EXPANDED VISION

Rethinking accessible living with broader-based community integration projects

BY TODD WILTSE | PHOTOS BY KENDALL MCCUSKIN

Designing a home to be accessible for a wide range of mobility, sensory and cognitive impairments is challenging enough. But the ultimate success or failure of the design is not just dependent on the "what" of the home’s location and the "how" of its integration into that community, as much as it does on the "where" — the physical environment within the home.

Designing with the expanded point of view on true accessibility and empowerment for residents not only allows architects to realize a greater impact for the people who make their lives in the buildings we create, it can define a new paradigm for how we design and build new paradigms for how we think about accessibility.

Access Health and Housing, a partnership between developer IFF Home First, the Illinois Department of Human Services and Trinity Healthcare system, is an example of a human-centered approach to the provision of affordable, accessible and community-integrated housing. This project recognizes that quality of life extends beyond the individual to the well-being of the community as a whole.

This project is one of a number of efforts to relocate individuals out of nursing care facilities back to community settings under the Colbert Consent Decree. The provision of healthcare and other support services in a residential setting is critical to the success of the Access Health housing typology, and it is challenging enough, but the ultimate success or failure of the design is not just dependent on the "what" of the home’s location and the "how" of its integration into that community, as much as it does on the "where" — the physical environment within the home.

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the need for additional affordable, accessible and community-integrated housing. This necessitated a human-centered approach that would not only prioritize accessibility and empowerment for residents, but also ensure that the design of the project would be inclusive and sustainable over the long-term.

At the same time, the design team focused on creating a development that would not only meet the needs of the residents, but also contribute to the overall neighborhood. The project was designed to be a catalyst for broader neighborhood improvements, with features such as sustainable landscaping and energy-efficient design.

Promoting health through the built environment
In addition to satisfying specific design features, the Access Health and Housing project also incorporated strategies to promote health and wellness. This included features such as well-lit, accessible corridors, and a focus on creating spaces that were designed to be supportive of individual needs and preferences.

Promoting sustainability and community engagement
The project was designed to be a model for sustainable development, with features such as solar panels to provide energy for the building, and a focus on reducing water usage.

Overall, the Access Health and Housing project represents a significant step forward in the development of housing that prioritizes accessibility, sustainability, and community engagement. With its innovative design and commitment to creating a supportive community, it serves as a model for future developments in the field.

Inserting accessible living options into locations that already have jobs, transportation, healthcare and other amenities, opens the door to sustainable and equitable communities, thereby ensuring broad-based equity.

Permanent Supportive Housing residents in the Access Health development have the ability to live independently. Both residents and architects are committed to ensuring that the building is designed to support a range of living arrangements. This includes the integration of work opportunities, transportation options, and other support services, thereby ensuring that residents are able to access the resources they need to live independently.

In conclusion, the Access Health and Housing project is an example of how innovative design and community engagement can come together to create a supportive and sustainable living environment. By prioritizing accessibility, sustainability, and community engagement, this project sets a new standard for the development of affordable, accessible, and community-integrated housing.