

## HOUSES FOR CHANGE – Architecture for Social Responsibility

HFC - 1669

The practice of architecture has drawn a fine line in the sand between influence and socially responsible design. Architects and designers frequently succumb to influence by way of no-frills development practices, typically resulting in short-term financial benefits and long-term environmental and community concerns. The mass housing typology typically found in urban centers is seen as the only viable solution to keeping people off the streets. They are built with profits in mind, usually go financially abused, understaffed, overpopulated, and repeated again and again with municipality consent despite their obvious flaws.

With this in mind, there is an urgency to invent alternative models for housing and development which challenge socioeconomic stigmas and provide safe, healthy, and dignified living conditions for the homeless and disenfranchised. As architects, designers, and social theorists, we must rehash existing ideas and adapt them for use in the current developer-friendly playground. Working on an even keel with developers, architects and designers have the ability to realize projects that are not solely based on 'zoning uses' within buildings. Instead, completely sustainable business-models can be designed and implemented that operate with a focus on community revitalization and personal improvement for the at-risk.

When analyzing the needs of the individual, we see that **Shelter**, **Food**, and **Well-being** top the list. While all are necessary and seen as inalienable rights, separately, each one is wrought with political strife resulting in social polarization.

In hopes to unify, an alternative to typical NYC affordable housing was realized which specifies a self-sustaining business model as the social and economic engine of the community. The new development, referred to as SFW, maintains its goal of community revitalization by creating a multifaceted, hands-on approach to community involvement and support.

SFW is based on the Four Pillars of the East Asian Medical model. Although introduced as an entire system of tools and practices to implement individual health and wellness, each of the four

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pillars can be used exclusively for a variety of uses. Utilization of tools, physical manipulation, dietary changes and personal cultivation are mimicked in a socially-utilitarian fashion within the SFW business development.

Due to the extent of poverty in East New York, the construction of affordable housing is beyond urgent, however, it, alone, never results in anything but a continuation of the typical. SFW intends to create a system where the neighborhood and the at-risk residents of the building are given the tools to bring them up the socioeconomic ladder by promoting self-education and mentorship as well as providing the three basic tenets to human life; shelter, food, and well-being.

Run by certified healthcare practitioners in an open-source business referral model, a clinic, the first pillar, offers a wide range of services from primary care to alternative medicines, and a learning environment where residents and community members can participate in educational workshops and vocational training.

Parts of East New York are considered to be food deserts, completely devoid of readily available fresh produce. In light of this, the second pillar, an indoor aquaponics farm will be created. Community members and residents will work closely with farmers to learn the skills needed to participate in and lead community garden initiatives. Due to the closed loop, highly efficient system it maintains, the aquaponics farm will produce high enough crop yields to provide direct farm-to-table produce for the community, residents of the building, and the third pillar; an eating and drinking establishment.

Although partially supported with produce from the aquaponics farm, the eating and drinking establishment will act as a direct outlet to teach culinary skills and for residents to come together in a communal fashion; inherently cultivating a change in how the area functions and individuals socialize.

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The fourth pillar, a housing development, will provide up to twenty six below-market rate affordable housing units intended for use by the largest demographic in the shelter system: runaway or abandoned teenage girls, women with dependent children, and single women. In taking up residency with SFW, these individuals will enjoy access to amenities provided by the other three pillars in a work-live arrangement granting them access to vocational on-the-job training.

Additionally, given New York City Department of Homeless Services currently pays upwards of \$3,000 per individual per month housed in an approved shelter, this money will be used to provide stipends and cover the expense for use of organizational amenities.

The success of SFW comes from the symbiosis of the Four Pillars approach and how this model maintains relationships between the community, developers, and the City of New York. Contrary to the possible, it is the purveyors of change that have sat idly by while developers take control of the most economically deficient neighborhoods, and it is no longer acceptable. It is the social responsibility of architects and designers to no longer design buildings exclusively, but to design fully functional systems whose goal it is to promote dynamic positive change; to promote an internalized gentrification without displacement.