



# BAKHITA GARDENS

*Seattle, WA*



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# AT A GLANCE

## Address

118 Bell Street / Seattle, WA 98121  
206.456.3102

## Managing Organization

### Catholic Housing Services

Eileen McComb, Program Director, Noel House Programs

## Architect

### Environmental Works Community Design Center

Bill Singer, Director of Architecture, [www.eworks.org](http://www.eworks.org)

## Interior Designer

### Environmental Works Community Design Center

Bill Singer, Director of Architecture, [www.eworks.org](http://www.eworks.org)

## Clients

Single adult homeless women. **Noel House permanent housing:** women pay 20% of their income for permanent housing. Average age is 53. Most are 30 or older. Clients have been homeless for 1 year or more. **Rose of Lima:** women pay 30% of their income.

## Facility Type and Capacity

Permanent supportive housing – Rose of Lima: 50 SRO's (1 year stay); Noel House: 20 persons, 1 year occupancy + 20 permanent supportive housing units (Noel House using partial wall cubicles). Note that only Noel House residential areas are reported here as Rose of Lima units were occupied and unable to be accessed by author.

## Approximate Square Footage

38,000

## Admission

Any state of dependency is okay for admittance. Drinking only permitted in permanent supportive housing.

## Year of Construction / Renovation and Approximate Cost

2010 / \$14,000,000.00

## Number of Floors

6

## Site

Urban

## On-site Services and Amenities

Street-level retail; Library, Computer lab, Laundry, Nurse/exam room, Food bank, External porch/deck, Client mailboxes, Media room, Conference room; Administration offices; Case manager offices; Dining with Client cooking; Client storage, Client personal refrigerators (Noel House permanent housing and Rose of Lima), Pest eradication units for belongings

# GOALS

Bakhita Gardens is a transitional and permanent supportive housing project with a design that emerged from a consensus of residents and administrators, and translated to physical form by the architectural firm Environmental Works Community Design Center. Its goal to provide peace of mind to residents and staff is a fitting one, both because it is located in a busy urban location, and because it serves women who have been homeless for an extended period of time.

Its design shows sensitivity to its Seattle location known for its cloudy days, providing high ceilings with tall windows, which is perhaps a reaction in part from its pre-2010 dark and damp location beneath a parking garage on the site. The clarity and calm of the space is a significant change for its female clients, some whom have slept outside for years.

The facility conforms to Evergreen Sustainable Development Standards required by funders that include the Washington State Housing Trust Fund and City of Seattle Office of Housing.



# FEATURES

## Entrance Area and Lobby

The entrance area begins a statement of welcome and respite, introducing the visitor to an optimistic, yet calming industrial-flavored materials palette and a striking sense of quiet in contrast to the street. No longer are women expected to come to the alley entrance – the new front door location is on the primary street itself, looking no different than other apartment buildings nearby and offering a new, tacit statement of respect.

“These women have been marginalized for much of their lives, so creating a welcoming entrance is important”, explains Bill Singer, project architect. “The entrance sequence is intentional, and designed to say ‘you’re home’”.

In service to this goal, the lobby gathers important public functions in one place so that these areas are immediately visible – seating and mailboxes are right here, as is the television room visible through internal windows and a central lending library full of book titles for residents’ use. A reception desk is situated to provide sightlines for both the street and the first level’s cluster of public spaces, making monitoring staff-efficient.







## Residential Space

On the second floor is Noel House, a Catholic Housing Services enterprise that provides forty individual living cubicles, half of them an enhanced shelter program for occupancy up to one year and the balance permanent supportive living in nature, each occupying opposite ends of the floor.

The design of these critically important residential spaces arose from focus groups conducted with female residents. Explains Eileen McComb, Program Director of Noel House, “we learned that isolation and sleeping alone was returning women to the streets, but on the other hand it was challenging for them to live in an open dorm space. Women wanted a sense of community with congregate space but also the ability for you to hear your neighbor breathe and move around but not see them.” The partial-wall cubicles offer the right balance of openness and connectivity with local privacy.



## Cubicles

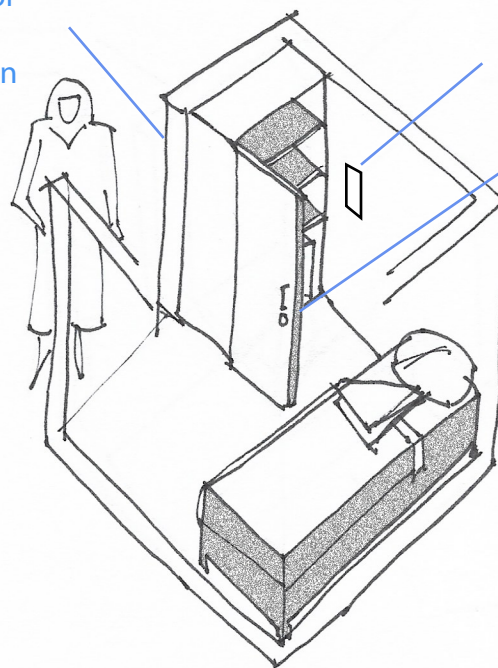
Each cubicle features securable possessions storage, open shelving for display of cherished items, locally-controllable lighting for reading, and – a resident favorite – a personal refrigerator.

Pamela Barnes, permanent supportive housing resident is enthusiastic about the cubicle design because it offers everyone options of togetherness or being alone in a visually interesting way: “It’s nice to block somebody out sometimes. It’s not just bed after bed. You can go into your cubicle and have privacy.”

The cubicles underscore the facility’s interest in supporting clients’ dignity by providing them personal control, but balance this with rules agreed to by consensus. For example, photos posted at cubicle entrances show what a clean cubicle looks like, which in turn assists clients with adhering to necessary policies. A system of colored changeable signs at cubicle entrances was created by residents that state either “Stop” or “Go” – allowing residents to choose if they wish to engage with others at any given time (see Great Ideas for a photo).

Resident advocate staff and same-floor case managers provide a measure of near security, while these offices’ placement avoids a sense of smothering surveillance owing to sightline management. Extra resident possessions are managed not only within the cubicles, but also with the availability of extra lockable storage in the parking/basement level.

Resident name plate,  
No/Yes sign for  
availability &  
unit inspection  
expectations



Wall sconce  
lighting

Locking  
storage

~52"

## Dining Room

The dining room is another area with a design that underscores client dignity. The main seating area is communal with long tables that prompt impromptu conversations.

However, a nearby secondary dining 'away space' permits residents that do not wish to engage in conversation a viable way to sit at bar-style seating with a view to the streetscape and city skyline. Yet, this seating is close enough to permit lean-in conversation with the main area if so desired.

A next-door patio offers the clients another public space option to read, engage in conversation, or simply enjoy gardening in the area's raised planters.





**BAKHITA GARDENS** / Seattle, WA



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# LESSONS LEARNED

1

Both Bill Singer and Eileen McComb agree the design solution's furnishings and finishes have performed well, and at the time of this writing four years after opening, only a few elements have required undue attention or maintenance. Not surprisingly, some furnishings are now requiring re-upholstery; however, the furniture frames continue to serve residents well.

According to Bill Singer and Eileen McComb, stained concrete is by far the most maintenance-free and durable floor material. New commercial appliances within the client kitchen became necessary due to ongoing heavy use of this area, and extra shelving space for residents' own containers of food in this area would be a good idea were the space to be redesigned again. Floor drains within the bathrooms would similarly be a good addition to make thorough cleaning easier.

2

The physical architecture of the Bakhita Gardens project achieves success in many ways. Its space planning, the volumetric design of its high ceilings and sensitive color palette achieve a mood of expansive calm, and hit the right note for this population besieged by a sometimes hostile external environment. In nuanced ways it achieves both a sense of security while retaining an underlying freedom for its residents that likely supports a sense of empowerment.

Its sensitive treatment of public and private spaces with a variety of options within both permits residents to satisfy their need for communication or fulfill their desire to be alone. Such options are important to residents. Pamela Barnes, permanent supportive client at Bakhita Gardens revealed the importance of her living there when she asked her case managers "Can I just die here?" Her case managers smiled and responded, "As long as you follow the rules and pay the rent." Pamela laughed as she recalled this exchange. "I needed to know that, you know?"

3

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4

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# FACILITY TOUR

## Attendance to Human Needs

Use this key on the following pages of the facility tour to learn how the design of the building and its spaces contributes to the well-being of its residents.



Dignity and Self Esteem



Empowerment and Personal Control



Security, Privacy and Personal Space



Stress Management



Sense of Community



Beauty and Meaning

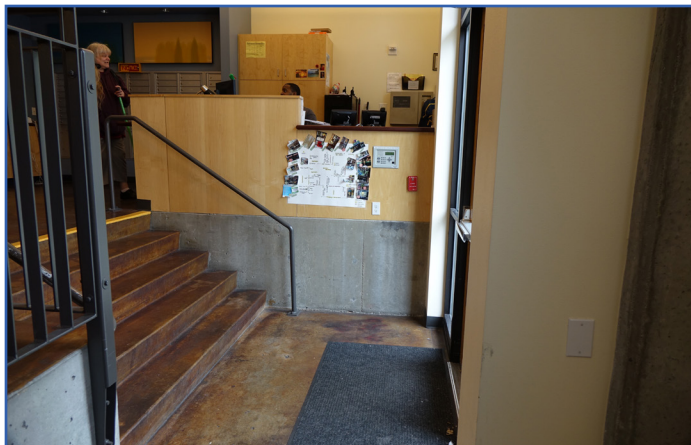


## Exterior

The building exterior blends with its urban environment through its embrace of ground level retail. The low-key main entrance is located on a prominent street, not hidden in an alley as previously designed. Facades show an enlivened articulation and attention to detail in tune with its savvy urban location.







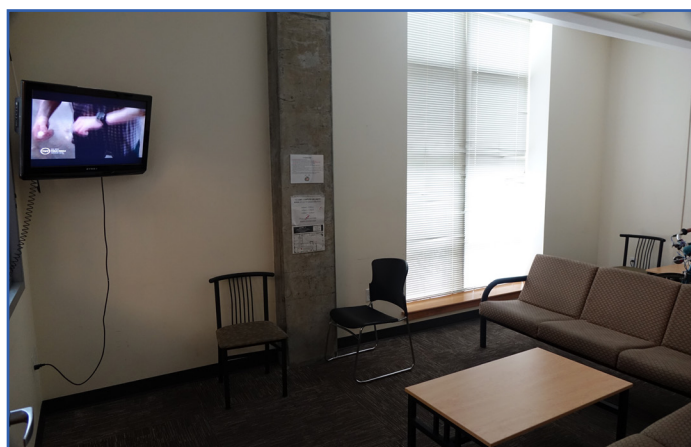
## Foyer

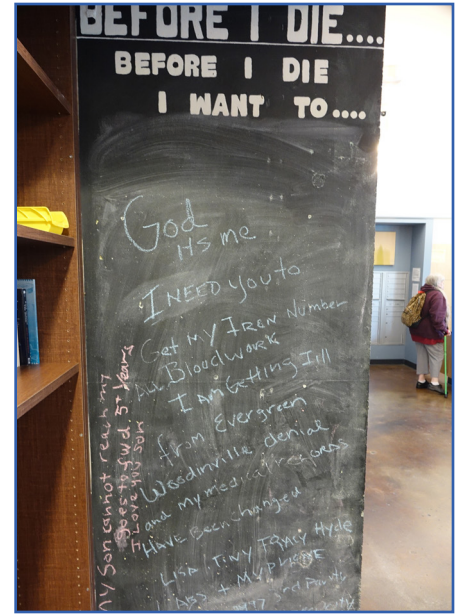
The entrance space within the front doors provides an intentional foyer to promote a sense of contrast with the exterior and sense of arrival. The reception desk provides surveillance of this point of entry, comforting to female residents.



## Media Room

This flexible space's extended ceiling invites light in while translucent window coverings protect street-level privacy.





## Library

The lending library is a prominent feature in the entry area, providing an amenity that lends dignity and promotes empowerment for clients.





## Basement Storage

Additional storage of client's possessions is made possible by a secured series of compartments (in addition to two 20 gallon bins in cubicles per client) within a locked room in the basement/parking level.

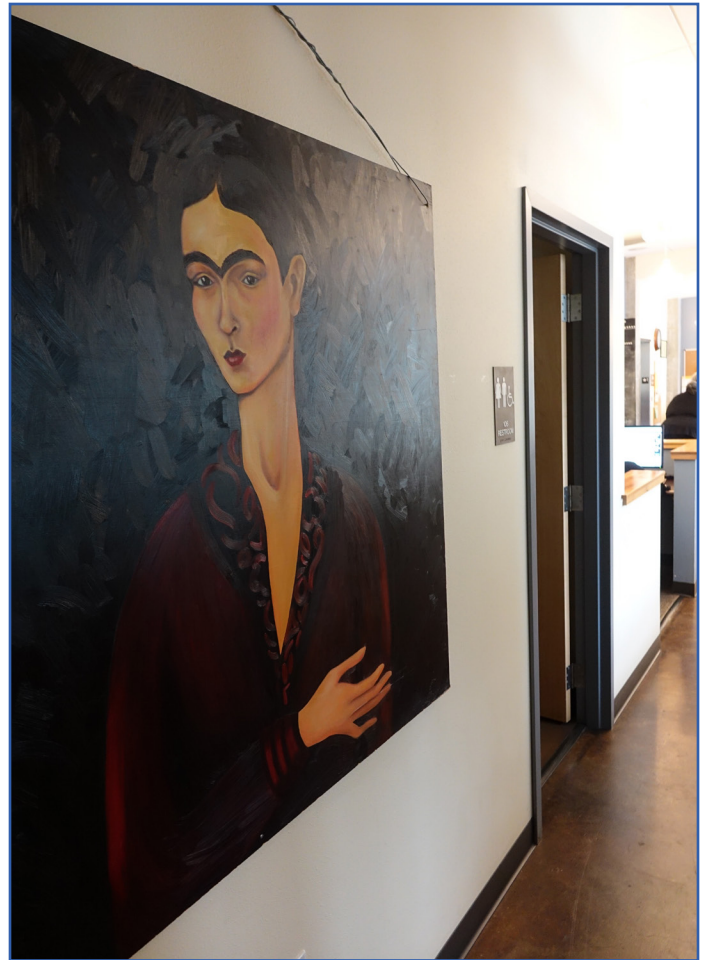


## Case Manager Office Sightlines

The case manager's office placed along the corridor to the sleeping area facilitates contact with clients.







## Art Program

Original artwork that celebrates women is a regular presence within the corridors of the facility. The facility's history is highlighted by placing the gates of the original facility's entrance inside in a prominent corridor. A local community college's art program also provided pieces.







## Advocate Desk

The advocate's desk provides sightlines at a major corridor axis point for sense of security and availability to clients.



## Sleeping Pod Bed

Wall heights are high enough for privacy yet low enough to promote the sense of nearby friends.





## Sleeping Pod Millwork

Lockable storage coupled with open shelves provides a sense of security and promotes personalization. Indirect overhead lighting fixtures provides ambient illumination that complements locally-controlled pod-based task lighting.





## Dining Room & Away Space

Communal dining promotes conversations while nearby bar seating with a view permits clients to sit alone yet have the control to join conversations if desired.







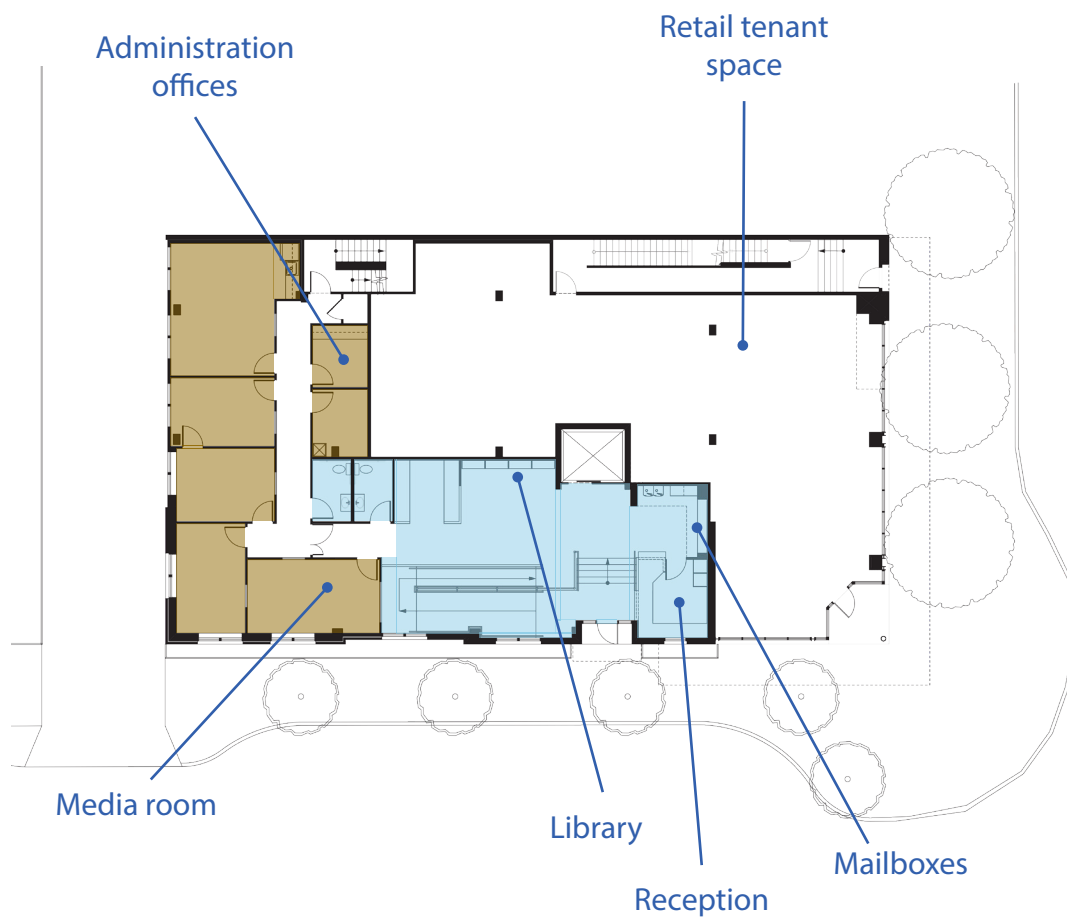
## Exterior Deck

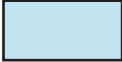
Clients maintain a garden in this area. The tall transparent railing system preserves the view while discouraging self-harm.





## Floor Plan: First Floor



-  Resident support spaces
-  Resident sleeping spaces
-  Resident kitchen and dining areas
-  Staff counseling, administrative and support spaces
-  Gardens, decks and patios

## Floor Plan: Second Floor Noel House



- Resident support spaces
- Resident sleeping spaces
- Resident kitchen and dining areas
- Staff counseling, administrative and support spaces
- Gardens, decks and patios

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## We thank these individuals for their contributions to this case study:

### Catholic Housing Services

Eileen McComb, Program Director, Noel House Programs

Pamela Barnes, resident of Noel House

### Environmental Works Community Design Center

Bill Singer, Director of Architecture, [www.eworks.org](http://www.eworks.org)



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[designforhomelessness@gmail.com](mailto:designforhomelessness@gmail.com)

3551 Blainstone Road Suite 128/233

Tallahassee FL 32301

850-228-2888

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