



SCO celebrates opening of its 30,000 s/f Spacesmith-designed Genovese Family Life Center

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Queens, NY SCO Family of Services celebrated the reopening of its Genovese Family Life Center in Jamaica. Keith Little, SCO president and CEO, along with Queens Borough president Donovan Richards welcomed SCO's clients, staff, and supporters into the new building.

SCO Family of Services is one of the metro area's largest human services providers, delivering vital services and support to children, families, adults, and the community for more than 125 years. The agency provides access to a continuum of care that improves results for people facing significant life challenges, with a focus on education, permanency and family supports, housing, youth justice services, supports for people with developmental disability, and community wellness.

"This is an exciting time at SCO as we unveil the newly reimagined Genovese Family Life Center," said Little. "This project brings together the best of trauma-informed design with innovative, flexible administrative space that will support our organization well into the future. Every detail of this new space will have a meaningful impact on our clients and staff, while realizing financial efficiencies in the process."

SCO's Genovese Family Life Center is the hub of its programming in Queens. With a mixed staff of administrators, caseworkers, legal advisors, educators, and medical and mental health professionals, SCO works to keep the families and social fabric of New York strong. Many of the children and families served by SCO have been exposed to trauma that takes a heavy emotional toll on them and the staff that works with them. Using the principles of trauma-informed design, Spacesmith renovated the new 30,000 s/f Genovese Family Life Center to help both SCO staff and their clients navigate the difficult process of healing.

"The work that takes place within SCO's Genovese Family Life Center is a critical piece of their continued positive impact on the lives of local children, families, and the community," said Ambar Margarida of Spacesmith. "From a design perspective, Spacesmith's work on this project was both about creating an uplifting, carefully crafted environment for SCO's staff to do its life-enhancing work and signaling to clients that SCO is a place where they will be taken care of."

Spacesmith's work on this project began with turning an underutilized basement into the Center for Professional Development, a hub for continuing education and training for staff and clients, as well as families interested in becoming foster parents. From a warren of makeshift, small rooms and dark corridors, the space became an efficient training center with flexible, interconnected rooms that host video conferences, classes, and events. The design counteracts the challenges of the basement level's low ceilings and lack of daylight by bringing in natural elements – wood grain, textured stone, bright saturated colors, and tropical prints.

The success of this initial project led to a building-wide renovation to craft the robust spaces SCO needs to support its work. The design team worked closely with the client on information gathering and vision sessions to understand the varying needs of the diverse staff.

Through these programming exercises, the realization that 50% of SCO's caseworkers do not require full-time office space led to the expansion of the mobile workforce program. As part of this process, it was determined that any person who spends more than half their time outside of the office would be equipped with the tools and technology they need to work from any location. The square footage gained allowed the in-building, client-facing programs to have the space they

needed.

At the building's secure entrance, a comfortable, welcoming reception area leads to the foster care program's medical clinic, which holds exam rooms, nurse practitioner and doctors' offices, and a phlebotomy lab. It includes its own waiting area and ensuite bathroom to give clients the privacy they need to prepare for a doctor's visit. The first floor also holds the foster care family visiting room, a large, inviting open area orbited by a series of semi-enclosed, colorful, kid-friendly spaces for birth parents to hold supervised visits with their children. This is a visiting and reunification space, as the ultimate goal is for families to come together again after being temporarily separated.

The upper levels each have a cozy reception area and additional public-facing rooms for mental health counseling, as well as flexible administrative zones for staff – open work areas, private offices, focus rooms, and rooms designed specifically for supervisor and staff meetings – that support SCO's hybrid workforce model.

The spatial layout, acoustic design, and material palette implement the principles of trauma-informed design and focus on creating a soothing, safe space – aesthetically pleasing but not overwhelming and complicated. Cool colors that have a calming effect and uplifting fixtures and finishes are found throughout, as well as biophilic-themed wall prints that connect patrons and provide positive distractions found to reduce stress and pain and improve mood. Curvilinear edges, lighting and furniture are used throughout which have been proven to be more approachable and elicit higher amounts of pleasant emotions such as feeling relaxed, peaceful, and calm, than rectilinear ones. Clients and employees have control over their visit and work settings, how much privacy or openness to engage in as well as lighting levels all shown to increase agency and wellbeing.

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