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News

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Philadelphia University Architecture students work with Project H.O.M.E. to improve Women of Change Safe Haven

PHILADELPHIA, May 4, 2012—Philadelphia University fifth-year architecture students collaborated with Project H.O.M.E. to design and build improvements to the Women of Change Safe Haven, located at 2042 Arch Street in Philadelphia.

With the goal of improving conditions at the shelter for 25 chronically homeless women, the Philadelphia University Design X Socio-Political Studio worked on design-build installations for the sleeping dorm, community room and medical area of the facility.

“We were looking for a project to collaborate with PhilaU students on and a series of needs emerged at the shelter which became a great opportunity for both us and the students,” said Paul Sassani, Project H.O.M.E. vice president of property and asset management. Women of Change Safe Haven serves chronically homeless, seriously mentally ill women.

For the dormitory sleeping area, the students created transitional living booths which offer a degree of privacy and sense of place while providing durable, hygienic sleeping quarters with integrated storage.

In the community area, the students focused on defining a space that residents feel comfortable using when the room is temporarily occupied by additional residents during code blue situations. The part furniture–part screen construction can be moved and repositioned to meet the changing needs of the space.



For the medical room, students plan to design and install a multi-use exam table which can be folded out of the way for space efficiency.

“This project is an extraordinary real-world learning experience for the students, said David Kratzer, associate professor of architecture at Philadelphia University. “To work directly with clients to generate the designs and then build the solutions is an incredible opportunity. And to be able to satisfy the needs of the shelter makes it even more rewarding.”

Working with the architecture students, graduate students in the occupational therapy program at Philadelphia University provided research and insights into the designs, making the project a rich interdisciplinary experience.

“This studio class required us to work within the restraints of a real-world project, testing our creativity and providing valuable lessons on collaboration, construction, documentation and working relationships with clients,” said Justine Tarrant, a fifth-year architecture student. “We have accomplished a functional and elegant solution to the problems and are looking forward to the final installation of the design at Women of Change Safe Haven.”

In addition to Sassani, the Project H.O.M.E. team includes Robin Bonfield, director of Women of Change; Alex Smith, social case worker; and Chris Rivera, director of facilities. Project H.O.M.E. works to achieve its mission of alleviating homelessness and poverty through street outreach, housing and comprehensive services.

The project is funded by a Philadelphia University Nexus Learning Grant and donations to Project H.O.M.E. There will be an exhibition and celebration of the work on Saturday, May 5 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the upper level conference room of the Architecture and Design Center at Philadelphia University. The exhibition is free and open to the public.

Philadelphia University, founded in 1884, is a private university with 3,600 students enrolled in



more than 60 undergraduate and graduate programs. As the model for professional university education, the University prepares students to be leaders in their professions in an active, collaborative and real-world learning environment infused with the liberal arts. Philadelphia University includes the innovative College of Design, Engineering and Commerce; the College of Architecture and the Built Environment; and the College of Science, Health and the Liberal Arts. For more information, go to

www.PhilaU.edu.