



Purpose-Built Design

Applying a purpose-built approach to
homeless shelter design

Downtown Madison, Inc.

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What is purpose-built design?

Purpose-built design is a design approach in which all elements of a space's design and programming serve a greater vision. Crucially, it engages stakeholders and gathers insight from diverse users, viewpoints, experiences, and knowledge. Purpose-built design requires that stakeholders think through all potential uses and employ creative solutions to not only meet existing needs but do so in the best manner possible.

In thinking about purpose-built design, it is instructive to consider the difference between purpose-built and built for a purpose. Things that are built for a purpose exist to serve specific functions. By contrast, things that are purpose-built serve not just their own immediate functions but a wider goal as well. This method goes beyond meeting the basic needs of a space to envision the full range of possibilities.

For example, when planning a sleeping space in an emergency shelter, a space designed for a purpose might prioritize maximizing the number of people a room can sleep. However, a purpose-built design would push past the space's primary function to consider how the space may be designed to maximize the number of guests served while also creating a sense of security, ownership, and comfort. Similarly, a shelter that serves vulnerable women may incorporate individual sleeping arrangements rather than a communal sleeping room to establish a greater sense of security and support an environment of well-being among guests.

Purpose-built design and homeless shelter planning

Purpose-built facilities must think holistically about design, programming, and how the two interact. A homeless care facility is not truly purpose-built if the space's physical design is not specifically created to complement the anticipated services. This begins with a clear set of goals and a vision for the project in question. For homeless shelter design, this often means tapping into prior experience, outside knowledge, and conducting a great deal of outreach to better understand the experiences of those entering shelter and those who work, volunteer, or otherwise spend time there.

Programming and design cannot be separated when employing a purpose-built approach. The centralized provision of services is an essential component of purpose-built design in homeless shelter work and sets this model apart from previous approaches to homeless prevention. Centralization of services requires a shelter to comprehensively examine the range of barriers individuals face when accessing help, and to think through how these barriers can be overcome.

For example, a shelter that has identified that parents often cannot access services because of childcare needs may incorporate a childcare center into their services. Similarly, a

shelter that has identified language as a barrier to service provision may integrate translation services into its work.

COMMONLY INTEGRATED SERVICES AT PURPOSE-BUILT SHELTERS



Examples of purpose-built design for homeless shelters:

For a deeper understanding of how a purpose-built design approach can be integrated with homeless shelter planning, it can be instructive to look at successful examples. This report highlights five examples of purpose-built shelters throughout the United States, including images and links to further resources. This is followed by a snapshot comparison of each shelter.

- Higher Ground Shelter: Saint Paul, Minnesota (Pg. 3)
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Higher-Ground Shelter

Saint Paul, Minnesota
Population: 304,547 (2019)

Overview

Higher Ground is an emergency shelter with 172 beds for men and 60 beds for women in Saint Paul, Minnesota. The shelter is a prime example of a purpose-designed facility due to its holistic approach to service provision, and thoughtful consideration for how the physical design of the shelter can best meet the needs of its guests. Stakeholders began the new space's design process by identifying their vision—to create a dignified space where those experiencing homelessness could access help. This vision drove every aspect of their design and associated programming.

Description

Higher Ground is a five-story structure, with shelter on the first floor and permanent housing on upper levels. When designing the building, architects strove to create a space that would be open and welcoming for those seeking services. Adapting from the previous center's design, the sleeping area was modified to incorporate bunk beds and natural light, minimizing crowding and creating a sense of openness. The building was also designed with highly transparent facades produced by large windows. This design allows more natural light and offers a clear view of Saint Paul itself. This sightline was essential to the designers. It symbolically connects guests with the greater Saint Paul community, fostering a sense of connectedness between the guests, the building, and the neighborhood.

The center's pay-to-stay facilities are another example of purpose-built design in action. Initially, this amenity was designed to house multiple women within the same space. As stakeholders further reflected, engaging guests on their experiences, the design was changed to more closely resemble pods. This allowed each woman her own room with a locking door, increasing a sense of security and well-being. The center further employs a harm reduction model, allowing those with medical, mental, and chemical health challenges to access help while preserving an environment of dignity and respect.

With regard to service provision, the center offers a comprehensive suite of services on site. Critically, the centralization of services and inclusion of both men and women at the shelter allows for a more efficient allocation of resources, while at the same time eliminating barriers to access for the shelter's guests. One example is the center's decision to incorporate medical respite rooms. These rooms are equipped with hospital beds and staff on-floor to help attend to residents in need of medical care. This example of complementary design and programming services the needs of guests while ensuring a dignified environment for those in need.

Key elements of purpose-built design

- Integrated services are provided on-site, mitigating transportation concerns and standardizing processes for a range of needs.
- Both men and women are welcome at the shelter, helping to maximize resource allocation.
- All aspects of physical design prioritize guest comfort and safety and allow for a broad range of services to be provided on-site.

Awards: 2020 Affordable Housing Design Award Winner, Watson-Forsberg

More information: <https://www.cctwincities.org/locations/higher-ground-saint-paul/>



Image 1: Higher Ground Saint Paul Rendering
Source: Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis



Image 2: New sleeping arrangements move guests off the floor and into bunkbeds
Source: Greater Minnesota Housing Fund

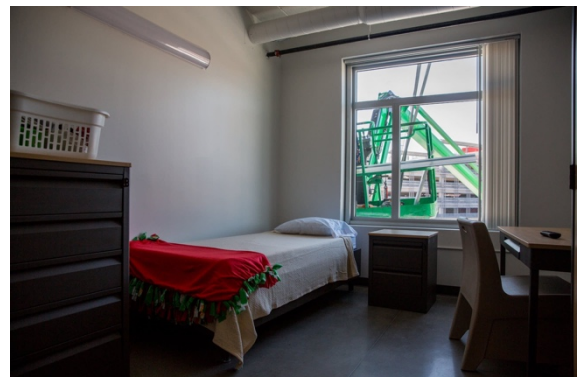


Image 3: Higher Ground Interior
Source: Homeless Shelter Directory

The Beacon

Madison, Wisconsin

Population: 254,977 (2019)

Overview

The Beacon is a homeless day resource center in Madison, Wisconsin. The center is a public-private partnership with Catholic Charities, which operates the shelter, Dane County, the City of Madison, and The United Way of Dane County. On average, the shelter serves over 225 men, women, and children every day. The Beacon exemplifies a purpose-built design approach by offering a range of services comprehensively from a single location.

Description

Working with 27 partner agencies, The Beacon provides centralized services directly to guests, mitigating the need for clients to navigate to and from different service providers and further eliminating barriers to access associated with transportation. Partners rotate into the center throughout the week, directly providing guests with the services they might need.

Regarding the physical design, the center provides six private showers with necessary toiletries and laundry facilities run by volunteers who will wash and fold clothing for guests experiencing homelessness. These services are oriented around increasing guests' comfort and preparing them with freshly laundered clothing for their jobs or other daily needs. A computer lab is also integrated into the center, allowing guests online access. While a center built with purpose may simply provide the computers, in this purpose-built approach, volunteers are made available to assist with basic questions like finding online information, completing work-related forms and resumes, and finding transportation information. Also in the center is a family area that provides space for developmentally appropriate activities and play for children. Expanding on this already valuable amenity, childcare providers are available to stay with children, creating a safe space for parents to leave their kids while accessing other Beacon services. Finally, recognizing the extreme barrier to access presented by limited transportation, the Beacon runs a shuttle to transport guests to and from an overnight shelter.

Key elements of purpose-built design

- A comprehensive suite of services is included on-site, centralizing processes and mitigating transportation concerns.
- Volunteers are available on-site to assist with questions and guest concerns.
- The center provides transportation to and from an overnight shelter, directly connecting guests to resources when not available on-site.

More information: <https://thebeaconhelps.org/>



Image 4: The Beacon Day Resource Center in Madison, Wisconsin
Source: The Badger Report



Image 5: Family Area at the Beacon
Source: thebeaconhelps.org



Image 6: The Beacon Laundry Services
Source: thebeaconhelps.org

La Mesita Family Homeless Shelter

Mesa, Arizona

Population: 499,720 (2019)

Overview

La Mesita Family Homeless Shelter is a purpose-built shelter in Mesa, Arizona. First opened in 1991, this 16-unit family shelter aids families in accessing a broad range of services. The shelter serves around 250 adults and children annually and allows families to stay for up to 120 days in one- or two-bedroom apartments. Basic needs such as food, clothing, hygiene, and household items are provided upon arrival.

Description

The La Mesita Family Homeless shelter was designed to provide families a safe, comfortable, and welcoming space to access needed services. In service of this mission, each aspect of design serves to aid families in their journey to housing stability. To best meet families' needs, the center provides apartment-style units for families experiencing homelessness to live in their own private space. Each unit locks, providing parents peace of mind when staying with children. The structure is intentionally designed with tall gates and an on-site playground to facilitate children's safety and play. Children also have access to a supportive afterschool program to help them stay on track in school and interact with the other children at the shelter.

A suite of comprehensive services is integrated directly into the shelter. These include comprehensive workforce training programs that help residents build their resumes, identify references, and secure interviews with local employers. The center further offers financial literacy and budgeting services to help residents develop their financial plans. Within the center is a hub of community resources assisting families in developing the skills and tools to achieve long-term stability. All programming is meant to work together to help provide a strong foundation for families experiencing homelessness.

Key elements of purpose-built design

- Services are comprehensively integrated on-site at the center, including employment, childcare, housing, financial literacy, and domestic and sexual violence services.
- All aspects of design prioritize family care, including individual locking apartments, an afterschool program, and on-site playground.
- A holistic approach is taken to housing, with services including shelter, long-term housing, affordable housing, and rapid re-housing.

More information: <http://turnanewleaf.org>



Image 4: La Mesita Family Homeless Shelter
Source: Arizona Department of Housing



Image 5: La Mesita Shelter Rendering
Source: A New Leaf



Image 6: A New Leaf at La Mesita, exterior view
Source: Homeless Shelter Directory

Central City Concern: Blackburn Center

Portland, Oregon

Population: 645,291 (2019)

Overview

The Blackburn Center in Portland, Oregon first opened in 2019, providing healthcare, housing, and employment services for individuals experience or at risk of experiencing homelessness. The center strives to be a model of holistic care, “treating the whole person, as a person” with the overarching goal of integrating clinical services with transitional housing from a centralized, six-story facility on Portland's near East side.

Description

In their approach, the center strives to address both the systemic drivers of homelessness and individual factors that further reinforce it. Services address a range of underlying concerns including access to affordable housing, health care, living-wage jobs, systemic racism, mental health, chronic health conditions, substance use, and time in the justice system. The center views these concerns as interrelated issues that must all be addressed together. To accomplish this, all services serve the center's foundational belief in "the restorative power of human connection and dignity."

On-site, residents can access care for health concerns, primary care, mental health support, care for addiction and substance use disorders, as well as access an on-site pharmacy. As most residents are in recovery, the center further facilitates on-site opioid treatment, hepatitis c treatment, and a recuperative care program for those without a place to go after hospital treatment. The center strives to provide as many services as possible from its centrally located facility.

Key elements of purpose-built design

- The location of the shelter is centrally located on Portland's East side.
- Services look holistically at the root causes of homelessness and include housing, shelter, healthcare, mental health, restorative justice, substance abuse, and chronic health conditions.
- Services are provided on-site at the Blackburn Center.

Awards: Metro Community Development Qualified Low-Income Community Investment of the Year (2018)

More information: <https://centralcityconcern.org/>

CCC BLACKBURN CENTER
Integrated Program

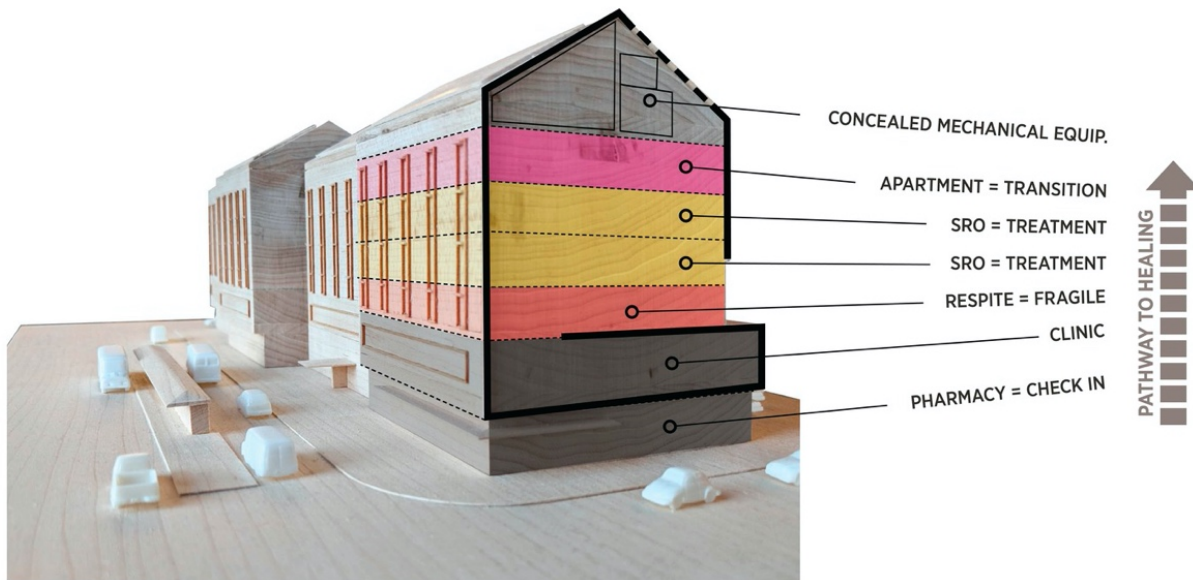


Image 7: Portland Oregon's CCC Blackburn Center Layout
Source: Ankrom Moisan Design



Image 8: Blackburn Center Interior
Source: Ankrom Moisan Design



Image 9: Blackburn Center Exterior
Source: Portland Monthly

St. Francis House
Boston, MA
Population: 684,349 (2019)

Overview

St. Francis House is a purpose-built shelter in Boston, Massachusetts. The center is open 365 days a year and includes primary, rehabilitative, and housing services designed to overlap and build on one another to provide continuous and comprehensive support for guests. Every design and program decision ties back into the center's overall mission "to achieve lives of independence, self-respect, and hope."

Description

In addition to basic necessities like clothing, shelter, food, medical care, and emergency assistance, the center provides employment, housing, mental health, substance abuse counseling, and life skills training on-site as part of its holistic approach to homelessness prevention. The first three floors of the day shelter provide a safe and dignified space that offers basic services, as well as mail, telephone, and computer access. To address the specific needs of female-identifying guests, St. Francis House also has a Women's Center, designed to be a "one-stop shop" for women in need of service. All guests, regardless of status or gender identity, have access to mental health support, substance use support, and housing navigation resources through on-site case management. When a program is not available on-site, staff at St. Francis work within the broader community to develop the needed resources.

Key elements of purpose-built design

- The center is open 365 days a year.
- Comprehensive services are offered on-site, including employment, housing, mental health, substance abuse counseling, and life skills training.
- Art and writing therapy provide additional outlets for healing and self-expression.
- Each aspect of design seeks to create a sense of dignity and an atmosphere of respect for guests.

Awards: St. Francis House is recognized as a National Model Program by the:

- United States Department of Health and Human Services
- United States Conference of Mayors Committee on Hunger and Homelessness
- Social Security Administration
- United States House of Representatives Speaker's Task Force on Homelessness

More information: <https://stfrancishouse.org/>



Image 10: St. Francis House exterior, Boston, Massachusetts
Source: St. Francis House



Image 11: St. Francis House reception, adapted for Covid-19 response
Source: St. Francis House

	Higher Ground	The Beacon	La Mesita Family Homeless Shelter	Central City Concern: Blackburn Center	St. Francis House
Location	Saint Paul, MN	Madison, WI	Mesa, AZ	Portland, OR	Boston, MA
City Population	304,547	254,977	499,720	645,291	684,349
At a Glance	Emergency shelter with 172 beds for men & 60 beds for women. Building is 5-stories, shelter on 1 st floor, permanent housing on upper floors.	Day shelter open 365 days per year, serving an average of 225 men, women & children every day.	16-unit family shelter with 1–2-bedroom apartments. Serves around 250 adults & children per year.	Six story supportive housing facility with services designed to address the underlying causes of homelessness in Portland.	Day shelter open 365 days per year, serving an average of 600 people per day through daily meal provision and other services.
Vision	To be a <u>dignified</u> space where people can access help	To <u>eliminate barriers</u> to accessing services	To be a <u>safe</u> and <u>welcoming</u> space for families	<u>Treating the whole person</u> , as a person	To help individuals achieve lives of <u>independence</u> , <u>self-respect</u> & <u>hope</u>
Purpose-Built Elements of Physical Design	Natural light, large windows, availability of individual rooms with locking doors. Layout allows for a wide range of uses.	Space is designed to facilitate comprehensive service provision including showers, computer lab, family play area, shuttle to overnight shelter.	Family apartments with locking door, playground, tall fences	Centrally located in the city, building layout supports a wide range of uses	Three stories dedicated to space for services, dedicated women’s area
Services Available On-Site	Services are meant to be comprehensive and easy to access on site. This includes staffed medical respite facilities, and other crucial services.	Services needs including laundry, career services, and case management. Service providers rotate into the shelter, centralizing processes and mitigating transportation barriers.	Guest needs are provided for on-site including provision of basic necessities, after-school programming, work training, financial planning supports, and case management.	Services are provided comprehensively on-site including health services, both mental and physical, including addiction & substance use-disorder treatment	Provides basic necessities; employment, housing, mental health & substance abuse counseling; case management all on site from their central location.