



Arroyo Village and Delores Project Rocky Mountain Communities

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The Purpose of this Case Study

There are over 3000 facilities for persons experiencing homelessness in the United States alone and thousands more worldwide, which range from modest projects housing ten or fewer people to large multi-service centers. Designers and organizations aiming to renovate existing facilities or construct new facilities look to existing building for ideas to help them avoid ‘reinventing the wheel’ and enable them to apply the strengths of prior projects to their work.

The goal of Design Resources for Homelessness (DRH) case studies is to share the innovations and lessons learned from a selection of high-quality projects. This collection is curated to showcase facilities that respond in unique and creative architectural ways to the policies of their respective organizations.

These in-depth reports concentrate on the lived human experience and reference a multitude of perspectives. Readers accustomed to reviewing architectural case studies as they prepare to design new projects may find that DRH case studies are different because they maintain an orientation toward humanistic architecture, that is, with the goal of understanding how environments can meaningfully support their users. These case studies concentrate, therefore, on the spaces that are most frequently inhabited by facility clients and staff. Although there may be less discussion of siting decisions and construction methods (good information in its own right), DRH strives to offer more information about the places in which people experience their lives—gather, share, eat, communicate, sleep and work.

There are several reasons for this approach:

- Interior spaces (as opposed to external aesthetic features) are the most frequent settings for everyday activities, which can create opportunities clients to recover and heal from trauma.
- There is a growing realization that elements of architecture that influence users’ self-perceptions include interior spaces, lighting, finishes, furnishings, and signage, each of which can affect one’s mental and physical health in significant ways. There are lessons to be learned from where one stores their shoes, and if they can read in bed at night.
- These case studies seek to capture the actual human experience of using and inhabiting buildings. For example:
- They showcase the outcomes of a complete architectural process, rather than merely the design process. This offers a concrete illustration of excellence, examining what was actually built rather than what was conceived but unrealized.

- The case studies as a collection include projects both new and not-so-new. Architecture can take some time to settle into, and many important lessons can be learned after ribbon-cutting day has faded into memory. One cannot appreciate durability and fitness to function without observing spaces that have been through the test of time.
- The photographs of these case study projects show spaces as they are encountered and used in daily life—not staged or even tidied up. This too is by design, documenting lived experiences in their authentic forms.
- We include multiple voices. It takes a village to determine how a building is used and perceived. To offer a diversity of perspectives, residents, staff, and experts in the field are interviewed when possible. The competing needs within a facility are laid bare, as, for example, with the tension between operational security and individual privacy.
- Although DRH case studies embrace a basic orientation toward built space (i.e., discussing space planning, lighting, furnishings, and finishes), there is an important ‘overlay’ that is less frequently addressed within case studies—the connection to human well-being. These psychological and physical user needs include safety, empowerment, stress management, and preservation of dignity. Doing so embraces Design Resources for Homelessness’s commitment to expanding the discussion and application of psychologically informed care principles, and more broadly, seeing architecture as an effective tool in nurturing positive change.

At a Glance

Address

1299 N. Knox Court, Denver, Colorado 80204

Managing Organization

Rocky Mountain Communities and The Delores Project

Year of completion

2019

Architect

Shopworks Architecture

Site

Urban

Approximate Square Footage

Building Total: 160,367 sf

PSH: 25,540 sf

Shelter: 11,306 sf

Workforce: 97,699 sf

Parking: 26,147 sf

Number of floors

4

Residents and Guests

Most residential clients of the Arroyo Village and the Delores Project come from the Denver area. Male, female, and non-binary adults are accepted, and most have been insecure in their housing for some time. All residents qualify for various levels of affordable housing. Those in the supportive housing have a disabling condition and are unhoused, while those in workforce housing are income-qualified.

Facility Type and Capacity

Continuum of housing that includes a 60-bed shelter for women and transgender individuals, 35 one-bedroom supportive housing apartment units for individuals who are unhoused and living with a disability (0-30% AMI), and a total of 95 one-, two-, and three-bedroom workforce apartments (AMI 30-50%).

Admission

Individuals at the shelter call to reserve a bed and have that bed as long as they are moving towards stability. Individuals in the supportive housing units attain their apartments via the Coordinated Entry system in Denver that works with homeless service providers to connect individuals to housing that meets their needs. All units in the Delores PSH Apartments have an attached housing voucher so residents pay 30% of their income towards their rent and the rest of rent is paid via a voucher. Residents in the 95 workforce units must income-qualify for the units through a traditional leasing process.

On-site Services and Amenities

- The workforce housing apartments were designed to serve individuals and families. The amenities for these units include a community living room, kitchen, multi-purpose classroom with direct access to outdoor space, food pantry, and staff offices.
- The permanent supportive housing apartments are for persons who are exiting homelessness. The amenities include laundry facilities, a courtyard, staff offices, and community spaces.
- The shelter was designed in consultation with current guests. It includes a library, a community space, a kitchen with dining room, laundry, and counseling and staff offices.
- This case study was prepared in consultation with Laura Rossbert and Jennifer Wilson of Shopworks Architecture.

Context

Arroyo Village is a pioneering affordable housing community located in the West Colfax neighborhood of Denver, Colorado. This project aims to address homelessness in the area by providing affordable, sustainable, and human-centric housing solutions to individuals and families who have experienced homelessness and other complex issues including substance abuse and mental health conditions.

The West Colfax neighborhood is located approximately two miles east of Denver's central business district. Arroyo Village is located in the West Colfax neighborhood of Denver 2 miles east of the central business district and at the Knox Court stop on the RTD W Line light rail. The area has a 48.31% poverty rate and 8.12% unemployment rate. The area is represented by 30% Caucasian (not Hispanic), 11% African American, 3.5 % American Indian/Alaskan Native, 1.3 % Asian, and 53% persons of Hispanic origin. 47.68% of the surrounding neighborhood is housing cost burdened (2024).

Recognizing the difficulty in transitioning individuals from the homeless shelter to traditional housing due to a lack of affordable options, Rocky Mountain Communities and the Delores Project partnered to build housing from the ground up, specifically targeting those most in need in the neighborhood. The area is rapidly changing due to its proximity to transportation and downtown Denver, with many high-class market-rate developments emerging. The design and stakeholder team sought to develop housing options that would ensure that those in the West Colfax = community had access to safe and reliable shelters and residences.

The building is a four-story light frame wood structure with a clean-looking exterior featuring brick masonry, stucco, and fiber cement cladding and accentuated by a bright paint scheme. The building includes an internal courtyard with a picnic area and community garden.

To help residents thrive, Shopworks Architecture's team employed a creative approach to the building's design based on the Trauma-Informed Design principles. This approach has influenced other affordable housing projects across Colorado and the United States.



Exterior view facing west, showing the workforce housing entrance.



Outdoor amenity space for the apartments, includes a terrace and community gardens. Other features that would provide context.



Mission and Goals

Mission

The mission of Arroyo Village is to create a holistic and supportive housing community that empowers individuals and families to overcome homelessness and achieve stability.

Goals

Offer Safe Housing: Arroyo Village aims to offer a wide range of housing options, from emergency shelter to permanent supportive housing and workforce housing. This continuum of care allows residents to transition seamlessly between different housing types as their needs change.

Promote Healing and Well-Being: By incorporating Trauma-Informed Design principles, the project seeks to create an environment that supports the mental and emotional well-being of residents. This includes ensuring safety, comfort, connection, and choice in the design of living spaces.

Enhance Community Integration: The project is strategically located next to the Knox Court Light Rail Station, providing residents with easy access to public transportation and essential services. This transit-oriented development enhances mobility and integration into the broader community.

Support Long-Term Affordability: Arroyo Village is committed to maintaining affordability for at least 40 years, with specific units designated for individuals at or below 30% and 50% of Area Median Income (AMI). This long-term commitment ensures that the housing remains accessible to low-income individuals and families.

Innovate in Housing Design: Arroyo Village aims to set a new standard in affordable housing by integrating sustainable practices, such as natural materials and energy-efficient systems, and innovative human-centric design elements, including high visibility in interiors, ample lighting, easy wayfinding, community rooms, and homey and comfortable furniture to create a healthy living environment. The project followed EGC self-certification and participated in the Xcel EDA Program. The project projects a 15% energy savings over an ASHRAE90.1-2007 baseline. The project utilized all LED lighting, water conserving fixtures, Energy Star Appliances, high efficiency condensing water heaters, and a high albedo roof designed to reflect UV rays.

The Delores Project: Build community that is changing the lives of our guests and residents for good!



View of Arroyo Village from the Knox Court Light Rail Station.

Empower Residents: The project focuses on empowering residents by providing access to supportive services, community spaces, and opportunities for personal growth and development. This includes offering programs and resources that help residents achieve greater self-sufficiency and improve their quality of life.

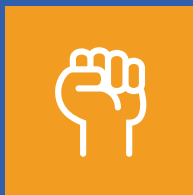
Arroyo Village aims to create a model for future affordable housing developments that address homelessness and housing insecurity through comprehensive, resident-focused solutions.

Facility Tour Key: Attendance to Human Needs

Use this key on the following pages of the facility tour to learn how the design of the building and its spaces contribute to the well-being of residents and staff.



Dignity and Self Esteem



Empowerment and
Personal Control



Security, Privacy and
Personal Space



Stress Management



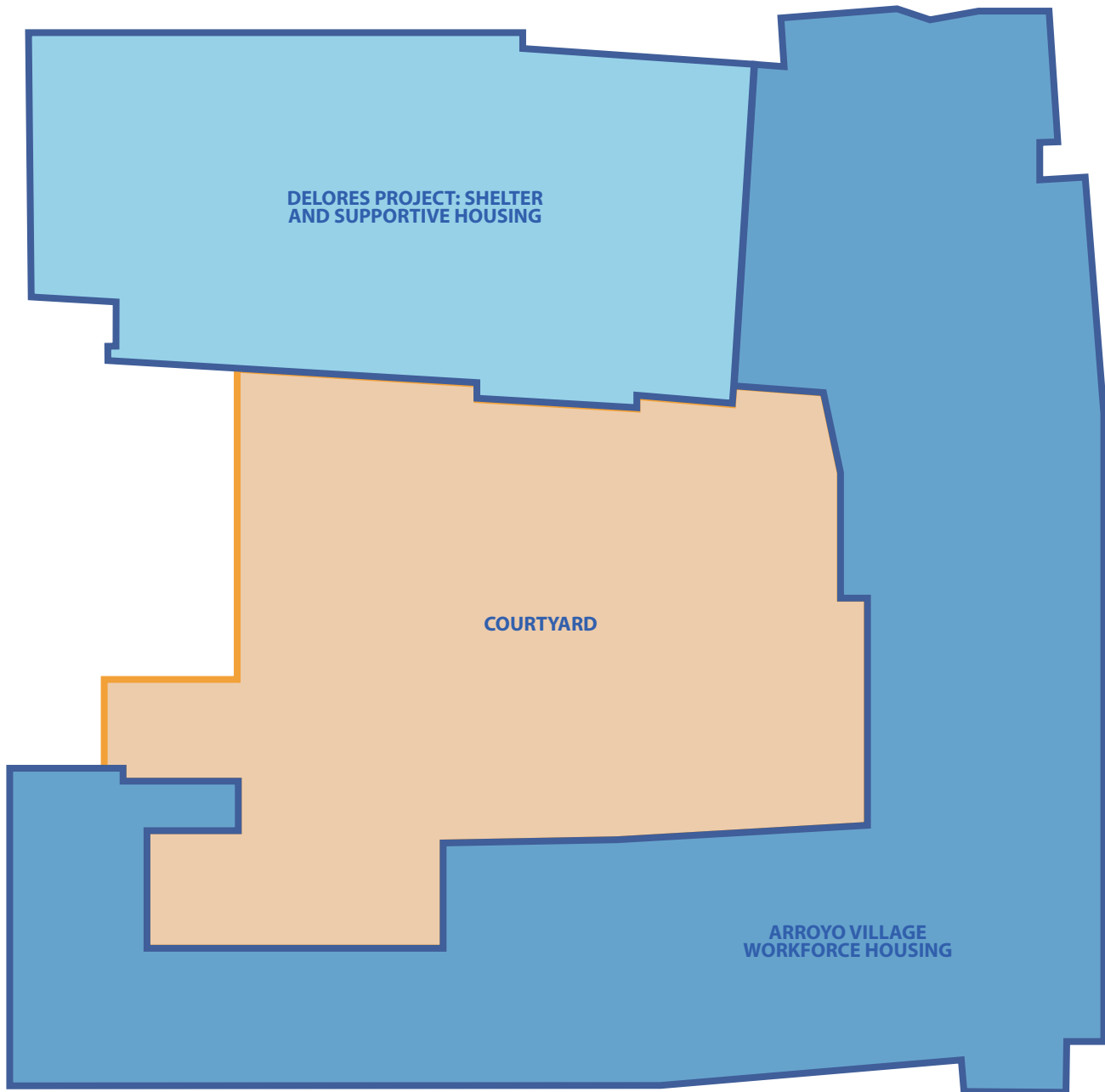
Sense of Community



Beauty and Meaning

Arroyo Village and Delores Project

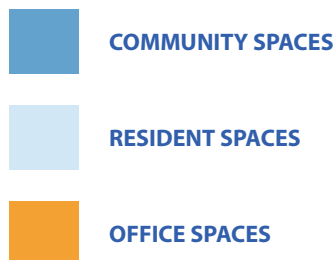
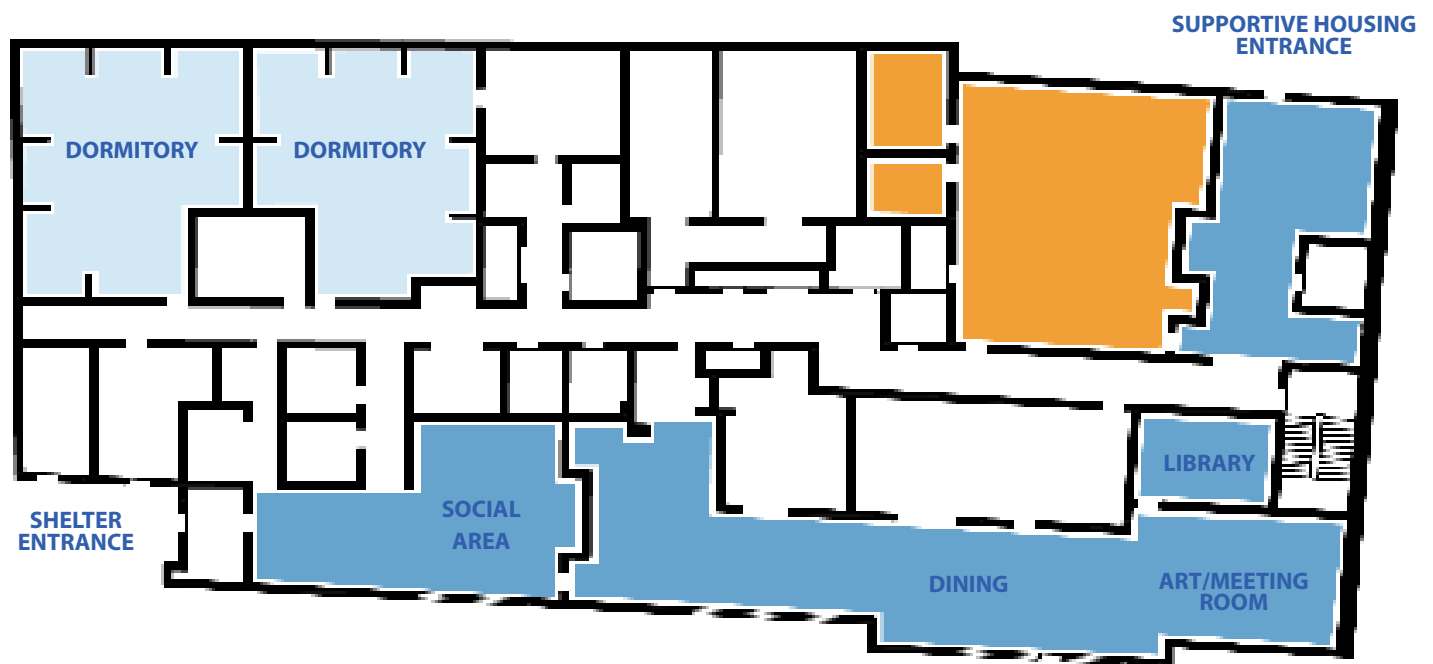
The Arroyo Village is centered around providing comprehensive housing solutions and support services to address homelessness and housing insecurity in Denver, Colorado.



Facility Tour

Delores Project

The Delores Project includes a 24-7 low-barrier shelter serving 50 individuals year-round; 35-unit supportive housing for those who were chronically homeless and have a physical, developmental, psychological, or substance use disability; and supporting services.



Amenities

- separate shelter and supportive housing entrances
- locked storage
- dormitories with assigned beds
- dining room
- library
- arts and crafts/meeting room
- courtyard with garden
- on-site laundry
- telehealth/staff breakroom.

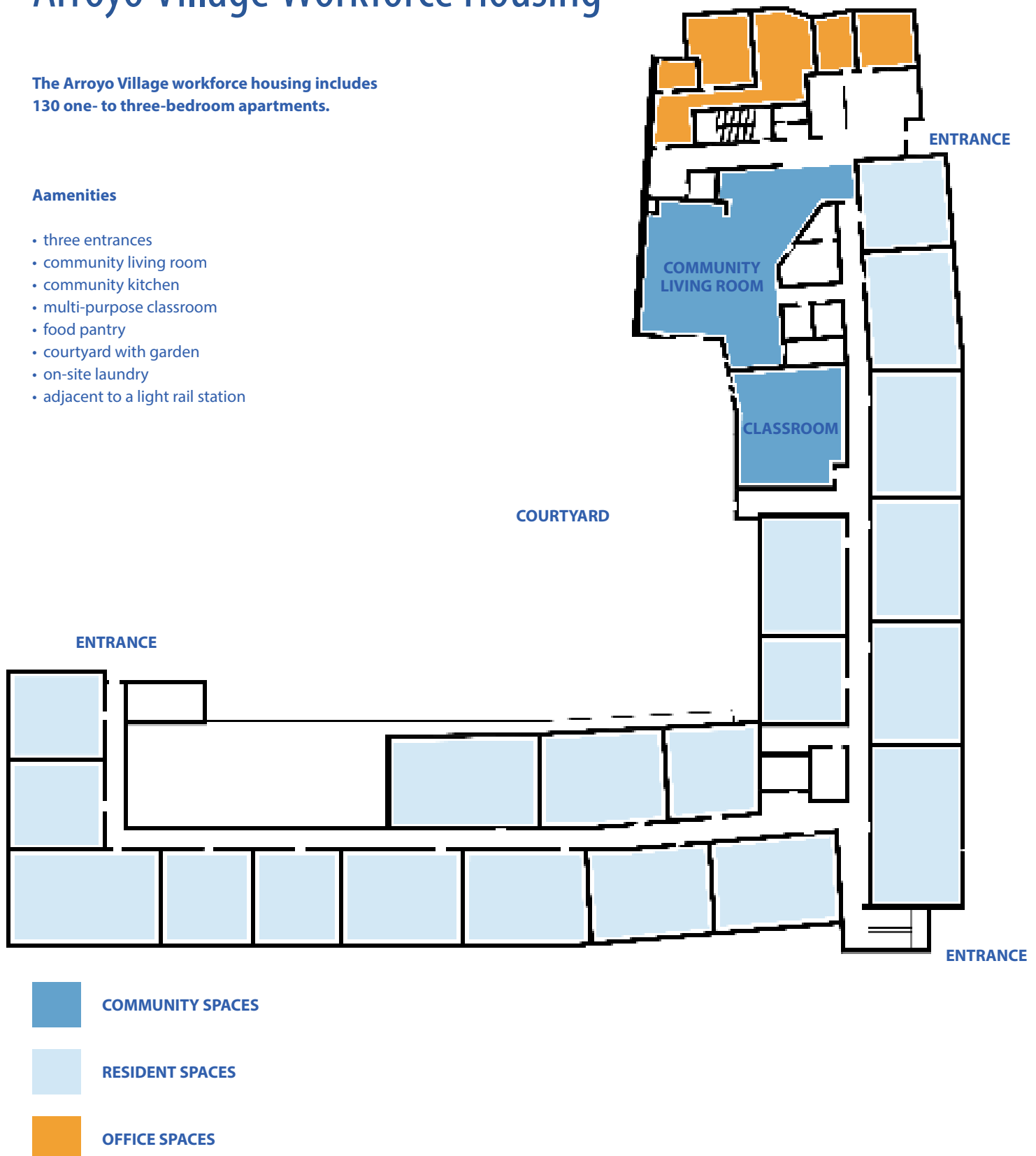
Facility Tour

Arroyo Village Workforce Housing

The Arroyo Village workforce housing includes 130 one- to three-bedroom apartments.

Aamenities

- three entrances
- community living room
- community kitchen
- multi-purpose classroom
- food pantry
- courtyard with garden
- on-site laundry
- adjacent to a light rail station



Trauma-Informed Design Framework

People who are experiencing homelessness often have been subjected to physically or emotionally harmful or even life-threatening events or living situations. These experiences may result in lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being (SAMHSA, 2014).

Crime, mental disorders, physical or emotional violence, and racial discrimination are contributors to trauma. This condition may result in withdrawal, denial, emotional outbursts, substance abuse, or developing more severe mental conditions, such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It is a situation that can last many years and is difficult to overcome. Responding to trauma first requires attention to safety. Only then can reclamation of the sense of self begin to occur.

Trauma-informed design (TID) stems from the trauma-informed care movement in the social work and psychology fields. TID may help to reduce stress and tension by providing for an increased feeling of personal safety and reducing the incidences and frequency of adverse coping behaviors, which may include withdrawal, self-harm, or emotional outbursts. Such environments may also reduce the likelihood of re-traumatization (Design Resources for Homelessness, n.d.) TID is thoughtfully integrated into the Arroyo Village and Delores Project fabric to create a safe, supportive, and healing environment for its residents.



1. Safety and Privacy

Physical and Psychological Safety: The design ensures both actual and perceived safety. This includes secure entrances, sound-dampening to minimize noise, and open sightlines to reduce stress and promote a sense of calm.

Privacy: The shelter entrance is strategically placed to provide privacy for guests – it is on the south side of the building, tucked away from the street. This helps in creating a secure and discrete environment for the most vulnerable residents.

On the supportive housing side, having an apartment for themselves “with a great lock on the front door,” as one resident put it, means being safe for many residents of the Arroyo Village. They can control who comes in, and they do not have to open the door if they do not want to. Additionally, the supportive housing side has an intercom system that allows staff to engage with visitors and make sure the resident is open to that individual coming in to see them, providing another layer of safety for residents.

“I’m happy here. I have a beautiful apartment, and I feel safe.”

Arroyo Village Resident



2. Dignity and Self Esteem

The attractive entrance into the workforce apartments faces a busy street intersection. The residents and guests are greeted with a generous and brightly accentuated overhang, large lettering, and glass doors. These features communicate openness and inspire pride in those who live there.

Natural Elements: The use of natural materials (including ceiling details in the entrance to the common living room, wood-toned vinyl plank flooring in the shelter entrance, side tables made from tree stumps), plenty of daylight, and biophilic design elements (including a significant number of plants throughout the common areas)) helps in creating a calming and restorative environment.



3. Community

Community Spaces: The project includes community rooms, multi-purpose classrooms, and a front lobby that encourages social interactions. These spaces are designed to foster a sense of belonging and support among residents. The residents reported feeling that these spaces were the “second safest” after their apartments.

Courtyard Design: The courtyard provides a protected and safe outdoor space. The shelter guests have their own, protected, courtyard that allows them access to the outdoors from both the living room at the shelter as well as the dining room. The courtyard runs the entire length of the dining room and allows for natural light and views throughout. The courtyard for residents allows them the opportunity to participate in a community garden or sit on picnic benches.

Neighborhood Integration: The design facilitates connections with the surrounding neighborhood, especially the park across the street (Paco Sanchez Park), which recently underwent a major renovation. This park allows the kids at Arroyo Village ample outdoor space, in addition to their protected courtyard. The building is also along a greenway, offering easy access to the city not only via public transportation, but also via walking and biking, enhancing residents’ sense of community and belonging.



4. Empowerment and Personal Control

Personalization: Residents have the ability to personalize their living spaces, which helps with fostering a sense of control and empowerment. This includes features like dimmer switches and window shades that allow residents to adjust light levels to their preferences.

Environmental Quality: The design incorporates elements that allow residents to regulate their physical and psychological comfort. All apartments have operable windows, which give residents control over temperature and ventilation. Post occupancy evaluations did, however, reveal that residents wished for more control over cleanliness (60%), noise (40%), heating/cooling (27%), and lighting (20%).

Varied Interaction Levels: The design of the public spaces in the building allows residents to choose their level of interaction and engagement with others by offering a choice of spaces in which to socialize—from large and open community spaces with varied seating furniture options to smaller front lobby areas, and picnic style seating in the courtyard. The community spaces also have two or more access points, which also implies an idea of choice and control, but in a subtler way.

Guests in the shelter have access to many personalized spaces so they can meet their own needs. For example, while three meals a day are provided for shelter guests, there is also a personal cubby for food storage for each guests, as well as guest-specific fridge and freezers, as well as a small food prep space.



5. Stress Management

The designers introduced a variety of features that may help residents to reduce stress and feel calm. In the shelter, the guests have access to a quiet library – where no technology is allowed. While experiencing homelessness it is rare to experience quiet, and so the design sought to create that opportunity for guests. Successful stress management is closely connected with a sense of feeling safe, and thus we may say that the spaces where residents feel the safest would also be great candidates for helping residents to alleviate stress.

The features that may help improve perceptions of self-esteem and enhance residents' abilities to manage stress and heal include openness of public spaces, greater window-to-wall ratios, easy access to outdoors, spacious apartments with higher ceilings, access to daylight, and street and natural landscape views.

The design team created a staff break room for the shelter, which offered staff an opportunity to calm themselves and deal with their vicarious trauma. This breakroom is within the administrative wing of the shelter, which also features a staff/volunteer restroom.



6. Beauty and Meaning

Current research indicates that visually monotonous environments with long stretches of blank walls and minimal architectural details may induce more stress responses than more visually complex and engaging settings (Ellard & Montgomery, 2013). This “blankness” is too often characteristic of institutional facilities. Beautiful spaces help residents recover from trauma by stimulating new connections between neurons in the brain, by enriching daily experiences, and by fostering social interactions, each of which, in turn, facilitates community building (Valentine, 2024).

The design team introduced The calming green-blue-neutral color palette in combination with non-institutional finishes featuring naturalistic textures. Tasteful patterns and wood grains also contribute to the sense of calm and natural beauty.

The exterior of the building has delightful bright colors, reminiscent of a quilt (meaningful to Delores throughout their history). Guest art adorns the shelter, and provides individuals an opportunity to have a meaningful impact on their environment.

When designing this project, the leadership staff at The Delores Project engaged actively with the shelter's Guest Advisory Committee, who offered feedback and guidance on the shelter design. Many aspects of the shelter were directly impacted by the guests, including offering a computer station in the living room at Delores, a specific ice machine in the dining room, as well as staff offices being offered inside the dorms (instead of across the hall from the dorms as they appeared in the original design). After this project opened, Shopworks Architecture partnered with Group14 Engineering, and the Center for Housing and Homelessness Research at the University of Denver to further research TID and determine best practices in affordable housing and shelters. Their research prompted the development of the Safety + Three C's framework—Comfort, Connection, and Choice—which drove the design of this and other Shopwork's permanent supportive housing projects. This work has impacted over 50 additional developments to implement trauma-informed design on those buildings.

By integrating these TID principles, Arroyo Village creates an environment that provides much-needed housing while also supporting the mental and emotional well-being of its residents and staff, helping them to heal and thrive.

Facility Tour

Delores Project



Lobby

This is the entrance to the Delores project supportive housing. This entrance has a secure front door, which only staff can open to ensure guests and residents are safe to come in. The small lobby has a front desk, a small seating area, and mailboxes for residents. This setup ensures easy connections between residents and staff.



Dining room

This dining room was designed to offer a dignified eating experience for all guests. The dining room runs most of the length of the shelter and offers ceiling-to-floor windows with views of the protected courtyard. The dining room also features light tubes, to bring in as much natural light as possible.



Facility Tour

Delores Project



Library

This is one of the residents' favorite spaces: a quiet, intimate nook where they can read, meditate, or simply spend time alone outside their apartments. A bookshelf filled with books and objects crafted by residents create a cozy and relaxing atmosphere. A string of suspended flowers with handwritten notes introduce a participatory and expressive element, offering residents an opportunity to share thoughts and memories.



Sleeping area

The dorms were designed after much feedback from guests. Features that they requested include outlets at each bed, a nightlight for reading, and secure lockers to which guests set the code so that their belongings can be stored safely.



Facility Tour

Arroyo Village Workforce Housing



Lobby

This is the front entrance to the apartments. The space has a direct access to two offices for property management and leasing. It also offers mailboxes, so that staff can ensure secure deliveries while also engaging with residents.



Community Living Room

This is the primary amenity space for workforce housing. Designed as a flexible community hub, the space integrates a comfortable lounge area, a media wall with built-in shelving and TV, and a fully equipped kitchenette. Warm wood finishes and layered lighting create an inviting atmosphere, while the bright accent wall and contemporary fixtures add energy and visual interest. Adjacent food pantry and maintenance office make it more functional and convenient for both residents and staff.



Facility Tour

Arroyo Village Workforce Housing



Courtyard

This is the courtyard for the workforce apartments – featuring benches, a pergola, and access to community gardens.



Lessons Learned

Arroyo Village is the first-of-its kind development in Colorado. It required creative thinking from the entire development team to bring to fruition. Because it was the first attempt at trauma-informed design for this specific design team, there are many things that the team would do differently.

Here are a few highlights:

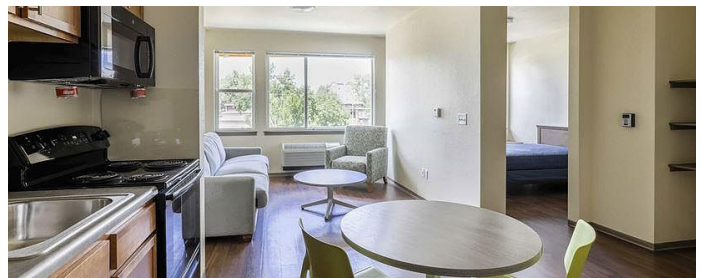
1. Ideally, the shelter would not have any bunk beds and would provide more private offerings for shelter to truly allow individuals a chance to heal and thrive.
2. The laundry rooms are small – and because the residents are often coming from homelessness – they often sit in the small rooms while their laundry is going. Ideally laundry is situated in amenity spaces, or are a larger room with comfortable seating, or exercise equipment, to allow people a dignified experience where they can stay with their laundry while it's happening.
3. Residents in supportive housing appreciate the large windows in their units, but would prefer blackout blinds to ensure they could have darkness (those who have been unhoused often have not experienced complete dark in years).
4. The staff offices are separated by a floor from the resident amenity space for Delores Apartments. This separation makes it so the amenity space is not utilized frequently. Best practice we have used going forward is to have staff offices have visual access to resident amenities – this helps them be used more frequently.
5. An outdoor staff area was created, but it is not utilized because it does not have privacy from the street.



1



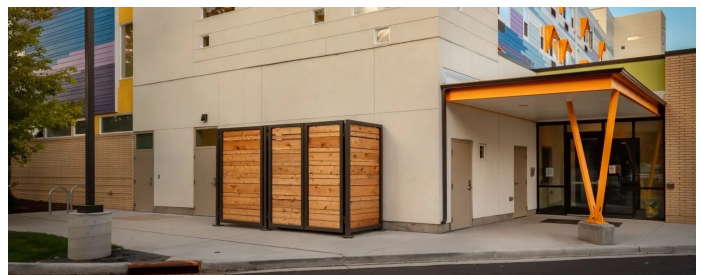
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3



4



5

Lessons Learned

Arroyo Village is unique in several ways, particularly due to its comprehensive approach to addressing homelessness and housing insecurity, and its integration of Trauma-Informed Design principles. Here are the key features that make Arroyo Village stand out:

1. Continuum of Care

- Arroyo Village is one of the few projects in the country that combines a homeless shelter, permanent supportive housing (PSH), and workforce housing under one roof. This wide continuum of care allows residents to transition seamlessly between different housing types as their needs change, providing a stable and supportive environment throughout their journey

2. Trauma-Informed Design

- The project incorporates TID principles to create a healing and supportive environment for residents. Key TID features include:
 - **Safety:** Ensuring both actual and perceived safety through secure entrances, soundproofing, and open sightlines.
 - **Comfort:** Creating environments that allow for physical and psychological comfort, including considerations of indoor environmental quality (IEQ) and the use of natural materials.
 - **Connection:** Facilitating connections between residents, staff, the surrounding neighborhood, and the building itself through community spaces and thoughtful design.
 - **Choice:** Providing opportunities for personalization and control over the environment, such as dimmer switches and varied seating arrangements

Awards and Recognition

Arroyo Village has received accolades such as the Urban Land Institute's Jack Kemp Excellence in Affordable and Workforce Housing Award, highlighting its excellence in design and impact on the community.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank these individuals for their contributions to this case study:

Laura Rossbert, Shopworks Architecture

Jennifer Wilson, Shopworks Architecture

Kevin Beaty, Denverite

Sean Vincion, Florida State University

Shopworks Architecture Team, Denver, Colorado



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