RESEARCH

People with Autism Spectrum Disorder vary greatly in how they think and interact with the environment. It’s been said that, “if you’ve met one person with autism, you’ve met one person with autism” (Shore, 2018). There is no set way to help people with ASD because everyone on the spectrum is so different. This poses a challenge when designing a space for people with ASD because their needs vary so greatly. The purpose of this research was first, to explore the possible traits and characteristics of people with ASD, second, to learn about how people with autism interact with their environment, and finally to analyze past examples of spaces meant to help people with ASD.

The findings showed that most people with ASD have a highly-developed talent in one area, or an intense, focused interest in one subject (Shore, 2018). Because people on the autistic spectrum process information differently, they often interact with their environments differently. People with autism can be divided into two categories: hypersensitive and hyposensitive. Those who are hypersensitive are extremely sensitive to sensory elements while hyposensitive people process sensory information slowly and see out extra stimulation (Pellicano, 2012). In a study done in Indonesia, it was shown that the physical layout of a space has a direct impact on the actions of people with ASD (Atmodiwirjo, 2014). However, after analyzing several post-occupancy evaluations of existing autism centers, it is apparent that what works for one person does not work for everyone. When designing a space for people with ASD flexibility is key. Creating spaces that can be stimulating or calming depending on the need will broaden the range of people that can be helped.

The reception area features natural materials, colors and patterns in order to create a calming atmosphere. The curved walls and corners echo the shape of the logo and add a friendly softness to the aesthetic. The floor plan design makes the space universally accessible. Extra wide doorways and halls make it easier for a person in a wheelchair to maneuver.
The Attain center is a place for adults with autism to develop the skills necessary to succeed in the real world. The space is catered to the needs of individuals by offering adjustable and dimmable lighting options, movable partitions and flexible room layouts. A space can become exciting and fun, or quiet and calming depending on the need. Because of its flexibility, clients can create environments for themselves that will optimize their ability to learn, grow and succeed. The design is inspired by rolling hills gradually growing taller and taller and represents how the Attain center enables clients to gradually reach higher and higher and attain their goals.

DESIGN CONCEPT

The hallway connecting the reception area to the offices in the adjoining building features a green wall with the Attain logo at the center. It is visible through the front windows adds interest to the exterior elevation as well as underscores the nature-inspired design of the autism center.

The sensory room features vestibular swings, bean bags, movable partitions, and alcoves in order to suit the needs of a variety of users. Glowing rain drops on the ceiling, dimming lights, and projections on the wall create a calming atmosphere and add interest.