Home is Here
Community + Health Center

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
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Abstract

Over 11 million undocumented immigrants live in the shadows all across America. They live with the fear of being separated from their families and the risk of being detained or deported back to a country they escaped. This thesis explores ideas of home, safety, and belonging through different elements in architecture, utilized to create welcoming and safe spaces. The community and health center is designed to reach, support, and empower immigrants, while acting as a new home where immigrants access a variety of health, education, and social programs. The project reuses and repurposes an abandoned building, which was originally designed to welcome immigrants, by carving out historic spaces while creating a new addition that gives it new life. To create a more welcoming experience, the existing brick building is integrated with the new through the use of natural materials, color, and the addition of large openings that allow natural light to fill the interiors. The design of large gathering areas both inside and outside allow people to come together and create a sense of community. Located in the center of immigrant neighborhoods, the proposed community and health center acts as a new beacon of hope and tranquility for immigrants in the District of Columbia.
General Audience Abstract

Everyday more than 11 million undocumented children and adults face the fear of being separated from their families and the risk of being placed in caged-like cells called immigrant detention centers. Rather than having more spaces that criminalize and treat immigrants inhumanely, this thesis seeks to design a space that welcomes and supports undocumented immigrants. A proposed community and health center is designed to reach, support, and empower immigrants, while acting as a new home where immigrants could access a variety of health, education, and social programs. The project reuses and repurposes a section of an abandoned building, originally built to provide housing and health services to immigrants, and introduces a new addition with the goal to preserve and continue its history as a place for immigrants. In order to create a more welcoming and safe experience, the design of the proposed building integrates three different strategies. First, the integration of sustainable natural materials and warm colors in the structure of the new addition and the interiors of the existing building. Second, the integration of large operable openings that frame views of the exterior landscape and allow natural light and fresh air to fill the interiors. Lastly, the integration of gathering spaces in the landscape and interiors that allow people to come together and create a sense of community. The proposed community and health center would become a new beacon of hope and tranquility for undocumented immigrants that live with fear and face different obstacles due to their legal status.
I would like to thank my committee members Marcia F. Feuerstein, Susan Piedmont-Palladino, and Paul Emmons for all the valuable feedback that guided me throughout the process of my thesis. I would also like to thank my family for all their support and encouragement throughout the years.
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The journey of my thesis began at a rally in Washington, D.C. where hundreds of brave undocumented immigrants and citizens came together to demand the government to maintain the dream act that protects thousands of dreamers. Dreamers like myself, who came to the United States at a young age and are eligible to study and work in America. At that rally, I got to hear stories of dreamers whose relatives had been recently detained by ICE, Immigration and Custom Enforcement, and were now incarcerated in immigrant detention centers. Spaces that are not so welcoming and treat immigrants inhumanely. The stories I heard that day brought fear and left a big impact on me as it reminded me that I have relatives and friends of my own that are at risk of being detained by ICE. A few months later, the stories I had heard at that rally had now become my reality. I got a phone call that one of my own relatives had been detained by ICE on his way to work and was now going to be placed in an immigrant detention center.

For my thesis, I wanted to investigate immigrant detention centers in order to understand what their main purpose is and propose a different solution that is a contrast to what detention centers represent. Rather than having more spaces that evoke fear and criminalize undocumented immigrants, I wanted to propose a space that allowed undocumented immigrants to feel safe and welcomed.
Across America, more than 400,000 undocumented immigrants are held in detention centers every year.¹

IMMIGRANT DETENTION CENTERS

Figure 2: collage created from images of immigrant detention centers

¹ Source: Immigration Center for Research and Policy
Who are detained?

Everyday more than 40,000 undocumented immigrants are held in detention centers across America. The majority of the immigrants incarcerated are from Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, all countries near the southern border.

Where are they located?

They are 222 facilities all over the United States. Authorized Dedicated Facilities: 37 Authored Non-Dedicated Facilities: 185

What are the conditions like inside detention centers?

Conditions of detention centers are reported to be inhumane. These are a few words used by detainees when describing detention centers. OVERCROWDED UNSANITARY NO ACCESS TO SOAP, TOOTHPASTE, SINKS OR SHOWERS SLEEPING ON CONCRETE FLOORS UNWASHED BOTTLES AND NOT ENOUGH DIAPERS FOR BABIES COLD TEMPERATURES SICK NOT TREATED CAGES

Who runs the detention centers?

The majority of detention centers are run by private companies that have been questioned to care more about their profits than the care of immigrants.

What are immigrant detention centers?

Immigrant detention centers are facilities that hold undocumented immigrants until a decision is made by immigration authorities to grant a visa and release them or deport them to their country of origin.

Figure 3: Image of a drawing created by a child held in a detention center

Figure 4: Map with the location of immigrant detention centers in the United States

Figure 5: Graph showing the number of immigrants held in immigrant detention centers by state

Figure 6: Graph of immigrants detained by age

Figure 7: Graph of data on immigrant detention centers

Figure 8: Graph showing % of detained that committed a crime

% of detention centers run by government and private companies

% of detained that committed a crime

Who are detained?

Who runs the detention centers?

What are the conditions like inside detention centers?

What are immigrant detention centers?

Detained Immigrants by Age
Alternatives to Detention

The Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) currently runs 1 alternative to detention called Intensive Supervision Appearance Program.

Intensive Supervision Appearance Program III (ISAP III)

Case Management
- Face to face and telephone meetings, unannounced home visits, court and meeting alerts.

Results
- 99% enrolled appeared to their court hearings
- 95% appeared to final removal hearing

Why use ATDS?
- Number of detained are getting higher
- The cost is lower
- Detention Centers: $137 is the average cost per adult per day
- ISAP III: $4.16 is the average per adult per day

Technology based monitoring
- Telephonic reporting, GPS monitoring, smartphone facial recognition application.

Results:
- 99% enrolled appeared to their court hearings
- 95% appeared to final removal hearing

Other Alternatives

Community-based programming as an alternative to immigrant incarceration
- Community based and community supported
- Run by non-profit organizations with case management model

Marie Joseph House

Chicago: the interfaith community for detained immigrants

Who they help
- Asylum seekers
- Immigrants seeking safety and stability after release from immigration detention

What they offer
- Provide food, housing, and case management
- Refer and connect immigrants to religious, health, legal, education, language services
- Accompaniment to court hearings or check-ins
- Post-transition services

Sweden: reception centers and community programming for asylum seekers

Initial screening and assessment
- Determine health, psychological, economic, and other needs

Case management
- Provide ID
- Help with process to seek asylum

Community placement
- Transitioned to community housing close to migration agency

Human Needs
- Provide medical care and legal services

Figure 8: Image of ankle GPS monitor

Figure 9: Image of ankle GPS monitor

Figure 10: Image of people in the kitchen of the Marie Joseph House

Figure 11: Image of people in the kitchen of the Marie Joseph House
UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS

Across America, more than 11 million undocumented immigrants are living in the shadows.¹
Undocumented Immigrants in the United States
Total population: 11,960,000

Population by State
- Mexico: 5,550,000
- El Salvador: 783,300
- Guatemala: 493,300
- Honduras: 442,300
- Philippines: 370,000
- China: 320,000
- India: 260,000
- Mexico: 166,900
- Other Countries: 870,000

Figure 11: Graphs created based on data found on a report by the Department of Homeland Security on undocumented immigrants in 2018

Figure 12: Graph from the Pew Research Center

Metropolitan areas with the largest number of Undocumented Immigrants
Over 25,000 undocumented immigrants are living in the District of Columbia. 

Figure 13: Graphs created based on demographic data found on planning.dc.gov.
My research on immigrant detention centers led me to propose a new kind of place that supports undocumented immigrants. Rather than having more immigrant detention centers that are designed to evoke fear and criminalize immigrants, why not have more spaces that welcome immigrants? Why not provide more affordable housing for undocumented immigrants? Why not provide more health centers where immigrants could have access to affordable health care? Why not have more community centers that offer programs that support immigrants?
Proposal

Across America, undocumented immigrants face the inability to have access to much-needed affordable health care, affordable housing, and other resources due to their legal status. This thesis project is a proposal to provide more housing, health centers, and community centers that are accessible to undocumented immigrants. The health centers include clinics that allow undocumented immigrants to have access to much-needed affordable health care. The Community center would be a place that offers a variety of academic programs for adults like English classes, citizenship classes, and after school tutoring for the youth. It would also be a space where different social events take place that allows immigrants to engage and connect with each other. The housing would provide affordable housing and transitional housing that help immigrants transition to life in America.
The selection of a site was an important part of my thesis and based on a criteria that I developed as follows. First, the site had to be located in a region that had a high population of undocumented immigrants. I decided to focus my search for a site in Washington, D.C. because it is the 6th metropolitan area with the most undocumented immigrants in the United States. Second, the site had to be an empty lot or a lot with a vacant building that was not being used. By looking at a list of vacant buildings of the District of Columbia, I was able to find a variety of possible sites that fit my criteria. Third, the site had to be within close proximity to public transportation which would allow the site to be accessible from different areas of the city. In the end, I found a site that was located at the center of immigrant neighborhoods and fit the developed criteria. The site is located at the border of wards 1 and 2, the wards within Washington D.C. with the highest undocumented immigrant population. It contains two vacant buildings that have not been used for over 10 years and one that functions as a homeless shelter. The site is located within close proximity to different bus stations and a metro station, which allow it to be accessed from different parts of the district. The most important and valuable part of the selected site is its history as originally designed and built to support immigrants.
1125 Spring Rd NW
Washington, DC

Area of Lot: 148,000 sq ft | 3.4 acres  
Ward: 4  
Neighborhood: Petworth

1125 Spring Road NW is an approximately 3.4 acre parcel located in the Petworth neighborhood of Washington, D.C. The site is surrounded by a low density residential neighborhood and within walking distance to commercial corridors. The existing site contains two vacant buildings and one functional building that is currently a homeless shelter. To the east of the site is the Raymond Education Campus and Raymond Recreation Center. The site is accessible by public transportation as there is a bus and metro station in close proximity. The Georgia Ave-Petworth metro station is within a five minute walk.
Site Analysis

- Site Location
- Bus Routes/Metro/Support to undocumented immigrants

- Neighborhoods
- Bus Routes
- Bike Routes

- Existing Building
- Stormwater
- Softscape
- Impervious Surfaces
- Pedestrian Activity
- Vehicles Traffic

- Columbia Heights
- Park View
- Petworth
- Bloomingdale

- 23
- 24
Site History

- **Nov. 1925**: Hebrew Home residential wing was completed.
- **Dec. 1935**: Hebrew Home addition was completed.
- **1974**: Paul Robeson School was completed.

**1940**

The Jewish Social Service Agency was completed.

Figures 20: timeline data and images found on planning.dc.gov
Figure 21: Front image of the old Hebrew Home
Figure 22: Image from the east side of the old Hebrew Home
Figure 23: Image from the back side of the old Hebrew Home
Figure 24: Image of the inside of the old Hebrew Home
Figure 25: Image of the existing parking lot to the east of the site
Figure 26: Image of the inside of the old Hebrew Home
Figure 27: Image of the inside of the old Hebrew Home

Existing Conditions

Existing Level 1

Existing Level 2

Existing Level 3

Existing Level 4
Process - Massing Studies

Concept 1: Maintain the south mass of the existing building

Concept 2: Maintain the two side wings of the existing building

Study Models

Southeast aerial view

Northeast aerial view

Southeast aerial view
The concept is to reuse part of the old Hebrew Home and demolish the rest of the vacant buildings. The part that would be preserved is the southern part of the existing building as it contains valuable ornaments and is the facade that has been facing the community since it was originally built.

A new addition is added to the existing building that is composed of two parts. First, an addition that is parallel to the homes north of the site. Second, an addition that connects the existing building with the addition to the north.
Level 1
Health Center
Wellness
- Dance Studio
- Fitness Room
- Multi-purpose Room
- Locker Rooms

Level 2
Health Center
Nutrition
- Community Pantry
- Kitchen Classrooms
- Classrooms
- Outreach Office

Community Center
Social
- Rec Room
- Study Rooms
- Open Study Spaces
- Computer Lab

Level 3
Health Center
Clinic
- Registration/Health Resources
- Exam Rooms
- Labs
- Workstations
- Community Center

Community Center
Education
- Library
- Classrooms
- Art Studio
- Community Meeting Room

Level 4
Health Center
Admin
- Counseling Offices
- Pharmacy
- Admin Offices

Community Center
Admin
- Library
- Admin Offices
- Shared Offices/Non-Profits
- Roof Garden
Legend
1. Health Center
2. Community Center
3. Future Housing
4. Pick-Up & Drop-Off Area
5. Greenery and Seating Area
6. Amphitheater
Site Plan Diagram
The first floor houses the wellness program of the Health Center and a large stair auditorium where people could gather.

As part of the wellness program the first floor includes:

- A dance studio where immigrants could teach and practice different cultural dances as a way to remember and showcase where they come from.
- A multi-purpose room where different yoga and meditation classes could be held to help heal the mind.
- A fitness room where kids and adults could access a variety of fitness classes that help improve the physical health.

A large stair auditorium was designed to allow people to move from floor to floor and at the same time be used as a place to gather. People could enjoy the large open space at the entry, allowing the space to be used to different events for the community.

Legend
1. Entry
2. Reception
3. Stair Auditorium
4. Lounge/Waiting Area
5. Dance Studio
6. Multi-Purpose Room
7. Fitness Room
8. Office
9. Locker Room
10. Storage
11. Mechanical
12. Restroom M/W
13. Service Room
14. Utility Room
15. Maintenance Room
The second floor houses the Community Center and the nutrition program of the Health Center. As part of the nutrition program, the second floor includes: A community pantry that offers free food to those in need, a kitchen classroom that would allow people to learn and share their recipes with the community. It would also be a place where the community could access a variety of healthy cooking and nutrition classes.

As part of the Community Center, the second floor includes: A recreation room where the youth of the community could have a place to gather and have access to a variety of games. A study area where the youth could have a place to study, work on homework, and get tutoring. A Computer lab that allows people of the community to have access to computers.
The third floor houses the clinic of the Health Center and different education spaces of the Community Center.

As part of the clinic the third floor includes: A registration and health resource office that guides people to different health resources in the District of Columbia. A clinic with multiple exam rooms that offers immigrants the ability to obtain regular check-ups.

As part of the Community Center the third floor includes: Multiple classrooms where immigrants could access a variety of classes such as English and citizenship classes. A library that allows people to access a variety of books in multiple languages. A community meeting room where the community could hold meetings.

Legend
1. Receptionist
2. Waiting Area
3. Registration/Health Resources
4. Workstations
5. Exam Room
6. Lab
7. Print Room
8. Dark Room
9. Break Room
10. Storage/Supplies Room
11. Mechanical
12. Restroom M/W
13. Records Storage
14. Library
15. Classroom
16. Art Studio
17. Community Room
The fourth floor houses the administrative offices of both the Community and Health Centers. In addition, a roof garden could be accessed through the Community Center and used as a place for people to gather or to get privacy and reflect.
Section A displays the existing building.
Section A - Sun Study
Section B displays the new addition.
Section B - Sun Study

Legend
- New
- Existing
Section C displays both the existing building and new addition.
Section C - Sun Study

Legend
- New
- Existing
The perspective displays the view when entering the building.

The perspective displays the view of people practicing a cultural dance in the dance studio.
The perspective displays the view down from the stair auditorium.

Interior Perspectives
The perspective displays a view of the open study area in the second level.

The perspective displays a view of the exterior from the second level.

Interior/Exterior Perspectives
Interior Perspectives

The perspective displays the view of seating area in the library.

The section perspective displays the recreation room on level 2 and the library on level 3 and 4.
Exterior Perspectives

The perspective displays the view from Spring Road.

The perspective displays the view of people approaching the entrance.
Exterior Perspectives

The perspective displays the view of the green wall and seating area outside the entrance.

The perspective displays the view of people seating on the amphitheater.
The perspective displays a southeast aerial view of the building during the day.
References


Endnotes


Resources for research, facts and figures

www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-in-washington-dc
www.planning.dc.gov/page/census-and-demographic-data
www.immigrationforum.org
https://www.freedomforimmigrants.org/map

Figure references

The images below are for academic purposes only and were produced according to fair law. All other images, drawings, and illustrations were produced by the author.

Pg 1 | Figure 1. Images of the Home is Here rally from different articles
https://www.unctad.org.en/justicex-take-up-high-profile-case-over-young-immigrants/

Pg 2 | Figure 2. Collage created by author from different images on immigrant detention centers

Pg 3 | Figure 3. https://www.icdichicago.org/ministries/post-detention/

Pg 4 | Figure 2. Collage created by author from different images on immigrant detention centers

Pg 5 | Figure 6. https://www.freedomforimmigrants.org/detention-statistics/

Pg 7 | Figure 8. <https://hscic.hhs.gov/news/2015/01/06/ho-alternative-ankle-monitors-expand-reach-immigration-detention>

Pg 8 | Figure 10. <https://www.wscidchicago.org/minhires/post-detention/>

Pg 9 | Figure 12. Graphs created based on data from DC.gov https://www.planning.dc.gov/page/census-and-demographic-data-

Figure 14. https://maketheroadny.org/.

 Pg 11 | Figure 11. Graphs created based on report by the DHS <www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/18_1214_PLCY_pops-est-report.pdf>

Pg 12 | Figure 13. Graphs created based on report by the DHS <www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/18_1214_PLCY_pops-est-report.pdf>

Pg 14 | Figure 14. Graphs created based on data from DC.gov

Figure 15. <https://www.wiredgroup.com/about/press-releases/triumph-family-housing-opening/>

Pg 16 | Figure 16. Aerial image taken from google earth
Pg 17 | Figure 17. Image taken by author
Pg 18 | Figure 18. Image taken by author
Pg 19 | Figure 19. Image taken by author
Pg 20 | Figure 20. Data and images from DC.gov

<https://www.unctad.org/en/justicex-take-up-high-profile-case-over-young-immigrants/>

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<https://www.freedomforimmigrants.org/map>
My name is Juan. I am a son.
I am a brother. I am a friend.
I am a lover of Architecture.
I am a DACA recipient. A human being.

#HOMEISHERE