRICAL AND PLUMBING DRAWINGS, FOR DIMENSIONS AND ADDITIONAL OPENINGS IN WALLS.
10. SEE STRUCTURAL FOR DIMENSIONS AND LOCATION OF CLT WALLS, COLUMNS AND BEAMS. ALL STRUCTURAL WOOD COMPONENTS THAT ARE EXPOSED TO BE FINISHED WITH CLEAR SEALANT PER SPECIFICATIONS.
11. ALL ART SHOWN IS NOT IN CONTRACT.
12. ALL WINDOW TREATMENTS SHOWN IN ELEVATION FOR COORDINATION PURPOSES. EXACT LOCATIONS OF GLASS-MOUNTED AND STOREFRONT SYSTEM-MOUNTED WINDOW TREATMENTS, INCLUDING ROLLER-SHADES, SHOWN IN ELEVATION.
13. FOR EXACT LOCATION OF ALL CEILING-MOUNTED ROLLER SHADES (WINDOW TREATMENTS), REFER TO SHEETS A8.01/A8.02.



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Revisions

1BID SET 02/17/23
2PERMIT REVISION 03/23/23



3161921 SSE S 1E6 O5athk ASvite
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Drawing Title

PLAN, FLOOR -
LEVEL 1



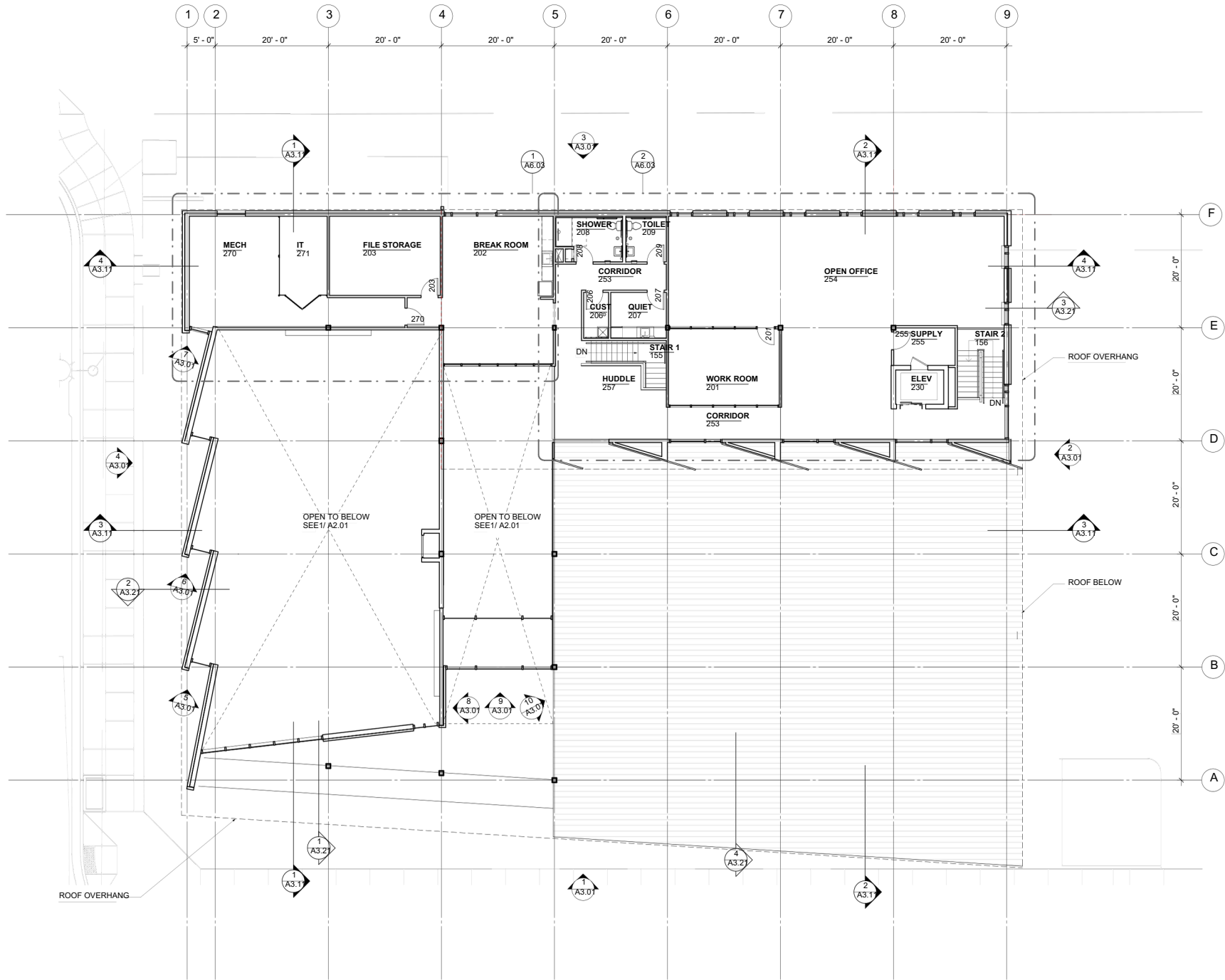
Date: 01/09/2023
Job No: 25892 Inet
Drawn By: A. DIEDRICH, EF,
EW
Checked By: A. HILLS, J. NYE

Drawing No.

A2.01
PERMIT SET

PROJECT
NORTH

TRUE
NORTH



1 PLAN, FLOOR -LEVEL 2
A2.02 1/8" = 1'-0"

GENERAL NOTES

- SEE A7.00 FOR STANDARD ACCESSIBILITY REQUIREMENTS AND MOUNTING HEIGHTS.
- ALL DIMENSIONS ARE TO FACE OF STUD UNO OR CENTER OF WINDOW OPENING. COLUMN, EXTERIOR DIMENSIONS ARE TO FACE OF FOUNDATION/FACE OF FRAMING. DIMENSIONS INDICATED AS "CLEAR" ARE TO FACE OF FINISH UNO. CLT AND CORRESPONDING CONCRETE STEM WALL ARE CENTERED ON GRID UNO.
- ALL DOOR OPENINGS PERPENDICULAR TO A WALL ARE 4" TO FACE OF PERPENDICULAR STUD UNO.
- ALL EXPOSED WOOD SURFACES, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO DOORS, CORNICES, BEAMS, AND WALLS SHALL BE CLEAR-COATED AND SEALED PER SPECIFICATIONS UNO.
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Rev is done



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Drawing Title

PLAN, FLOOR -
LEVEL 2



Date: 01/05/2023
Job No: 25892 Inet
Drawn By: A.DIEDRICH, EF,
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Drawing No.

A2.02

PERMIT SET



EXTERIOR FEATURES I'D INCLUDE + WHY THEY MATTER:

EVERY ELEMENT I'D INCLUDE THROUGH TRAUMA-INFORMED DESIGN IS GROUNDED IN LAYERED SAFETY, SECURITY, AND ACCESSIBILITY. THERE'S AN ADDED LAYER OF PROTECTION THROUGHOUT —ESPECIALLY FOR INDIVIDUALS FLEEING UNSAFE SITUATIONS, INCLUDING SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, TRAFFICKING, AND CARCERAL SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT.

RESIDENTS OR VISITORS WOULD EITHER USE A KEY FOB TO ENTER OR CALL RECEPTION USING A VIDEO SCREEN THAT ALLOWS SECURITY STAFF TO BOTH SEE AND SPEAK WITH THEM. A LOWERED PEDESTAL WITH A FOB READER AND PUSH PLATE ENSURES HANDS-FREE, ACCESSIBLE ENTRY FOR WHEELCHAIR USERS, WHILE A RECESSED WALL-MOUNTED INTERCOM PROVIDES THE SAME ACCESS FOR INDIVIDUALS NOT USING MOBILITY DEVICES.



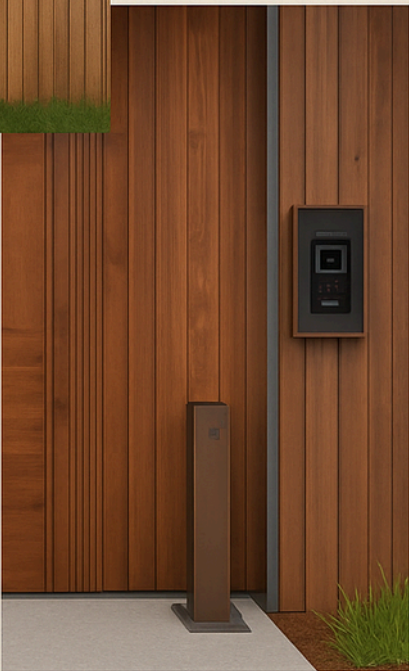
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EXTERIORS CONTINUED...

Exteriors



- Bulletproof wooden door
 - One-way mirrored, bulletproof windows
 - Living green roof
- Ensuring hands-free access and fob entry for wheelchair users



EXTERIOR FEATURES FOR TRAUMA-INFORMED TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

- **Bulletproof wooden door** provides an extra layer of protection for individuals fleeing unsafe situations, including survivors of domestic violence, trafficking, and carceral system
(TID Domain 1: Safety, Cultural; H. ofory, Gender Awareness)
- **One-way mirrored windows** allowing residents privacy by enabling residents privacy and the ability to see out without being seen in.
(TID Domain 1: Safety, Domain 8: Comfort; SAMSHA: Safety, Cultural, Historical,



- **All exterior windows are bulletproof** – this added safety measure helps protecting visibility and daylight, especially for those healing from high-alert environments.
(TID Domain 6: Choice; Domain 7, Equity). SAMSHA: Empowerment, Voice, and Choice

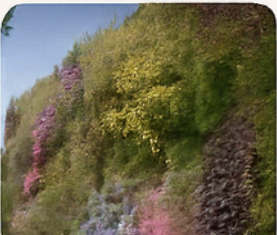


- **Combined fob pedestal + recessed intercom system:** ensures hands-free, accessible entry for wheelchair users and equitable access for standing visitors
(TID Domain 2: Choice; Domain 7, Equity; SAMSHA: Empowerment, Voice, and Choice



- **Video screen with adjustable camera + bilingual audio prompts** – supports secure visual confirmation and communication in English and Spanish, reducing language-based access barriers,

(TID Domain 2: Trustworthiness & Transparency, Domain 7: Equity, SAMSHA: Trustworthiness, Cultural, Historical, and gender



INTERIOR FEATURES I'D INCLUDE + WHY THEY'RE TRAUMA-INFORMED (TID-ALIGNED) RECEPTION + ENTRY-LEVEL COMMONS



THE RECEPTION AREA IS THE FIRST POINT OF CONTACT-AFTER THE SECURITY STATION. IT SHOULD IMMEDIATELY COMMUNICATE SAFETY, AND CARE.

INCLUDED ELEMENTS:

- RECEPTION DESK WITH CURVED EDGES TO REDUCE SHARPNESS AND SOFTEN ARRIVAL. EQUITABLE HEIGHT FOR CHILDREN, WHEELCHAIR USERS, ETC.
- SECURITY STATION DISCREETLY ADJACENT TO RECEPTION -VISIBLE BUT NON-THREATENING (TID DOMAIN 1: SAFETY)
- 4 "RESTORATION STATION" ALCOVES DISTRIBUTED THROUGHOUT THE MAIN FLOOR-EACH OFFERING A TRIFECTA OF GROUNDING TOOLS: MINI HARP OR XYLOPHONE, PLANT, AND TACTILE GAME (LIKE A RUBIK'S CUBE OR BEAD MAZÉ), THESE ALSO SERVE AS REST STOPS FOR THOSE UNABLE TO WALK LONG DISTANCES, (TID DOMAINS 1. SAFETY, 10: MOVEMENT, II: PLAY, SAMHSA. SAFETY, EMPOWERMENT)
-

INTERIORS CONTINUED - FLOOR LEVEL

- SINGLE USE BATHROOM STALLS (6 TOTAL ON GROUND FLOOR) TO SUPPORT PRIVACY. GENDER INCLUSIVITY, AND EASE OF ACCESS FOR EVERYONE, WITH CLEAR SIGNAGE FOR INFUITIVE WAYFINDING
- (TID DOMAIN 7: EQUITY; SAMHSA CULTURAL, HISTORICAL, AND GENDRY AWATENESS)
- SKYLIGHTS (2 CIRCULAR AND 4 RECTANGUGLAR) THROUGHOUT THE RECEPTION AID MAIN HALLWAYS TO INCREASE NATURAL LIGHT AND SUPPORT CIRCADIAN RHYTHMS
- (TID DOMAIN 9: COMFORT; SAMHSA. SAFETY)
- QUIET HVAC SYSTEM TO PROMOTE CALM, REDUCE NOLSE (TID DOMAIN 1: SAFETY; SAMHSA. SAFETY)
- IPAD AVAILABLE FOR RESIDENT FEEDBACK FOR VOICE, CHOICE, PEER SUPPORT, COLLABORATION, AND MUTUALITY
- (TID DOMAINS.6. CHOICE; 12: VOICE; SAMHSA. PEER SUPPORT, COLLABORATION, MUTUALITY)
- ELEVATOR WITH KEY FOB ACCESS AND SOFT LIGHTING FOR ACCESSIBILITY AND SECURITY
- (TID DOMAINS 6: CHOICE; 7: EQUITY; SAMHSA. EMPOWERMENT)
- RETRACTABLE STAIR LIFT BUILT INTO THE MAIN STAIRWAY SO INDIVIDUALS USING MOBILITY DEVICES CAN CHOOSE HOW THEY MOVE THROUGH THE SPACE
- (TID DOMAIN 6: CHOICE; EQUITY, SAMHSA; EMPOWERMENT)



INTAKE SHOWER AREA



RESTORATION STATION.

MULTI-USE INTERIOR SPACES & SENSORY-INCLUSIVE DESIGN

- CAFÉ WITH CULTURALLY FAMILIAR, HEALTHY MEALS; RESTAURANT-STYLE SEATING; ACCEPTS EBT
- (TID DOMAIN 6: CHOICE; SAMHSA: EMPOWERMENT, CULTURAL AWARENESS)
- COMMUNITY FRIDGE + 24HR MINI MARKET WITH BUDGETING EDUCATION AND CONTROLLED ACCESS
- PODS IN CAFÉ FOR STUDY, REFLECTION, OR QUIET CONVERSATIONS
- INDOOR/OUTDOOR KITCHEN + BBQ WITH FANS AND MISTERS
- (TID DOMAIN 10: MOVEMENT; SAMHSA: COMMUNITY)
- BIOPHILIC DESIGN THROUGHOUT
- COMMUNITY LIVING ROOM WITH A DAVINCI GREENSMART SAFE-TOUCH FIREPLACE, BOARD GAMES, AND FLEXIBLE SEATING
- (TID DOMAINS 1 & 9; SAMHSA: SAFETY, COMMUNITY)
- MUSIC/DANCE STUDIO WITH MIRRORS, CLEAR GLASS, AND TR
- INDOOR SWING AND QUIET, WASHABLE SURFACES THROUGHOUT
- IPAD KIOSKS (3 UPSTAIRS, 3 DOWNSTAIRS; HEIGHT-ACCESSIBLE FOR KIDS AND WHEELCHAIR USERS) FOR FEEDBACK + EVENT INFO
- RESTORATION STATION ALCOVES: MINI HARP OR XYLOPHONE, TACTILE GAME, PLANT, BACKLIT, WITH CULTURAL FABRIC LINING
- PRIVATE ADA-ACCESSIBLE SHOWERS, PEST-CONTROL STEAMERS, AND HEATED FLOORS THROUGHOUT THE FACILITY
- BEDROOMS: WOOD BED FRAMES, DRAWER STORAGE, LOW-PROFILE BEDS FOR VETS, PRIVACY FILM ON WINDOWS
- EDUCATION SPACES: PARENTING, SELF-CARE, AND FINANCIAL LITERACY CLASSES
- DISCREET SECURITY THROUGHOUT TO SUPPORT SAFETY WITHOUT SURVEILLANCE TRAUMA
- COUNSELING ROOMS WITH EMERGENCY BUTTONS AND ART THERAPY OPTIONS
-

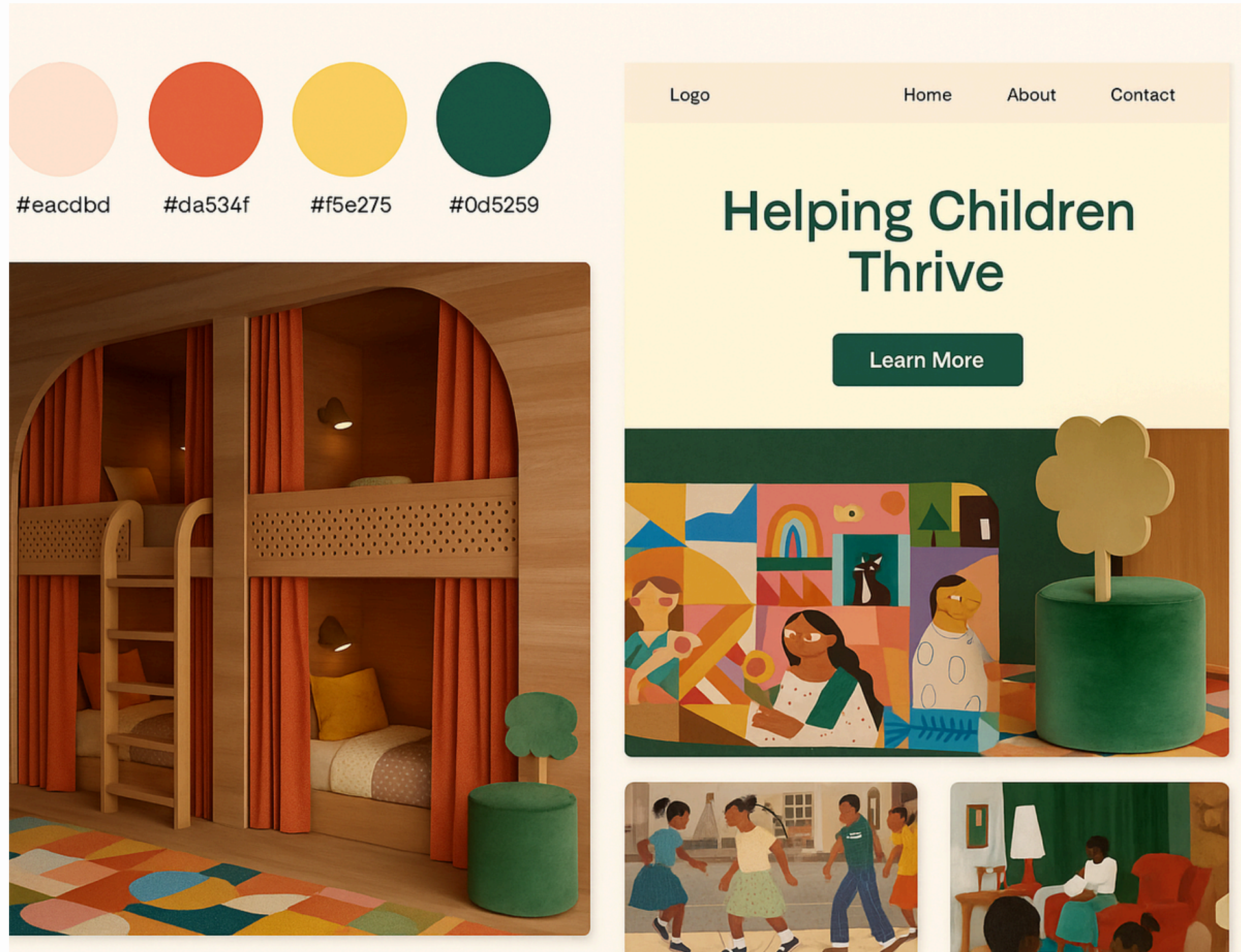
TRAUMA-INFORMED RECEPTION +



- TECH LOCKER, BIKE + STROLLER STORAGE, HIGHLY DURABLE MATERIALS THROUGHOUT
- THEATER CLASS, VENDOR NIGHTS, COURTYARD EVENTS WITH PROJECTOR SCREEN
- ELEVATOR (FOB-ONLY ACCESS), PHYSICAL APARTMENT KEYS.

TID DOMAINS ACTIVATED: 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11
SAMHSA PRINCIPLES ACTIVATED: ALL S

INTERIOR FEATURES I'D INCLUDE + WHY THEY'RE TRAUMA-INFORMED (TID-ALIGNED) UPPER LEVEL



THE UPPER LEVEL BALANCES PRIVATE LIVING WITH STAFF WELLNESS SPACE. ALL ROOMS ARE DESIGNED TO FEEL STABLE, CUSTOMIZABLE, AND SAFE.

- SRO-STYLE UNITS + STUDIOS
- CONVERTED OFFICE + WORKROOM → SROS
- BREAK ROOM → FAMILY WING
- FILE STORAGE → STAFF RECALIBRATION ROOM

STAFF ROOM INCLUDES:

- YOGA MAT ZONE, MINI KITCHEN, LOW LIGHTING, SOFT FURNITURE
- VIDEO SCREEN FOR YOGA/STRETCH ROUTINES
- PRIVATE, RESTORATIVE ZONE TO SUPPORT SECONDARY TRAUMA RECOVERY

TID DOMAINS: 1, 4, 5, 9

SAMHSA PRINCIPLES: SAFETY, COLLABORATION, EMPOWERMENT

TRAUMA-INFORMED DESIGN
INVITES US TO SEE SPACE NOT
JUST AS SHELTER, BUT AS A
STABILIZING FORCE. THIS
PROJECT CENTERS LAYERED
SAFETY, CULTURAL AWARENESS,
AND DIGNITY—HELPING
RESIDENTS FEEL GROUNDED
AND SUPPORTED FROM THE
MOMENT THEY ARRIVE. WE'RE
STYLING FOR STABILITY &
HEALING.

WORKS CITED

-
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- [HTTPS://WWW.OPB.ORG/ARTICLE/2024/04/24/WIT-H-SURGE-IN-HATE-CRIMES-OREGON-JUSTICE-DEPARTMENT-LAUNCHES-HOTLINE/](https://www.opb.org/article/2024/04/24/wit-h-surge-in-hate-crimes-oregon-justice-department-launches-hotline/)
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- • [HTTPS://FORTIFIEDESTATE.COM/BULLETPROOF-DOORS/?UTM_SOURCE=CHATGPT.COM](https://fortifiedestate.com/bulletproof-doors/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)
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- • [HTTPS://SALAZARCH.COM/PROJECTS/LA-PLAZA-ESPERANZA/](https://salazarch.com/projects/la-plaza-esperanza/)
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THANK YOU

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