

Hawthorne Community Building

Pilot on designing a trauma-informed office and community space

POAH Community	Hawthorne Place Apartments
Location	Independence, Missouri, USA
Number of units	745
Property size	72 acres
Property Manager	POAH Communities
Resident Services: Community Services League (CSL), Boys’ & Girls’ Club of Greater Kansas City, Small Wonders Childcare and Learning Center, Holy Rosary Credit Union	
Unit Mix	One- to three-bedroom units



David Stanley Community Building at Hawthorne Place Apartments (photo: Google Maps)



Hawthorne Place residences (photo: POAH)



Playground at Hawthorne Place (photo: POAH)

About Hawthorne Place Apartments

Hawthorne Place Apartments, the largest affordable housing community in Missouri, is home to over 1,900 residents and comprises 745 one- to three-bedroom homes across a sprawling 72 acres in the outskirts of the city of Independence. The property has gone through one major renovation completed in 2003 when POAH acquired the property. In 2007, the 22,000 square foot David Stanley Community Center was completed and is a crucial asset for residents as it houses all residential services. At the community center, residents have access to services from maintenance and property management, Community Services League (CSL), the Kansas City Boys and Girls Club, a food pantry, a computer room, a credit union, and daycare.

Hawthorne Place has provided much needed stability and rental subsidies to hundreds of families and individuals from diverse backgrounds and one stand-out characteristic is that about half of its residents are children under the age of 14. As of June 2020, there were 1,969 residents living at Hawthorne Place in 726 households; 63% of residents identify with a race or ethnic group other than white; 63% of residents were female; 50% of residents were children under the age of 14; and 49% of residents live in a household with over three people. The community has also long struggled with high eviction rates and turnover with 80% of residents having a tenancy of 0-5 years.

As the largest affordable housing community in the state, Hawthorne Place is a beacon for families and individuals seeking access to a stable home and services. However, over the years Hawthorne Place has struggled with crime in the community and faced constant stigma from neighboring communities and the city. While residents can get access to services and resources to provide stability and opportunities for themselves and their families at Hawthorne Place, they often also must find other kinds of support to build resilience as they become part of a community who has dealt with trauma.

As one of the POAH sites part of the Resilient Communities Grant, Hawthorne Place presents an opportunity to embed trauma-informed care to amplify resident services, strengthen community relationships, and cultivate resilience in families and individuals who are facing significant community trauma.

An opportunity for a fresh start

In 2021, POAH obtained financing and began construction to complete a major renovation to the apartments and community center at Hawthorne Place. While the renovation was envisioned long before the COVID-19 pandemic started, access to funds and renovation plans initiated during one of the most challenging times for the country. The renovation is expected to be complete by 2022. Over the last 18 months, the Hawthorne Place community has been dealing with the effects of the coronavirus pandemic and with the construction disruption and being temporarily relocated while renovations take place. Increasing tensions between the renovation project and the social disconnect that resulted from the pandemic has led residents and on-site staff to feel increased stress, lack of community, and social isolation.

Understanding the unique needs

Although the pandemic and renovation project has exacerbated some of these unique challenges many across the country are facing, these are not new sentiments. Early engagement insights from the “Resilient Communities” grant project shed light on ongoing tensions in residents and staff at Hawthorne Place. Interviews conducted with residents revealed that despite having access to the support and resources provided by resident services, pervasive community trauma has led to a living environment with very limited resident interactions and high anxiety to follow the rules over fear of eviction or other repercussions. Similarly, staff expressed shared sentiments around feeling severe work burnout and facing high workplace trauma in their daily interactions with other staff and residents. Moreover, the grant team is also working directly with POAH property management and CSL at Hawthorne Place to find ways to improve resident services. Both organizations offer separate and distinct much needed services to residents. However, this distinction has also become a source of tension among the staff at either organization and perception in the community to see property management as ‘bad cop’ and CSL as ‘good cop’. This tension is intensified in their physical office space; currently, POAH and CSL share the entire second floor office space in the community center where residents access many of the community amenities and also seek services from either organizations using separate entrances and meeting spaces.

Alignment with the ongoing grant

The renovation project and alignment with the scope of the “Resilient Communities” grant presented a unique opportunity for the grant team to do a deep dive into Hawthorne Place and find early opportunities to embed trauma-informed care lessons in the engagement process and within a small scope of the renovation project. This pilot focused on implementing a trauma-informed design process, specifically for the renovation of the second floor of the community center which is home to POAH Property Management offices, CSL offices, and community amenities including the credit union, the food pantry, and the computer room. The following pages describe the trauma-informed design and engagement process with staff and residents, the design response, and lessons learned.



RESILIENT
COMMUNITIES



Designing Trauma-Resilient Communities Partner Team

Process: What does a trauma-informed design process look like?

Over the course of five weeks, MASS Design Group completed an engagement process with POAH HPA Property Management staff, CSL staff, and HPA residents to develop spatial recommendations for the renovation of the community building. The process for engagement was trauma-informed by incorporating human-centered design activities including: team kick-off and mission visioning, persona development, journey mapping, and focus groups. The following represent lessons learned from this process.

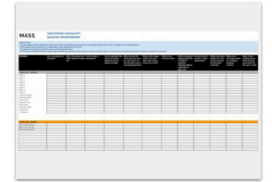
Mission Brainstorm



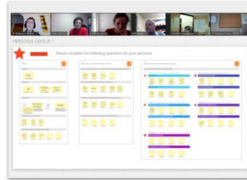
Needs & Opportunities



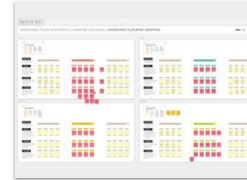
Programming Worksheet



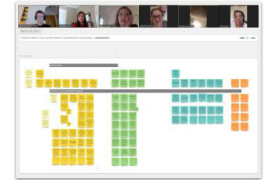
Resident Persona Development



Resident Experience Journey Mapping



Resident Focus Group



Key activities completed during the engagement process (image: MASS Design Group)

What we heard

- Spaces are not accessible for residents and staff with mobility impairments
- There are not enough spaces for community use
- Staff workplace environment and cross-organization interactions need to be better supported
- The spaces at the community building do not welcome children safely
- Meeting between staff and residents do not feel private

What it could mean

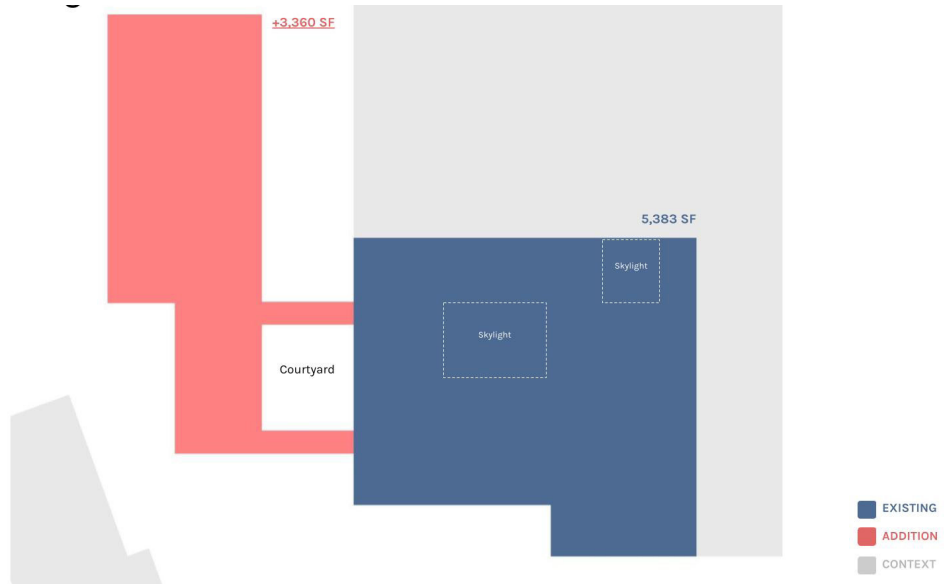
- The community center should:
 - Make everyone feel welcome and safe
 - Foster community intergenerational engagement and learning
 - Create a healthy work environment that leads to positive staff & resident experience
 - Welcome children into spaces designed with children in mind
 - Offer dedicated resident and staff meeting spaces

What we recommended in response

- Incorporate universal design so all spaces are accessible to everyone
- Foster a healthy work culture for staff to do their best work
- Empower residents by having direct access to community-facing spaces
- Create spaces that welcome and protect children
- Enhance quality of relationships between staff and residents with dedicated meeting spaces

Tactics: What are the trauma-informed design opportunities?

While the scope of this design project was limited to the property management and CSL offices, the design and spatial recommendations are a good example of trauma-informed design opportunities that can be explored in similar settings.



Existing and proposed addition floor plan (image: MASS Design Group)

Key elements in the proposed plan:

1. Resident-facing program is in the front of the building, with clear access for residents
2. Resident & staff should have dedicated meeting rooms
3. Staff areas separate from resident spaces



Proposed floor plan with design recommendations based on the principles of trauma-informed care (image: MASS Design Group)

Lessons Learned

Engagement with staff and residents

The engagement process should center the experience of the end user regularly to identify needs, pain points, workarounds, and opportunities for this work to be impactful. The design recommendations for the HPA Community Building renovation incorporated the input from staff and residents.

Communication

A process that is grounded in trauma-informed care elevates the importance of communication at every stage of the process between the team leading this work and all stakeholders involved. Defining the clear expectations and ways in which progress and communications will happen provides transparency to the process for everyone who is involved and invested in the process. This process relied on regular virtual communications (e-mail, zoom meetings) between the design team and the stakeholders.

Decision-making

Paired with communication, defining clear paths on how decisions will be made will help clarify the roles and expectations for the project. It is crucial to balance the needs and opportunities identified and shared by stakeholders with what is possible to implement in the project within the constraints of the timeline and budget.

Community / Historical Trauma

Deeply understanding the community and context is crucial for this work to gain insight into any community trauma and historical trauma that will be important to address and acknowledge as a part of a trauma-informed design process. The engagement process with HPA was deployed within the constraints of a tight construction timeline which did not allow the design team to delve deeply into these topics.

Stakeholder Analysis

The stakeholder groups engaged were initially determined by the rehabilitation scope for the project which included renovation of the second floor of the community building currently housing the offices for POAH HPA Property Management, CSL, and the Holy Rosary Credit Union. The direct engagement with stakeholders included staff from POAH HPA Property Management Staff, CSL Staff, and residents. While the community building currently houses more partners who provide services to residents, such as the Boys & Girls Club, Holy Rosary Credit Union, and the Small Wonders Daycare, this process did not specifically engage with key representatives from these organizations. Upon completion of this process, the design team received feedback that it would have been preferred to reach out to these partner organizations to explain the process and why or why not they were not invited to participate at this time.

References

- “Nonprofit Lands Financing for Missouri’s Largest Affordable Housing Community.” Multi-Housing News. March 18, 2021.
- Hawthorne Place Apartments. Preservation of Affordable Housing.
- Hawthorne Place Property Demographics Tearsheet. Preservation of Affordable Housing.

About Designing Trauma-Resilient Communities

In 2020, POAH was awarded a \$2M Enterprise Housing Affordability Breakthrough Challenge, a Wells Fargo funded challenge grant designed to test and scale innovation housing solutions. POAH's proposal, "Designing Trauma-Resilient Communities", will identify ways to reduce adversity and harm and promote resilience for residents across four sites part of POAH Communities.

About This Document

This document shares lessons learned from a pilot trauma-informed design process completed for Hawthorne Place Apartments (HPA). The lessons learned and shared in this document were incorporated into the broader grant team's process and were useful in guiding the rest of the sites' brainstorming phase. The scope of this pilot process included designing and implementing an engagement process with POAH HPA Property Management staff, CSL staff, and HPA residents to assess the needs and opportunities for the upcoming renovation of the second floor of the Hawthorne Community Building.