

**New Wells Park building functions as 'another staff person' for HopeWorks** by Peter Rice, Downtown Albuquerque News (DAN), 4/19/22



*This hallway gradually narrows. It's no mistake. HopeWorks*

At first blush, the brand-new 42-unit apartment complex at Third and Summer dubbed Hope Village appears to be the very picture of normality. The colors are a soft collection of white, light brown, orange, and yellow, and they work well with the abundant natural light. The common areas have couches, TVs, a pool table, and potted plants. There's even a suggestion box at the front desk.

But take a closer look and several deviations from your standard-issue apartment building begin to pop out. The building has very few corners to maneuver around and is generally designed so that everything there is to see can be seen at a glance. That goes for the 405-square-foot rooms as well, where the wall separating the kitchen area from the bedroom features a doorway with no door and a separate window-like

opening. Walk the hallways inward from the building's extremities and you'll notice that they get wider as you go. And just outside the front doors, there's a designated area for outdoor sleeping that the front desk staff can easily keep an eye on, just in case a tenant isn't quite comfortable spending the night inside yet. (The complex, a recently-completed project of Wells Park social service agency HopeWorks, is designed to house [chronically homeless](#) people.)

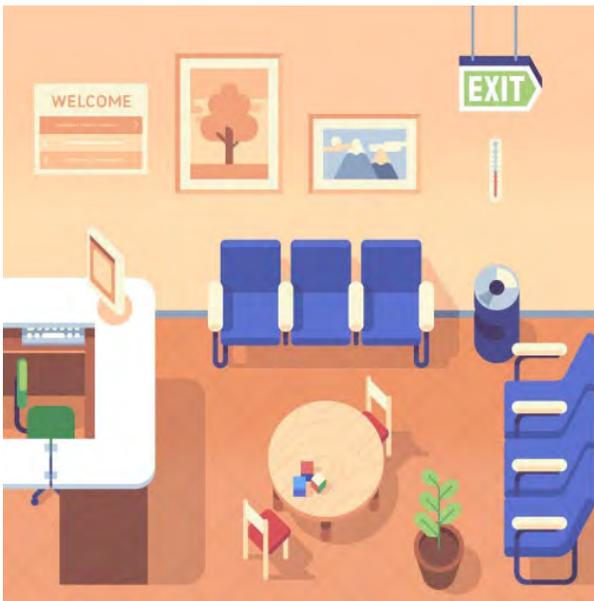
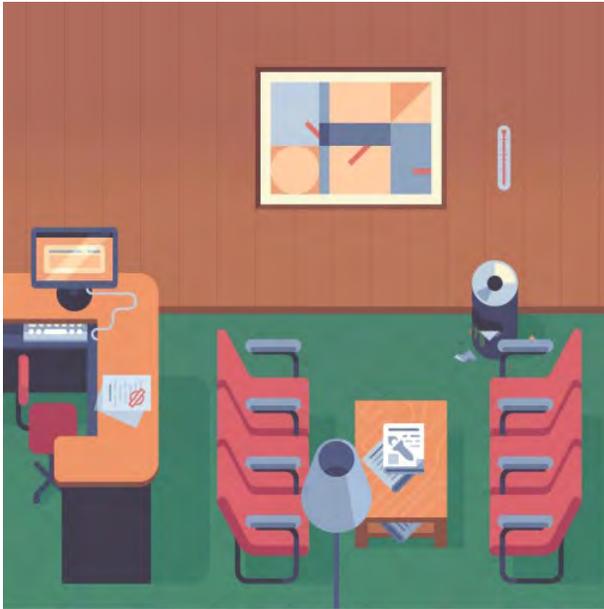
This is [trauma-informed design](#), a newish collection of architectural principles that aims to turn out buildings where people who haven't always been safe can nonetheless feel safe.

Those wide-open rooms and common areas, for example, are one way of reducing the fear - conscious or otherwise - that something bad may be lurking around a corner.

"I can come in, I can go up the main stairs and get to my place without feeling like there may be somebody hiding," said Doug Heller, a principal at [Mullen Heller](#), the West Downtown architecture firm that designed the project. Likewise, "If you are standing in any one place within your apartment you can see everything you've got, and that's important if you've been homeless. You want to keep everything you've got as close as possible."

The narrowing/expanding hallway, meanwhile, is all about maintaining personal space. The closer you get to the middle part of the building, the more people may be using the hallway at any given time, so the building gives them extra room.

But if those aspects of trauma-informed design are especially pertinent to people who have had some harrowing experiences, others apply to pretty much everyone. Those natural-light-filled rooms, cool colors, and tasteful plants are also part of the design principles.



*TOP: The intense colors, too-complex art on the walls, general untidiness, and "confrontational" face-to-face seating are all examples of bad trauma-informed design, according to [this guide](#) from the Committee on Temporary Shelter, from which these diagrams are taken. BOTTOM: The addition of clear signage, a plant, cool colors, and a different seating pattern are meant to put people at ease.*

"It really can translate to multi-family projects as well, and some commercial projects," Heller said.

Hope Village takes inspiration from the [Sanderson Apartments](#), a complex in Denver with a similar mission that Heller and former HopeWorks CEO Greg Morris visited while planning out the Albuquerque building. Morris, who has continued to work on the marathon project, is elated by how it turned out.

"The building itself becomes another staff person," he said. "It supports the trauma-informed care that you're already implementing with clients." (Those clients/residents are [very likely to have gone through some dreadful experiences.](#))

And he's already looking ahead to a possible next project: A long-contemplated new day shelter, replacing the current incarnation next door that features very few of the principles used in the new building.

"Eventually we'd love to build a new day shelter that is built with trauma-informed design as well," Morris said.

**See it for yourself:** HopeWorks organizes occasional tours of the new building. To join one, email Rachel Rodriguez at [rrodriguez@hopeworksnm.org](mailto:rrodriguez@hopeworksnm.org).

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