

CARE House
Child Advocacy Center
Dayton, Ohio

The purpose of this 10,000 SF facility is to enhance the organization's ability to effectively address the trauma associated with child abuse cases. The design has created a welcoming and nurturing environment to allow CARE House to fulfill its mission of providing a team response to child abuse through prevention, intervention and advocacy.

One of the design goals is to minimize the pain children have experienced by the very system that is intended to protect them. This has been accomplished by conceiving child-friendly surroundings that allow the professional staff to deliver medical and mental health services, conduct forensic interviews, and offer victim advocacy and support.

A major priority of the project is to depart from the traditional residential setting as a means of making children feel comfortable as this is typically the place where abuse or neglect occurs. The interior space takes its inspiration from nature, a place that most children find relaxing and secure.

The connection to nature and the outdoors is achieved through the use of color, form and scale. Finding the appropriate child-friendly scale was critical to ensure that the children do not have a sense of intimidation or a feeling anxiety that is often associated with institutional facilities.

CARE House is located in a neighborhood that contains the campus of Dayton Children's Hospital and 1930s residential housing. The building's design complements the fabric of this residential and healthcare setting.

The hospital contains hip gables and red brick as a branding element. The form of the building is a play between the orthogonal geometry of the residential city grid, and the organic forms of the adjacent highway that has an exit ramp at the corner of the site. This play of hard edges and curves faces the front entrance which transforms into the small cubes that turn the corner to the residential neighborhood.

The building exterior blends with the fabric of the community while setting the scale to comfort the children through the organic forms of nature. After entering through the curved gateway, with its tree branch glass-etching, the main hall takes its cues from a majestic canopy of trees. This feeling is achieved throughout the structure with all-wood beams and a floating wood roof that feels like the canopy of a forest.

The walls, floors, reception desk and children's area are all opportunities to discover nature under the canopy of trees flooded with natural light. The building is oriented to allow the natural light to constantly change the perception of the space. The floor uses curved tiles to create a playful wayfinding form to guide visitors and children through the facility.

Every aspect related to the interior was carefully selected to build upon the idea that nature is a nurturing element that can foster the healing process of abused and neglected children. The integration of art helps fulfill this concept. The designer collaborated with a local artist to create three commissioned pieces of art that are prominently displayed throughout the facility. Each piece utilizes crystal prisms and reflective metal shapes that dance in the sunlight much like the sun's rays shine through the tree canopy of the main hall.