

WHAT IS TRAUMA-INFORMED DESIGN?



Design that is trauma-informed centers healing as an integral part of the design process and prioritizes it as an observable outcome in the built environment.

Informed by trauma is grounded in the understanding that all people experience adversity and external factors, such as the built environment, can play a role in supporting healing and fostering resilience.

It goes beyond tactical interventions when a trauma-informed design process offers an opportunity to disrupt the structural systems that perpetuate trauma.

It is good for everyone because spaces are purpose built and empower individuals and communities to steward the design of homes, schools, neighborhoods, etc.

HOW DOES TRAUMA-INFORMED DESIGN APPEAR IN AFFORDABLE HOUSING?

Trauma is a leading health concern in the U.S., impacting 6 in 10 people, and disproportionately impacting residents of affordable housing.

Housing and community development practices must seek to understand and acknowledge residents' collective lived experience and expertise. If overlooked, housing owners and operators risk perpetuating trauma among the very communities they seek to serve.

Historically, the housing sector has evaluated community development impact through the lens of the number of units produced or preserved.

However, a trauma-informed design approach, centers residents' lived experiences and understands success not just in terms of bricks and mortar, but on the well-being of residents and the staff that serve them.

TRAUMA-INFORMED DESIGN PRINCIPLES | IN AFFORDABLE HOUSING COMMUNITIES

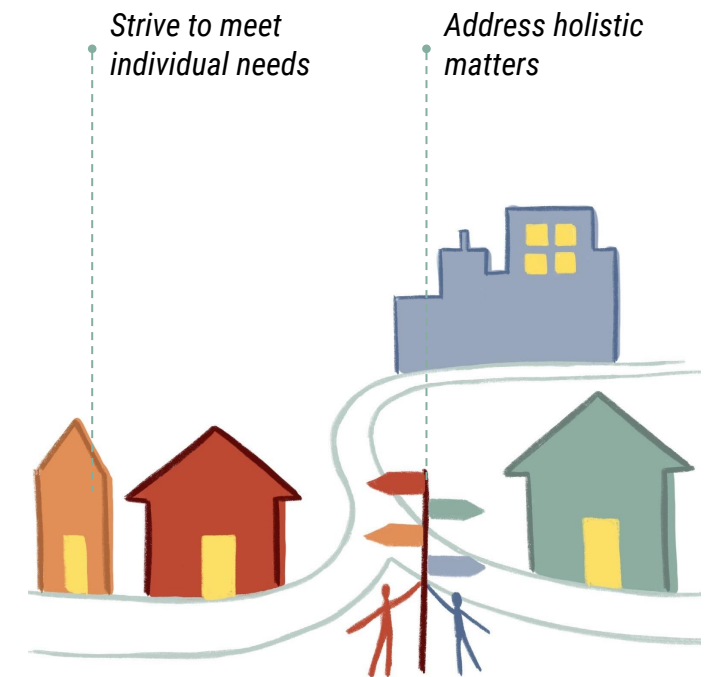
SAFETY & TRUST

Housing communities designed to **create a sense of safety and trust** offer spaces, services, and programs that are welcoming, inclusive, and representative of the local context and culture.



CHOICE & EMPOWERMENT

Housing communities designed to **lift up choice and empowerment** offer residents clear options of spaces and services to use that enable them to make choices of how to best meet their needs.



COMMUNITY & COLLABORATION

Housing communities designed to **build community and collaboration** cultivate social cohesion with a diversity of space and service offerings.



BEAUTY & JOY

Housing communities **spark beauty and joy** encouraging residents to take care of their environment to cultivate growth, pride, and delight.



TRAUMA-INFORMED DESIGN PRINCIPLES | DESIGN OPPORTUNITIES AT-A-GLANCE

These design opportunities, in no particular order, are a sampling of evidence-based interventions to consider when designing trauma-informed spaces – actual design recommendations should be based on the particular project, program, and context.

Clear access and wayfinding	Entrances are easy to find and locate throughout the property and building design with clear wayfinding signage
Provide access to nature	Access to nature is linked to promoting positive health impacts, joy, healing, solace, and reflection.
Flexible, adaptable spaces	Ability to adjust spaces increases sense of safety, comfort, and purpose.
Offer a variety of spaces	Offering different types and sizes of spaces accommodates varying degrees of socialization and comfort.
Provide movable furniture	Provide lightweight furnishings that give users the choice to rearrange the space.
Design for acoustical privacy	Limit or mitigate loud noises (e.g. building equipment, big events, etc.) and prioritize users' acoustic privacy.
Offer positive distractions	Design features that alleviate stress and elicit positive reactions, feelings, and hold attention.
Provide inclusive furniture	Space and furnishings are welcoming to all.
Design for property security	Building provides security measures throughout the property.
Design for visual safety & privacy	Provide appropriate security measures and allow users to make some adjustments as needed.
Provide predictable spaces	Organizations of rooms and spaces are intentional, easy to understand and predict, and navigate by users.
Design unobstructed sightlines	Unobstructed views, ample lighting, soft and wide corners throughout the property exterior, interior spaces, and corridors.
Offer spatial openness	Perceived sense of open space available that allows residents to choose their path based on their level of comfort.
Use high quality materials	Durable materials show quality and care for residents
Offer artful features	Art can create belonging and connection, foster empowerment, and serve as an outlet for self-expression.
Strive for visually simple and clear design	Simple, uncluttered, and clean design features achieve organized and visually balanced spaces.
Consider natural materials	Natural materials draw connections to nature, support a healthier environment for people, and promote a sense of calm and clarity.
Use cool color choices in common areas	In common areas, consider blues, greens, and purples which have calming effects.
Light-filled spaces	Maximize natural daylight as much as possible in all spaces.
Provide clear circulation paths	Provide barrier-free, visual transparency and wider-than-usual corridors where appropriate

Refer to the following section for tactical interventions to implement according to the spatial program type.

TRAUMA-INFORMED DESIGN PRINCIPLES | SAFETY & TRUST

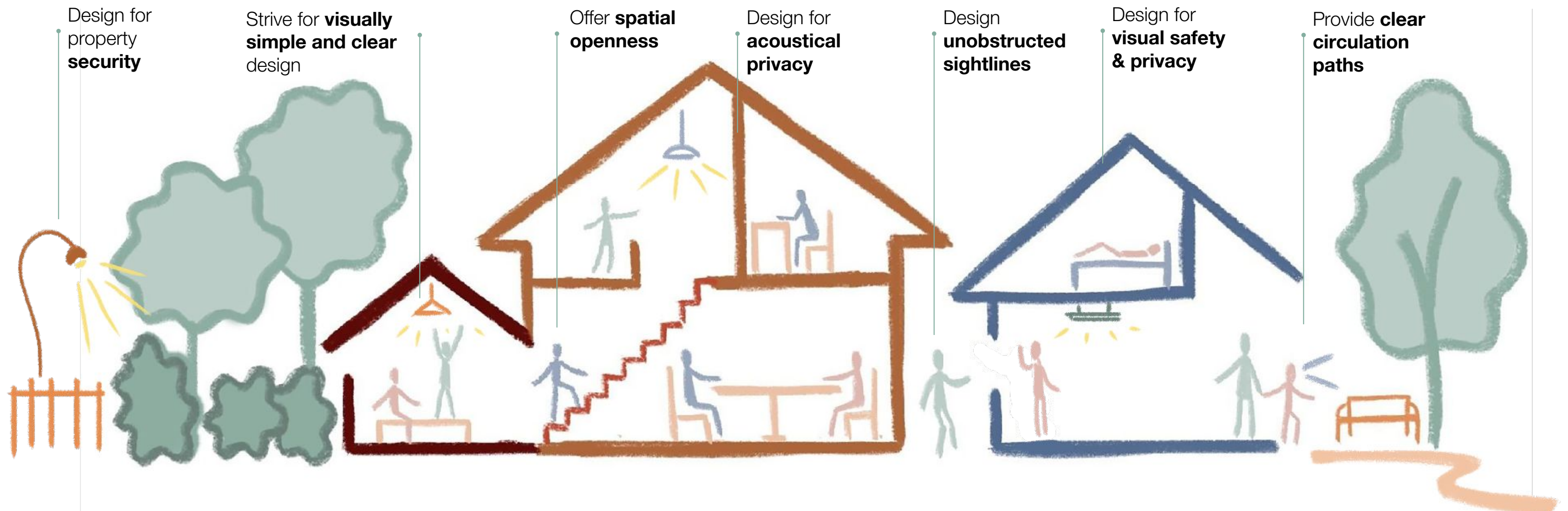


As a fundamental need, understanding safety as defined by those served is a high priority.

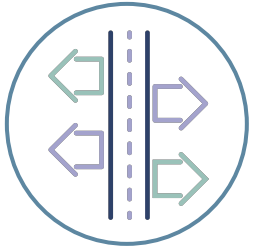
Therefore, spaces in the built environment, informed by the local context, should prioritize individuals' sense of physical, psychological, and community safety and should offer a variety of space sizes, use quality materials, respect privacy and acoustics, and promote equitable and inclusive access for all.

“Being outside is peaceful. It’s where I feel most safe with friends.”

- Resident, Flat 9 at Whittier



TRAUMA-INFORMED DESIGN PRINCIPLES | CHOICE & EMPOWERMENT



A sense of agency, representation and choice is important for all people, especially in affordable housing communities where many residents, historically, have been impacted by decisions made without their voice or consent.

“I feel a strong sense of trust when I can navigate spaces on my own.”

- Resident, Hawthorne Place Apartments

Therefore, the built environment should offer a variety of design features that allow individuals to make choices aligned with their needs, to feel heard and represented, and to practice self-care.



TRAUMA-INFORMED DESIGN PRINCIPLES | COMMUNITY & COLLABORATION

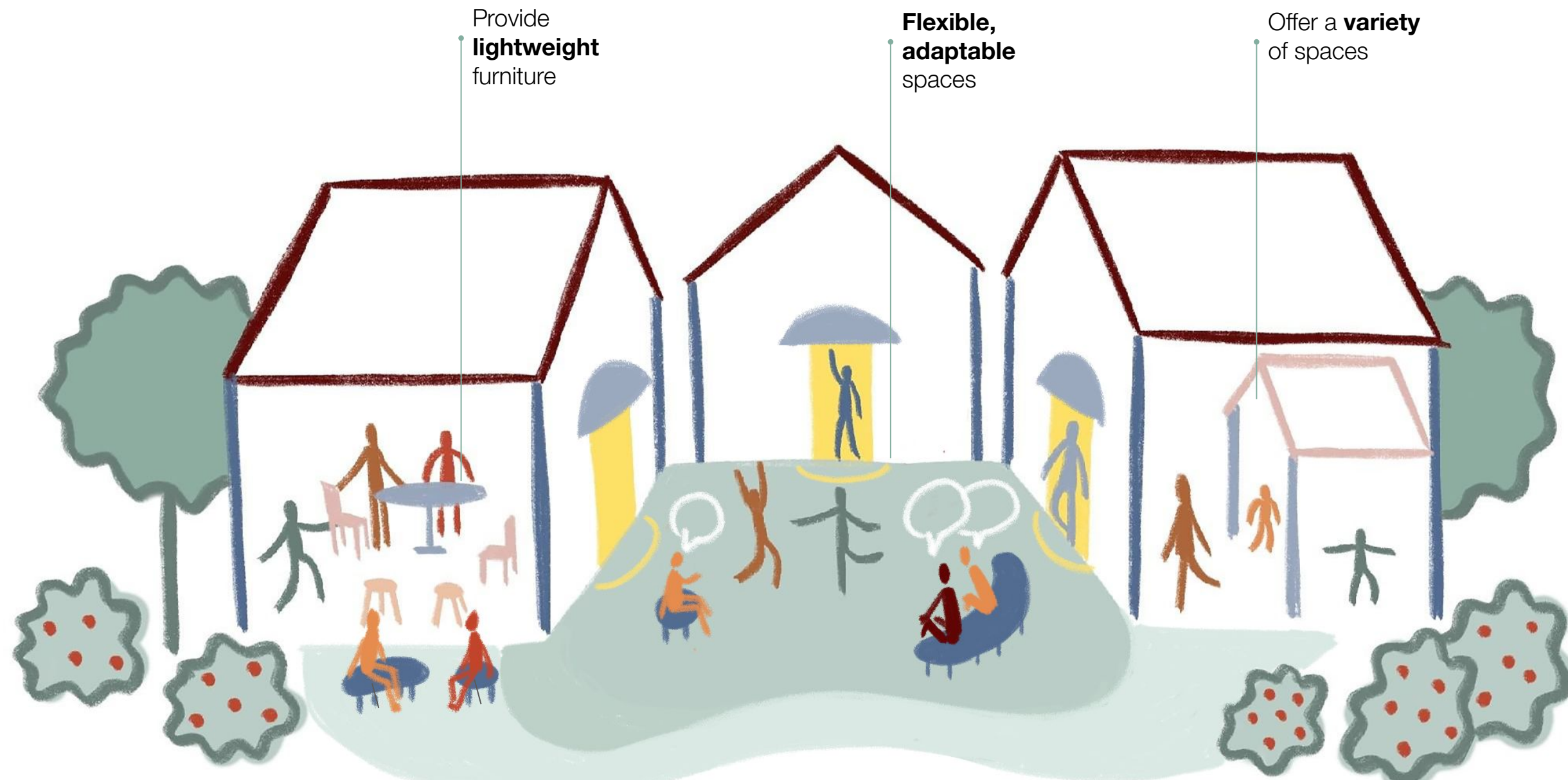


Healing happens within the context of relationships and in the meaningful sharing of power and decision-making.

Therefore, physical spaces support rest and connection, and celebrate the history and strengths of the community.

“I can rely on my neighbors. We know each other and look out for each other, too.”

- Resident, POAH Community in Cincinnati



TRAUMA-INFORMED DESIGN PRINCIPLES | BEAUTY & JOY

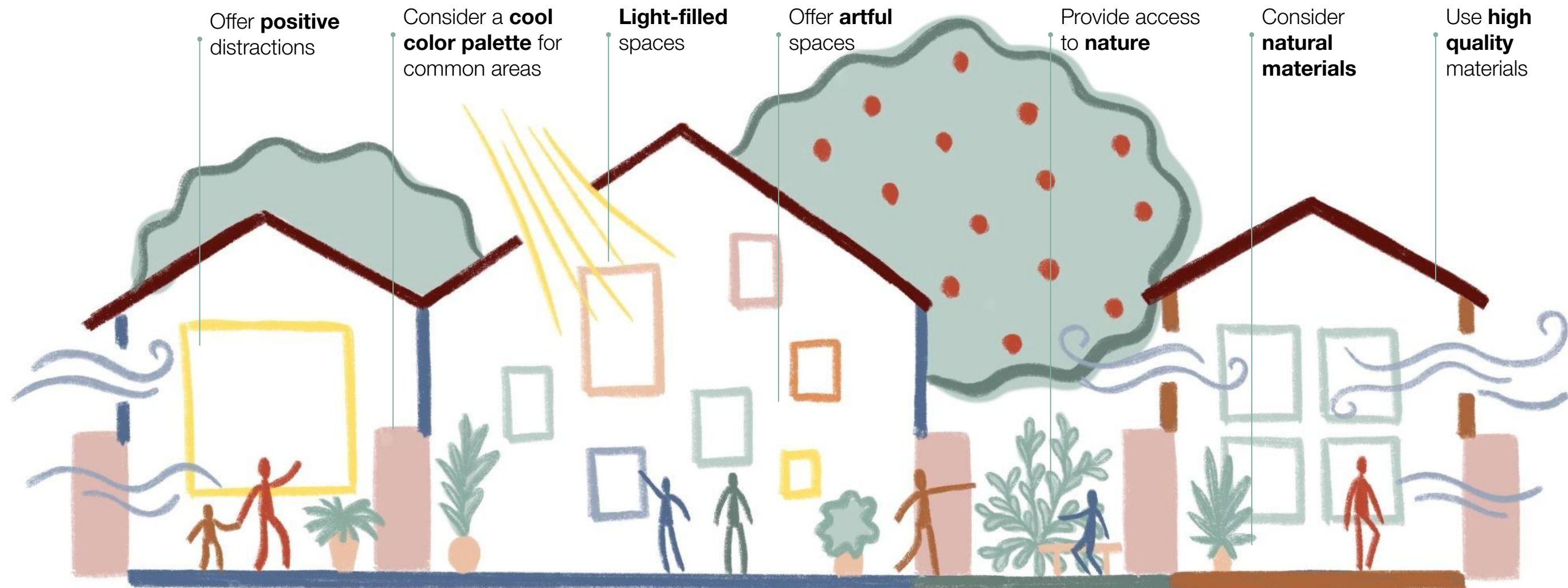


Promoting recovery and healing happens with the appropriate social and spatial supports.

Therefore, spaces in the built environment should evoke hope, resiliency, and imagination.

“It is the first place that has felt like home.”

- Resident, Brandy Hill Apartments

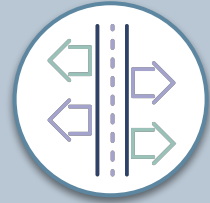


FROM TRAUMA-INFORMED DESIGN PRINCIPLES TO DESIGN OPPORTUNITIES

PRINCIPLES



SAFETY & TRUST



CHOICE & EMPOWERMENT



COLLABORATION & COMMUNITY



BEAUTY & JOY

DESIGN OPPORTUNITIES

- Clear **access and wayfinding**
- Provide access to **nature**
- Flexible, adaptable** spaces
- Offer a **variety** of spaces
- Provide **lightweight** furniture
- Design for **acoustical privacy**
- Offer **positive** distractions
- Provide **inclusive** furniture
- Design for property **security**
- Design for **visual safety & privacy**
- Provide **predictable** spaces
- Design unobstructed sightlines
- Offer **spatial openness**
- Use **high quality** materials
- Offer **artful** spaces
- Visually simple and clear** design
- Consider **natural materials**
- Use a **healthy** color palette
- Provide **clear circulation paths**
- Light-filled** spaces