

Megan Wilson
Portfolio

Final Major Project

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Figure 01

Megan Wilson

Interior Architectural Designer

WELCOME

I am an interior architecture and design master's student with a strong interest in **creating spaces that promote emotional safety, psychological well-being, and inclusivity**. I have an increasing expertise in **human-centred and research-led design**, with a particular focus on **how environments can support healing for individuals who have experienced trauma**. Having lived through domestic abuse myself, I have a personal understanding of how the built environment can either reinforce feelings of fear and disempowerment or offer comfort, dignity, and a sense of control. This experience has shaped my commitment to trauma-informed design as both a practical framework and an ethical responsibility. Through my work, I aim to **bridge theory and practice to create environments that are sensitive, supportive, and designed with care** for all users, regardless of their background or experiences.

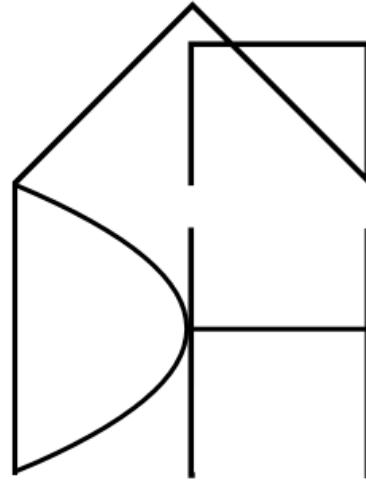


Figure 02

Designed to Heal

Philosophy

Designed to Heal is a trauma-informed design project that centres the emotional, physical, and spatial needs of women survivors of domestic abuse. It challenges traditional interior design norms by **reframing space as an active participant in the healing process.** Drawing on feminist spatial theory and research into environmental psychology, this project envisions a future where design supports recovery, dignity, and long-term empowerment.

This project emerged from a desire to **bridge the gap between design practice and survivors' experiences.** Conventional housing and support spaces often fail to account for the psychological aftermath of trauma, creating environments that are technically safe but emotionally sterile or re-traumatising. **My work advocates for a shift: from functional spaces to restorative ones.**

PROJECT FOCUS

What This Theme Addresses

This project presents the case that architects, designers, and organisations involved in the provision of support and care for survivors of domestic abuse have an imperative to not only **make spaces safe but also trauma-informed**. Trauma affects how individuals experience space – how they process light, sound, texture, and proximity. Yet, **trauma is rarely addressed in mainstream design education and practice**. Survivors are often housed in temporary, impersonal environments that prioritise institutional efficiency over psychological recovery.

This project addresses the following challenges and opportunities:

- The lack of trauma-informed frameworks in spatial design.
- The disconnect between survivors' needs and the environments architects typically deliver.
- The need for dignity in support spaces, beyond mere functionality.
- The emotional cost of invisibility, particularly for women navigating systems of care.
- The proposal for a new standard: spaces that are safe, soothing, and sovereign.
- Tools and resources for professionals and individuals with interests and needs in this space.

This is done through a combination of academic research, insights from lived experience, and design innovation.

DESIGN APPROACH

How the Theme Shapes the Project

Comprehensive academic research, precedent studies and first hand survivor experience informs the trauma informed design principles that run through every output of this project. These principles are applied not only to interior design elements, but to all aspects of the project, including:

Website (designedtoheal.co.uk)

A living resource hub that centralises trauma-informed design knowledge, practical tools and support. It makes specialist knowledge accessible and visually engaging whilst also bringing together designers, organisations and survivors.

Toolkit & Visual Language

Simplified trauma-informed design principles made actionable for designers and support organisations. Developed through my dissertation research and now integrated into an evolving design language.

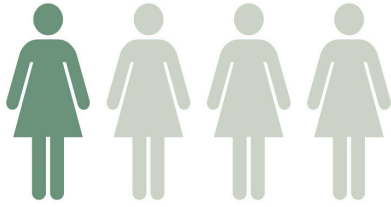
Artefacts

SafeStart Bag: A portable, dignified care kit designed for moments of emergency or transition.

SecureEase Lock: A symbolic and functional object that references fortress aesthetics and personal sovereignty.

SOCIAL JUSTIFICATION

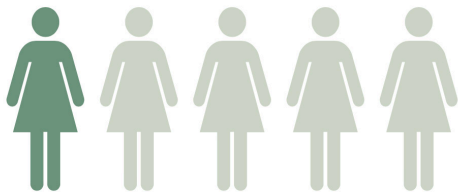
Prevalence & Impact



1 in 4 women in England and Wales will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime



40% of homeless women cite domestic abuse as a contributing factor to their homelessness



One woman is killed by a current or former partner **every five days** in England and Wales



On average, the police receive a domestic abuse call every 30 seconds, yet **under 24% of incidents are reported**

3.9 MILLION

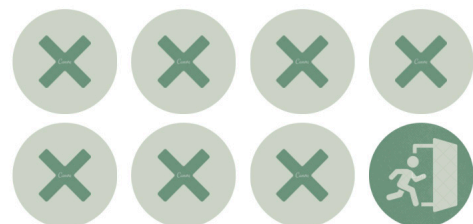
Approximately **8.0% of adults (3.9 million people)** experienced abuse in the year ending March 2024



Approximately **3 women a week** die by suicide as a result of domestic abuse

20%

20% of UK children live with an adult perpetrating abuse



Victims often try to leave on average **seven times** before successfully escaping

KEY VALUES

Designed to Heal is grounded in five core values of a trauma-informed approach, based on research conducted by Harris and Falot (2020), that shape spatial and product-based design interventions:

Safety

Environments must ensure physical and emotional safety, creating secure and predictable spaces free from threats to support trauma recovery.

Trustworthiness

Designs should foster respectful environments that maintain personal boundaries, using non-institutional aesthetics to promote trust and comfort.

Choice

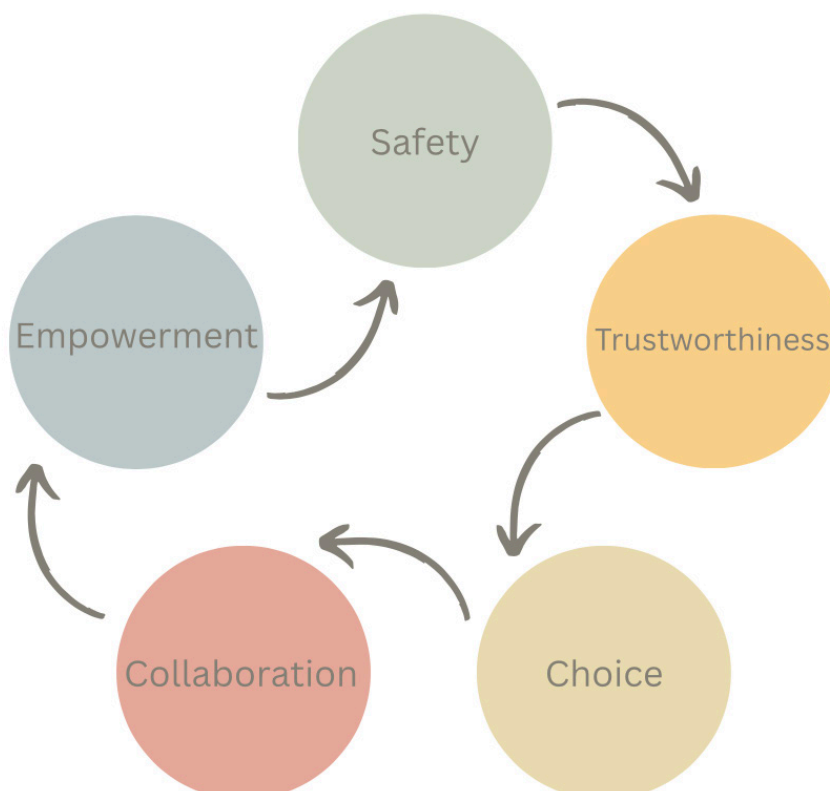
Providing individuals with control over their environment, interactions, and space usage restores agency and supports healing from trauma.

Collaboration

Involving users in design decisions and sharing power ensures spaces reflect their needs, enhancing a sense of partnership and inclusion.

Empowerment

Prioritising empowerment through skill-building environments uplifts users, fostering resilience and a sense of value in healing spaces.



DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The following trauma-informed design principles translate the key values along with further academic research into practical strategies that can be used in the design industry:

Furniture and Layout – Layouts should be legible, intuitive, and **easy to navigate**. Use **modular furniture** and **clear zoning** between communal and private areas to **help users orient themselves** and reduce cognitive load. (Ames and Loebach, 2023).

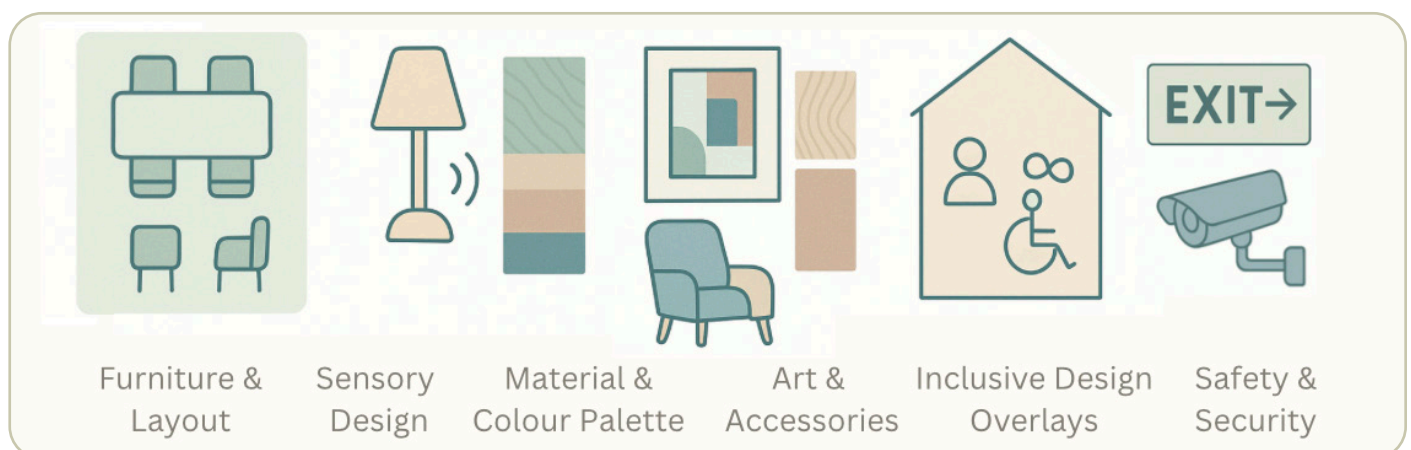
Sensory Design – Sound, light, texture, and scent should be carefully considered to reduce overwhelm and promote grounding. Use **noise-buffering materials**, **warm layered lighting**, **natural textures**, and neutral or calming aromas to **support sensory regulation**. (Shopworks Architecture, 2021).

Material and Colour Palette – Choose warm neutrals and muted tones—like **sage, dusty blue, or rose**—to create an environment that feels **safe and comforting rather than clinical**. Avoid harsh whites or greys that evoke institutional settings. Prioritise **tactile, natural materials** that provide sensory comfort. (Christine Ann Awad Cowart, 2024).

Art and Accessories – Use calming, meaningful artwork to reflect dignity, hope, and belonging. Provide opportunities for users to **personalise their space**, and include supportive accessories—such as **weighted blankets, soft partitions, or sensory tools**—that serve both emotional and functional needs. (Christine Ann Awad Cowart, 2024).

Inclusive Design Overlays – Design with layered inclusivity in mind: create **neurodivergent-friendly environments**, **child-friendly layouts** for mothers and children, and **fully accessible spaces** that accommodate **mobility needs and sensory differences**. These layers work together to reduce stress and increase participation. (Owen and Crane, 2022).

Safety and Security – Safety should be **embedded visibly and invisibly**. Include features like **discreet locks, clear exit routes, and monitored zones** with CCTV and lighting—without making the space feel punitive or over-policed. **Smart tech, personal alarms, and motion sensors can enhance safety** while respecting privacy and dignity. (Owen and Crane, 2022; Ames and Loebach, 2023).



METHODOLOGY

This project uses a **mixed-methods approach**, combining academic research, precedent analysis, user-informed insights, and design concepts to **prototype a website, trauma-informed toolkit and artefacts** that are grounded in evidence and shaped by real-world needs.

Design Development:

The project evolved through continuous **feedback loops with tutors, peers, and professionals**, allowing refinement of focus, tone, and deliverables.

Research Review and Precedents:

In-depth **analysis of trauma theory, spatial psychology, and survivor experiences** along with analysis of precedents to ground the project in evidence-based understanding.

Digital Prototyping:

I developed **diagrams, illustrations and marketing concepts** to communicate the proposed artefacts and environments with clarity, empathy, and visual strength.

Creation & Communication:

I designed a **live website as both a visual extension of the project and a tool for outreach**, ensuring all content is accessible, motivating, and ethically presented.

Empathy-Led Ideation:

I drew on **survivor narratives, academic research, and trauma-informed design frameworks** to imagine solutions that prioritise safety, dignity, and psychological comfort.

Lived Experience Integration:

Survivor perspectives, gathered through **precedent case studies, and existing literature**, were central to shaping design decisions, tone, and toolkit content.

MY POSITION

This project is not neutral. It takes a stand.

I believe that **trauma-informed design is not an optional or niche approach—it is a moral and professional imperative**, especially in spaces designed for survivors of domestic abuse. Design has emotional consequences. It can retraumatise or it can repair. As such, I argue that **every architect, interior designer and spatial practitioner should be trauma-literate and attuned to the psychological and emotional impact of the spaces they shape**.

My stance is both personal and political: **I see design as a form of care work**. Safety is the baseline, but it is not enough. I believe that healing environments should also be beautiful, dignified, and emotionally meaningful. These spaces should support autonomy, honour identity, and provide refuge—not just physically, but holistically.

A well-designed space is not just a roof over someone's head, it's a blueprint for recovery.

This project, Designed to Heal, reflects these values and advocates for a future where trauma-informed design is embedded in mainstream practice.

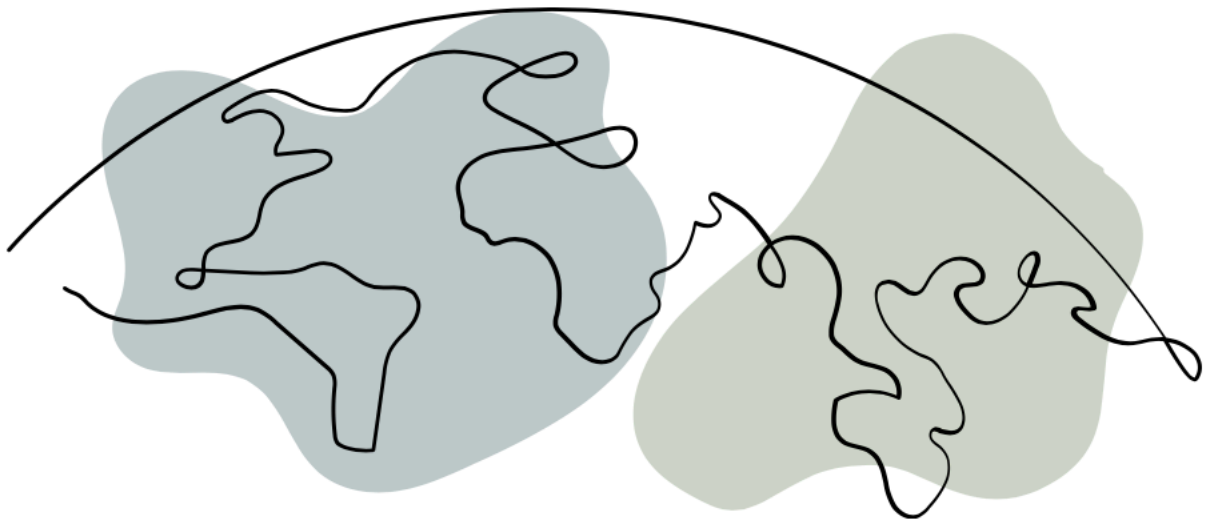


Figure 13

Note: While it is recognised that **trauma and domestic abuse are not exclusive to any one gender** and can affect anyone, **this project specifically focuses on women**. The design strategies, case studies, and survivor insights highlighted here are tailored toward supporting women who have experienced domestic abuse. Whilst many of the trauma-informed principles explored are applicable across a wide range of contexts and will benefit all individuals impacted by trauma, the primary lens of this work is shaped by the realities, needs, and recovery journeys of women.

TRAUMA THEORY

Understanding Trauma and Its Spatial Impacts

Trauma is not only psychological but also physiological and environmental in its effects. Van der Kolk (2014) explains that **trauma reshapes the body and brain, impacting an individual's ability to feel safe, regulate emotions, and respond to surroundings**. Judith Herman (1992) reinforces that recovery from trauma requires safety as the first stage of healing, making environmental design a critical factor in supporting restoration.

Stephen Porges' Polyvagal Theory (1994) adds that **survivors are highly sensitive to environmental cues** of safety or threat. Spaces that are overwhelming or unpredictable can exacerbate hypervigilance, while calm, coherent environments can support nervous system regulation and foster a sense of security.



Figure 14

SPATIAL PSYCHOLOGY

The Importance of Environmental Cues

Environmental psychology highlights how **the built environment influences mental well-being**. Kaplan & Kaplan (1989) emphasise the restorative value of environments that are coherent, legible, and offer refuge. **Trauma-informed spaces should be easily navigable and promote autonomy**, with features like clear sightlines, quiet zones, and adaptable layouts.

The principle of “defensible space” (Newman, 1972) underlines the importance of personal territory and natural surveillance in creating perceived and actual safety. Picketts L, Warren MD, Bohnert C (2021) further advocates for designing environments that prioritise dignity, control, and inclusivity, warning against institutional aesthetics that can feel punitive or alienating.



SURVIVOR EXPERIENCES

Lived Experience and User Needs

Insights from survivors and practitioners reveal consistent needs: discretion, autonomy, and environments that avoid clinical or stigmatising aesthetics. Sullivan and Cain (2004) argue that **survivors thrive in environments that balance privacy and community**, offering choice and empowerment within a supportive structure.

Harris and Fallot (2020) identify **five trauma-informed principles—safety, trust, choice, collaboration, and empowerment**—which can be translated into spatial design strategies. For example, empowerment may mean **movable furniture or adaptable lighting**, while **safety** can involve **layered privacy, clear sightlines, and secure refuge spaces**.



Figure 16

GAPS IN RESEARCH

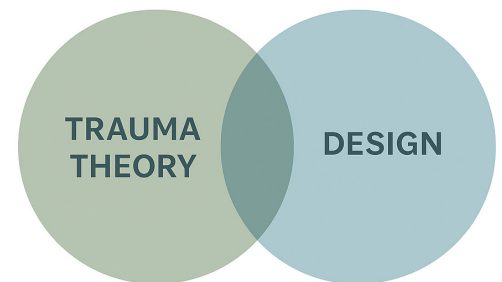
While the body of literature around trauma theory and trauma-informed care is well-established in psychology and social work (Herman, 1992; van der Kolk, 2014; Hopper et al., 2010), **there is a significant gap in applying these principles directly to spatial and environmental design**, particularly outside of clinical or therapeutic settings. **Trauma-informed design is still emerging as a recognised discipline**, and its integration into mainstream architecture, interior design, and product development remains limited.

Much of the existing guidance focuses on healthcare, education, and homelessness services (SAMHSA, 2014; Hopper et al., 2010), with **far less attention given to domestic violence refuges, transitional housing, and everyday public or semi-public environments** such as police stations or pharmacies — where survivors may first seek help. Research and case studies in these contexts are minimal, and **often focus on operational safety rather than the emotional and psychological experience of space** (Sullivan and Cain 2004).

The perspectives of survivors themselves are often missing in design research. While participatory frameworks are encouraged in social services (Christine Ann Awad Cowart, 2024), co-design practices are **rarely extended to those with lived experience of trauma in architectural processes**. There is a lack of robust, qualitative data on how survivors respond to and navigate space, or how sensory and material choices directly affect their sense of safety and empowerment.

Additionally, **few studies bridge trauma theory with practical design strategies in a detailed, accessible way for practitioners**. Most trauma-informed design toolkits remain broad or theoretical, lacking specificity around construction, materiality, or spatial planning.

This project seeks to help close these gaps by translating trauma theory and survivor insight into tangible design strategies that can be used across sectors — from domestic settings to emergency spaces. Designed to Heal positions design not just as a logistical solution, but as a tool for emotional and psychological support.



SCOPE, FUNDING & SIGNIFICANCE

Sector Overview & Importance

Approximately 1 in 8 women in England and Wales experienced domestic abuse, stalking, or sexual assault in the year to March 2025, equating to approximately 3.2 million individuals (Office for National Statistics, 2024).

Domestic abuse is officially recognised as a public health emergency, with major gaps in how services identify victims and coordinate support (The Guardian, 2025).

Experts estimate the societal cost of domestic abuse in England in 2022 at nearly £78 billion, with every £1 invested delivering nearly £9 in savings through reduced demand on policing, housing, healthcare, and justice systems (UK Parliament, 2022).

1/8



£79
Billion

Figures 22–24

Funding Sources & Allocation

Statutory funding from government or local authorities is the main income source for 80% of domestic abuse service providers; smaller, grassroots organisations often rely on short-term grants or donations (GOV.UK, 2025).

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 introduced a statutory duty for local authorities in England to provide support within safe accommodation to survivors and children – requiring long-term planning and sustained funding (GOV.UK, 2025).

Central government funding streams include:

Victims Funding Strategy: A collaboration between the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and Home Office, aiming to align victim-support funding across multiple departments (GOV.UK, 2025).

Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Grant (DASA): Administered via the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), recently increased to £160 million for 2025/26 (GOV.UK, 2025).

Ministry of Justice and Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) Grants: Support victim and witness services, including domestic abuse support (GOV.UK, 2025).

Statutory Funding

Grants
Donations
Charity

Figure 25

Challenges & Funding Gaps

Charitable and trust funding is vital — especially for specialist ‘by-and-for’ services supporting minoritised groups who are disproportionately underserved (Women’s Aid, 2021).

Women’s Aid reports a £321 million shortfall in funding essential domestic abuse services in England, with many organisations using reserves or reducing core services (Women’s Aid, 2021). Only about 22% of refuge spaces are adequately commissioned, and around 61% of refuge referrals are currently declined due to lack of capacity (Women’s Aid, 2021).

Specialist services, particularly those led by and for Black, minoritised, or disabled survivors, face disproportionate underfunding and structural exclusion from commissioning processes (Women’s Aid, 2021).



Figures 26–28

Where Money Comes From

Central government departments (Home Office, MOJ, and DLUHC) allocate statutory funding and grants for domestic abuse support (GOV.UK, 2025).

Local authorities and Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) commission and distribute funding per statutory duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (GOV.UK, 2025).

Non-governmental funding from charitable trusts and donors, such as the National Lottery and Tudor Trust, supports grassroots and specialist survivors’ services (Women’s Aid, 2021).

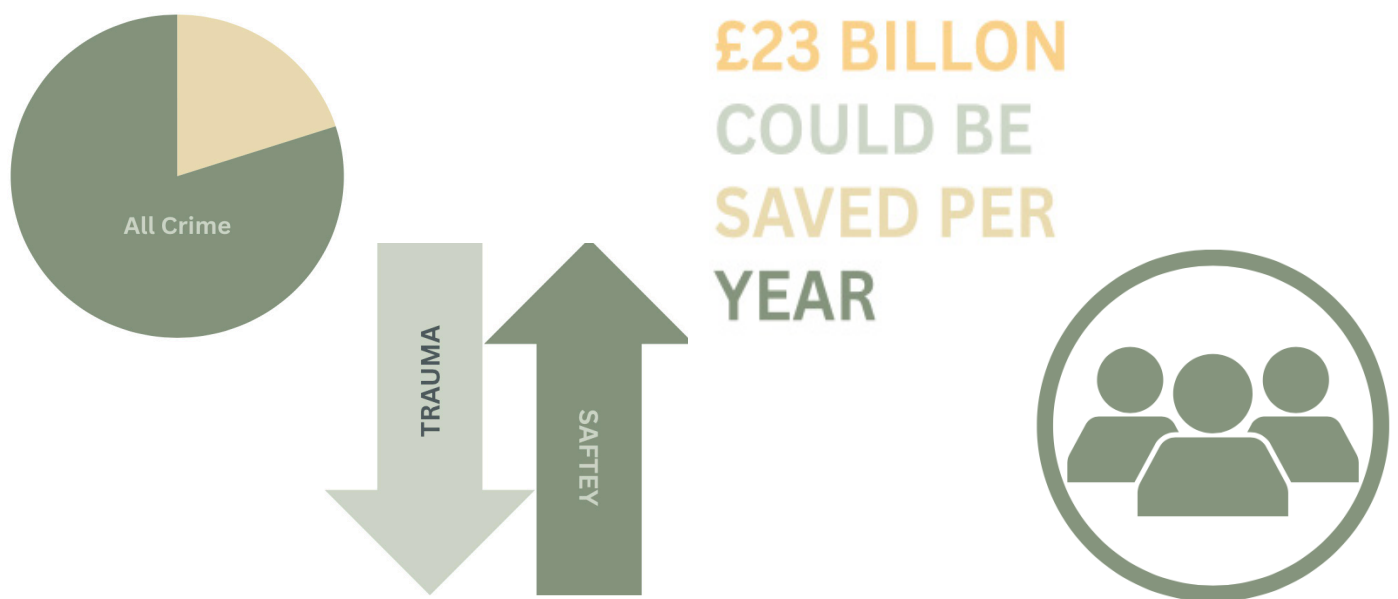


Figure 29

Why It Matters

Domestic abuse accounts for approximately 20% of all crime — disproportionately impacting women and children, shaping health and social outcomes (Office for National Statistics, 2024). Effective funding and well-designed spaces can reduce trauma, increase safety, and support recovery, generating both social and economic benefits (Women's Aid, 2021).

Women's Aid and others argue that **delivering £427 million annually would address service gaps and deliver long-term cost savings of up to £23 billion per year** (Women's Aid, 2021). Long-term, protected funding and better coordination between departments will help prevent service cuts and ensure fair support for all survivors, especially those from marginalised groups (GOV.UK, 2025). The domestic violence sector in the UK operates under severe pressure — serving enormous demand with limited, often short-term funding (Women's Aid, 2021). Strategic investment and trauma-informed infrastructure design are not just necessary — they are transformative.



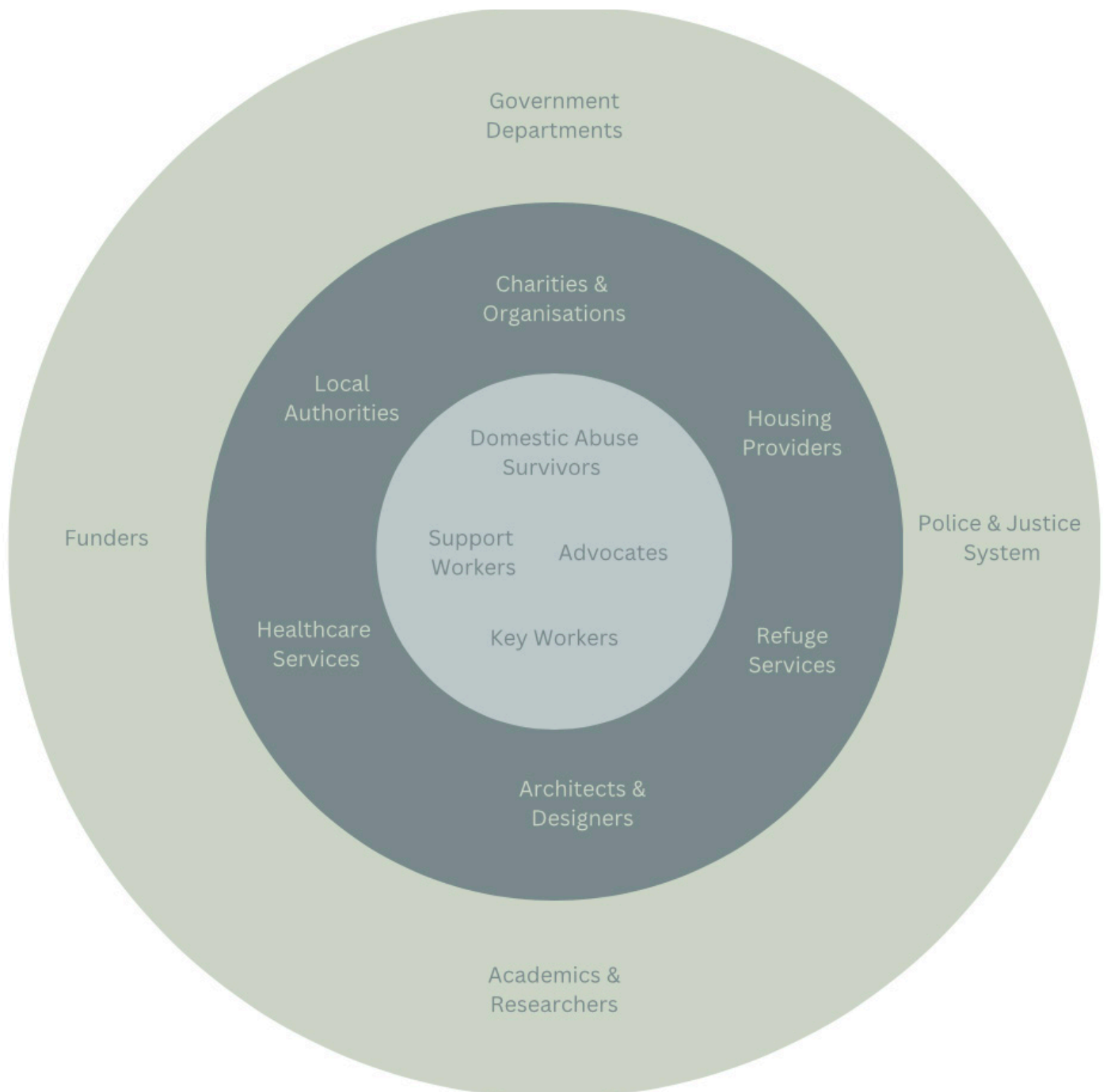
Key Insights

Understanding how the UK funds domestic violence services helps position Designed to Heal for future support. With statutory duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and funding from departments such as the Home Office, Ministry of Justice (MOJ), and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), there are clear pathways to align the project with government priorities.

By demonstrating how trauma-informed design supports survivor recovery and safety, Designed to Heal could access public grants, local authority funding, or support from charities focused on violence prevention, mental health, or inclusive design.

STAKEHOLDER MAP

The stakeholder map categorises key individuals and organisations involved in the UK domestic abuse sector based on their level of influence and interest. It helps clarify who needs to be consulted, informed, partnered with, or monitored when designing trauma-informed spaces, ensuring survivors' needs remain at the centre of all decision-making.



PROCESS FOR VICTIMS

The journey for a domestic violence survivor typically involves **navigating multiple agencies; police, social workers, healthcare providers, housing services, and charities**. This process can be overwhelming and re-traumatising, as many survivors move between temporary accommodations, attend legal appointments, and access support in settings that often feel institutional, unsafe, or emotionally sterile (Women's Aid, 2021). This fragmented pathway neglects the powerful role environments play in shaping behaviour, memory, and healing.

Research shows that **survivors often leave and return to an abusive partner approximately seven to eight times before breaking free for good** (Time, 2025). A key but frequently overlooked reason for this cycle is the **inadequate design of the spaces survivors escape to**, these places often feel cold, unsafe, and lacking in comfort or warmth (Women's Aid, 2021). **This discourages survivors from staying, resulting in costly relapses.**

Current data reveals that domestic abuse costs the UK up to £78 billion annually, while survivor support services receive just 0.3% to 1.1% of that amount (UK Parliament, 2022). Yet, investing in trauma-informed design can yield significant benefits: for every £1 spent on support services, the public saves at least £9 in health, legal, and societal costs (UK Parliament, 2022). **By embedding trauma-informed design into every stage of the survivor's journey — from shelters to pharmacies — Designed to Heal aims to soften the experience of seeking help, reduce barriers to recovery, and create safe, welcoming environments that empower survivors to stay away from harm.** Redirecting funds toward such environments could alleviate pressures on healthcare, legal systems, and charities while providing survivors with the secure spaces they need to heal.



KEY SPACES INVOLVED

Key spaces along the domestic violence survivor's journey each present unique design challenges and opportunities to support safety, dignity, and empowerment. **Homes, refuges, council emergency housing, police stations, Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs), safe spaces in public venues, and court waiting rooms can either compound trauma or foster recovery** (Women's Aid, 2021). In a trauma-informed approach, these environments prioritise privacy through soundproofing and discreet entrances, create a sense of control with adjustable lighting and flexible layouts, and avoid institutional cues by using warm materials, natural elements, and calming colour palettes (Hopper et al., 2010). Cultural inclusivity — through multilingual signage, prayer spaces, and diverse artwork — ensures relevance for a broad range of survivors, while sensory regulation features such as quiet rooms, textured finishes, and biophilic design help to reduce stress responses. By tailoring interventions to the function and emotional demands of each space, *Designed to Heal* positions the built environment as an active partner in recovery rather than a passive backdrop.



DESIGN DISCIPLINE CROSSOVERS

Domestic violence touches multiple fields including **architecture, interior design, product design, urban planning, and public service delivery**, however there is little formal collaboration between these disciplines and the domestic violence sector. Most environments in this context are created with basic function or security in mind, rather than psychological healing. Designed to Heal investigates how **trauma-informed design can connect these disciplines, drawing on lessons from healthcare, education, and residential design to improve domestic abuse services**. It also highlights the role architects and designers can play in addressing urgent social issues moving beyond aesthetics and commercial goals to create spaces that actively support recovery, safety, and dignity. **Each industry brings its own unique skills and expertise**, and if these were brought together through genuine collaboration, it could create a future where trauma-informed design becomes the standard rather than the exception, it would be embedded into every space, service, and environment.

Architecture



Figure 37

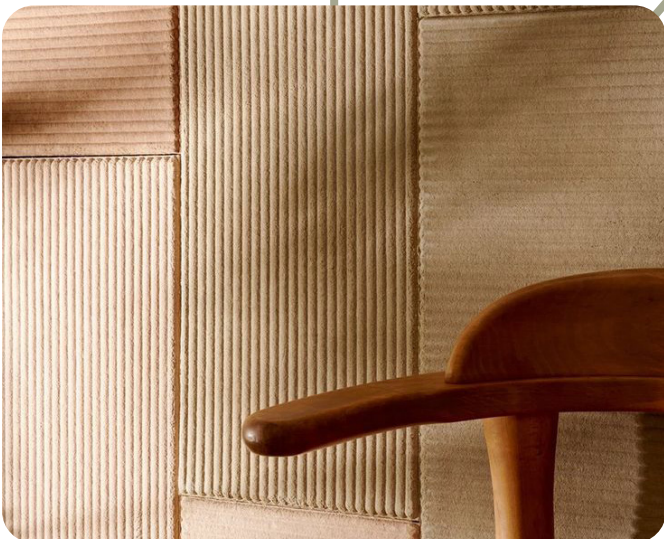
Interior Design



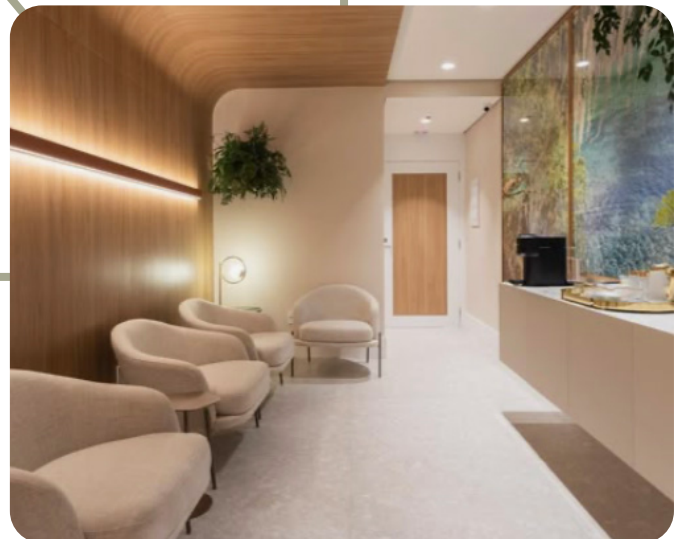
Figure 39

Figure 38

Figure 40



Product Design

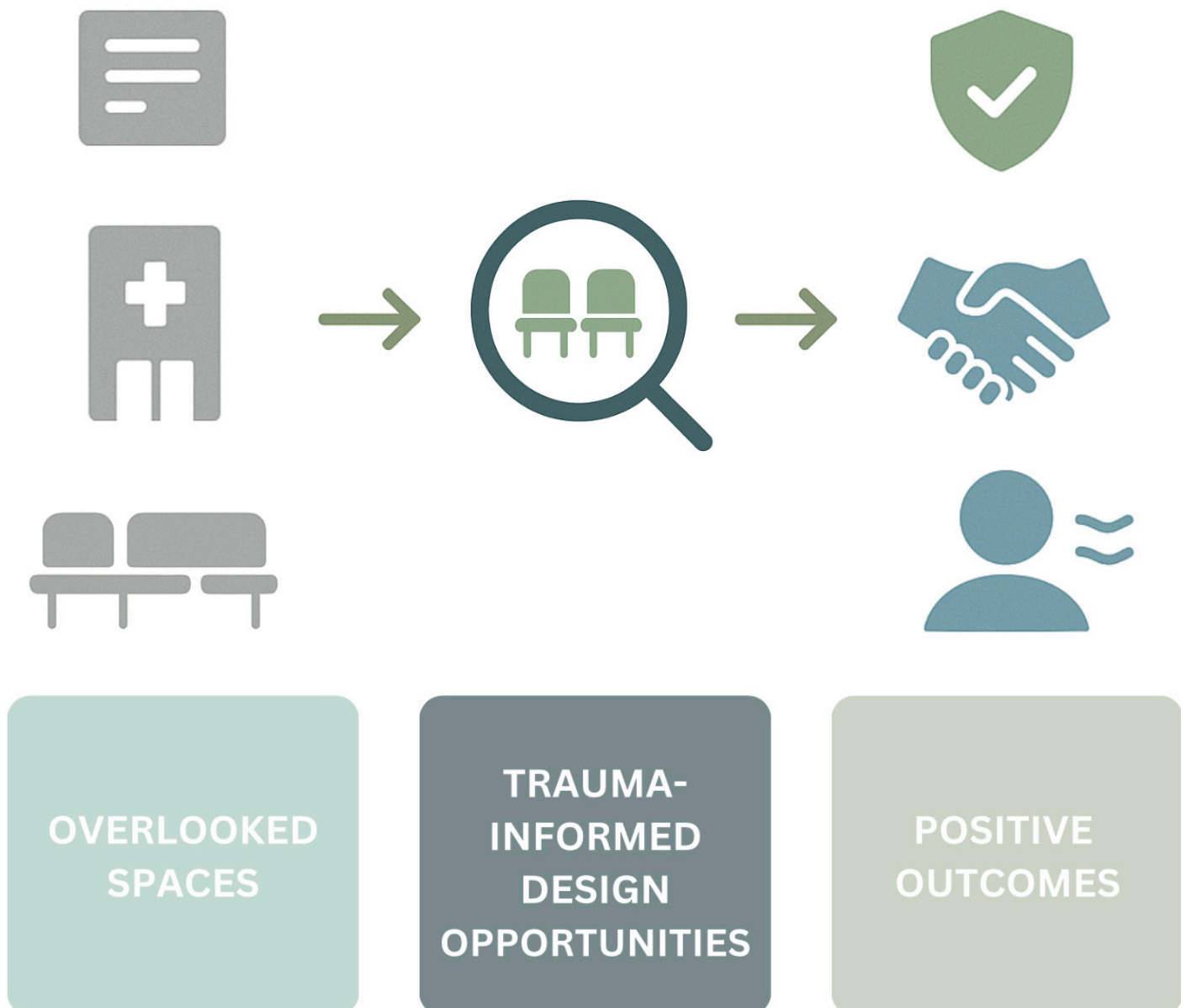


Public Service Delivery

DESIGN OPPORTUNITIES

Despite limited resources, the **domestic violence sector offers significant opportunities for innovation**. Many everyday environments such as **waiting rooms or pharmacies are often overlooked by designers** despite their potential role in safety and emotional wellbeing. These commonplace settings can contribute significantly to trauma recovery. (Chanmugam and Grieder, 2013; Kirwan and McLaughlin, 2024).

With growing interest in trauma-informed approaches in sectors like education and mental health, there is increasing momentum to bring the same principles into violence prevention and survivor recovery. **Designed to Heal positions the built environment as a frontline support tool, showing how trauma-informed changes can dramatically improve safety, trust, and emotional regulation.** This approach has the potential to transform not only how these specific spaces are designed, but also how the design community as a whole views the role of interior design and architecture in supporting human wellbeing.



PRECEDENTS



Figure 42

FURNISHING FUTURES

<https://www.furnishingfutures.org/partners>

Description

Furnishing Futures is a London-based charity that creates fully furnished, trauma-informed homes for women and children who have experienced domestic abuse and are transitioning from refuges or temporary accommodation into permanent housing. Founded by interior designer and former social worker Emily Wheeler, the organisation works at the intersection of design, care, and social justice.

How They Work

- Collaborate with local councils, housing associations, and support services to identify families in need.
- Source high-quality donated furniture and homewares from interior brands and the design industry.
- Professionally design and install interiors that prioritise comfort, dignity, and healing.
- Often include soft lighting, warm colour palettes, natural textures, and custom touches.
- Volunteer designers may assist with installations or creative direction.

Spaces They Design

- Social housing flats
- Refuge communal spaces (e.g., lounges, entrance halls)
- Individual bedrooms for women and children
- Occasionally shelters or transitional housing



Figure 43

Pros

- Delivers real, immediate impact for vulnerable women.
- Embeds trauma-informed principles in domestic settings.
- Strong ethical model: sustainable (via reuse), social, and design-led.
- Offers a replicable framework for future collaborations across the UK.

Cons

- Limited to certain geographic areas (mainly Greater London).
- Reliant on donations and partnerships, which can limit scalability.
- Not an architectural practice—focus is on interiors and soft furnishings, not structural redesign.

SNUG ARCHITECTS – HOPE STREET

<https://snugarchitects.co.uk/our-work/hope-street>

Description

Snug Architects, a UK-based architectural firm, designed Hope Street in Southampton—a trauma-informed residential community for women and their children who have been involved in the justice system. Developed with One Small Thing (a charity founded by Lady Edwina Grosvenor), the project pioneers a new, restorative approach to women's justice, providing an alternative to prison through supportive, healing environments.

How They Work

- Designed Hope Street around trauma-informed principles: safety, autonomy, dignity, and empowerment.
- Used co-design with women with lived experience of trauma and the justice system.
- Created a residential complex that includes private bedrooms, communal kitchens, therapy spaces, gardens, and support services.
- Emphasised natural light, calming materials, and spatial layouts that support emotional well-being.



Figure 44



Figure 45

Spaces They Design (For this project)

Trauma-informed communal living accommodation, private bedrooms and family areas, shared kitchens and lounges, therapeutic support and counselling spaces, outdoor gardens and landscaped area and secure yet non-restrictive entrances and circulation routes.

Pros

- Integrated trauma-informed principles into architectural layout, not just interior finishes.
- Strong use of co-design and ethical engagement with end-users.
- A model for justice reform through spatial care—highly replicable across the UK.
- Prioritises healing and rehabilitation rather than punishment.

Cons

- As a large-scale architectural development, it may be cost-prohibitive to replicate in lower-budget contexts.
- Focused specifically on women in the criminal justice system—less applicable to general domestic violence shelters.
- Currently a single project; long-term outcomes and replicability still being evaluated.

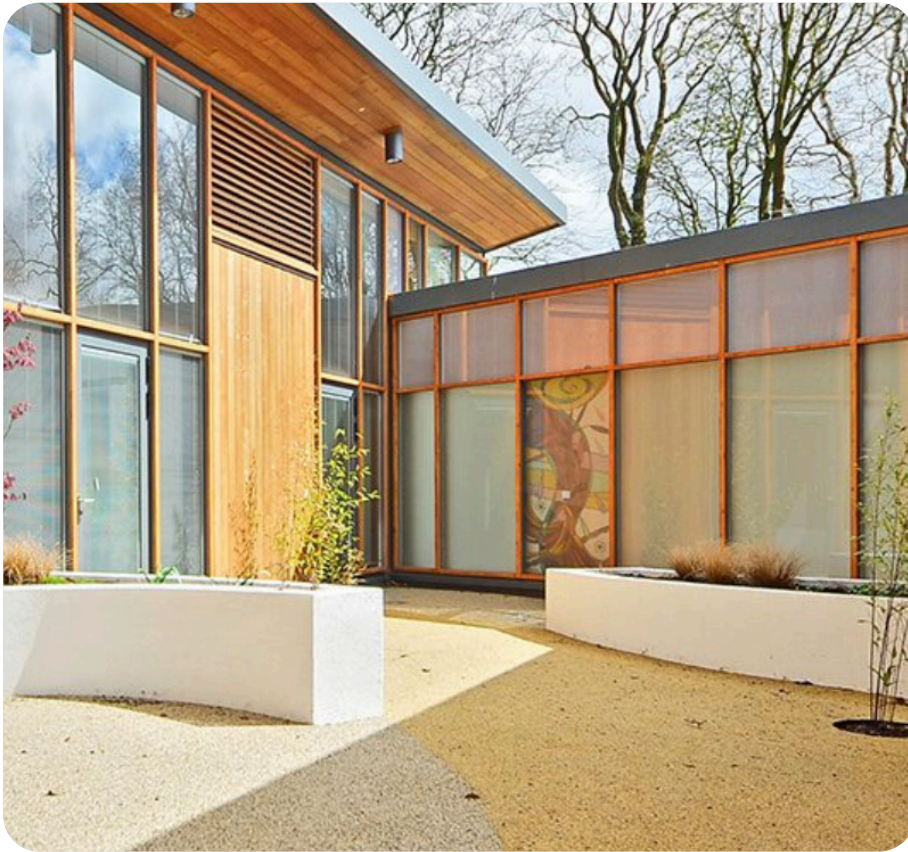


Figure 46

KEPPIE DESIGN – THE ROWAN

<https://www.keppiedesign.co.uk/project/the-rowan-sarc/>

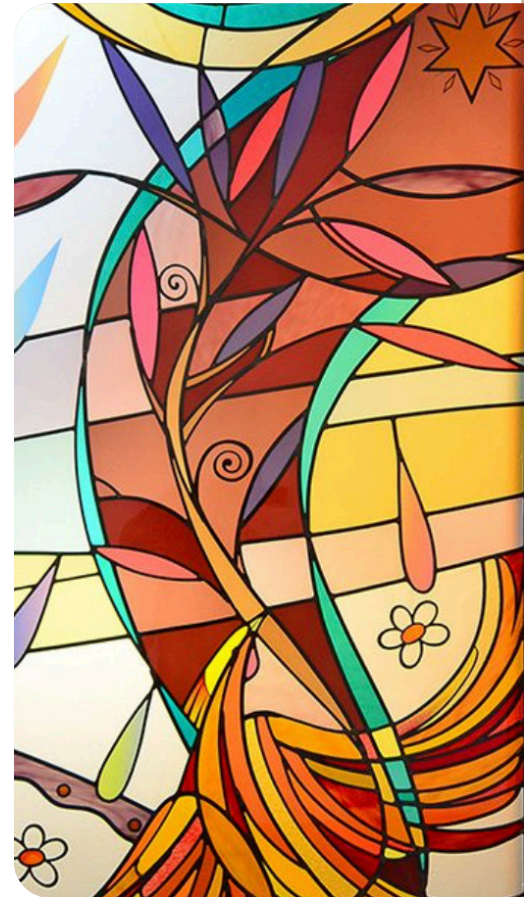
Description

Keppie Design, a multidisciplinary architectural practice based in Glasgow, designed The Rowan, Northern Ireland's first Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC), located in Antrim. The centre offers a holistic, trauma-informed environment for individuals affected by sexual violence—providing integrated medical, psychological, and legal support within a sensitive, non-institutional setting.

How They Work

- Designed in collaboration with healthcare professionals and support services to address user needs with dignity and care.
- Emphasis on privacy, discretion, and emotional comfort throughout the spatial journey.
- Use of non-clinical aesthetics: soft colours, warm materials, natural light, and low-stress circulation.
- Separate entrances, clear wayfinding, and acoustically considered interiors reduce stress and re-traumatisation.

Figure 47



Spaces They Design (For this project)

Private consultation and examination rooms, forensic interview and evidence collection rooms, calm, neutral waiting areas, discreet staff support spaces, secure yet non-intimidating entry/exit routes and sensitively landscaped outdoor environment



Figure 47

Pros

- Exemplary integration of trauma-informed design within a healthcare context.
- Balances the needs of multiple services (medical, forensic, therapeutic) in a single unified environment.
- Prioritises user dignity through subtle spatial cues and soft, home-like finishes.
- Demonstrates trauma-informed design at a public infrastructure level.

Cons

- Highly specialised use-case (sexual assault response) may not fully translate to domestic or refuge spaces.
- Institutional limitations may still impose procedural or security constraints on design flexibility.
- Limited visibility of post-occupancy feedback or user-led evaluation.

MILLSPower – CARING SPACES

<https://www.millspower.com/news-and-views/caring-spaces-trauma-informed-spaces>

Description

MillsPower is a UK-based architectural studio with a strong focus on social value. Their Caring Spaces project, designed for the Freedom from Torture centre in London, reimaged therapeutic spaces for survivors of torture and trauma. The goal was to create a safe, welcoming, and non-triggering environment for counselling, group therapy, and support services.

How They Work

- Engaged directly with therapists, clinical staff, and clients with lived experience.
- Prioritised sensory and spatial comfort through careful material choice, lighting, and acoustic design.
- Integrated nature-inspired colours, homely textures, and intuitive wayfinding to reduce institutional stress.
- Designed to minimise visual and auditory overstimulation while supporting autonomy and calm.



Figure 48



Figure 49

Spaces They Design (For this project)

Counselling and therapy rooms, reception and waiting areas, breakout spaces for staff and service users, transitional areas (hallways, entrances) with calming elements and sensory zoning and colour strategies.

Note: Visual reference for this project limited likely to protect user safety and discretion.

Pros

- Thoughtful approach to multi-sensory triggers and trauma awareness.
- Used co-design to ensure the environment met psychological and therapeutic needs.
- Small-scale but deeply impactful redesign of everyday spaces, such as counselling rooms and waiting areas.
- Practical and replicable trauma-informed strategies for similar community or therapy spaces.

Cons

- Focus is limited to therapeutic and clinical interiors, not broader housing or refuge settings.
- Primarily an interior retrofit, without significant architectural intervention.
- As a single-case collaboration, further scalability depends on client funding and partnerships.

PRECEDENTS REFLECTION

Furnishing Futures (Various Designers) – This initiative provides high-quality furniture and interior packages to survivors moving into new homes. It demonstrates how thoughtful aesthetics and comfort play a role in emotional recovery. However, the approach could be strengthened by embedding trauma-specific spatial strategies and giving users more agency in customising their space.

Snug Architects – Hope Street – This women’s justice centre blends trauma-informed design with sustainable architecture. Its strength lies in offering women dignity and normalcy through soft materials, daylight, and non-institutional design. Hope Street offers a compelling model of how restorative spaces can serve justice-involved women—though its scale may limit replicability.

Keppie Design – The Rowan – A sexual assault referral centre in Northern Ireland, The Rowan exemplifies calm, secure, and purpose-built trauma-informed design. Soft textures, neutral tones, and private circulation routes support survivor dignity. Its clarity of spatial organisation is particularly relevant to Designed to Heal’s toolkit principles.

MillsPower – Caring Spaces – This design-led research initiative explores how public sector spaces (like waiting rooms or hospitals) can be reimagined through a trauma-informed lens. Their work emphasises empathy, user-centred prototyping, and sensory comfort. The project offers valuable insight into how emotional wellbeing can be embedded at even the earliest stages of spatial planning.

Together, these **precedents demonstrate the growing potential—and necessity—of embedding trauma-informed design into spaces that support vulnerable populations.** While each takes a different approach, common threads emerge: the importance of dignity, autonomy, sensory comfort, and spatial clarity. Projects like Hope Street and The Rowan showcase how large-scale architecture can embody safety and warmth, while Furnishing Futures and Caring Spaces show how even modest or temporary interventions can support healing. However, there are still limitations. For example, **many focus on physical safety or aesthetics without fully integrating trauma theory or survivor co-design.**

It has **proven challenging to identify precedents specifically within the domestic abuse survivors’ journey** – ranging from transitional spaces to short and longer term accommodation – and, therefore, to identify any consistent design themes, strengths, and weaknesses across typologies. Funding challenges discussed above (pp 20–22) highlight the imperative for, not only, increased provision of new, dedicated spaces for survivors but, also, the review and cost-effective transformation of existing spaces. In order to drive these changes I have highlighted the **urgent need for increased intradisciplinary research and collaboration in this area** – across academia, public services, third sector providers, and practitioners. Alongside this, the provision of accessible, adaptable, cost-effective design education and tools can support interested professionals and survivors in implementing improvements within their existing spaces.

Design to Heal contributes tangibly to both these goals – the academic and the pragmatic – and incorporates plans for its further development beyond this initial project submission.

TARGET AUDIENCE

1 Primary

Architects, Interior Designers & Spatial Practitioners

Why: These professionals are responsible for shaping the built environments where survivors live, heal, and rebuild.

Needs: Practical, research-informed guidance on trauma-informed design; clear examples, toolkits, and case studies that can be directly applied to their work.

What They'll Gain: Insight into designing for emotional safety; access to resources that help embed trauma-informed thinking into their practice.

2 Secondary

Domestic Violence Organisations, Refuge Providers & Support Services

Why: These groups manage or influence the physical spaces that survivors use every day, from shelters to drop-in centres.

Needs: Cost-effective, easy-to-implement design interventions; templates and support for commissioning trauma-informed upgrades.

What They'll Gain: Tools to make existing environments feel safer and more empowering; confidence to collaborate with design professionals and advocate for better spatial standards.

3 Tertiary

Survivors of Domestic Abuse and Trauma, and their Advocates

Why: Survivors are the ultimate beneficiaries of trauma-informed design, and their insight is essential to shaping truly healing spaces.

Needs: Reassurance, education, and emotional validation; an understanding of what safe, empowering design looks like and how to seek it or advocate for it.

What They'll Gain: A sense of agency, community, and support; resources to help them identify and create spaces that aid their healing journey.

PERSONAS

Persona 1: Aspiring Trauma-Informed Designer

Name: Matt Thompson

Age: 35

Occupation: Interior Designer

Location: London, UK

Background: Matt has 10 years of experience in residential and commercial interior design, with a portfolio spanning modern apartments and corporate offices. Recently, they attended workshops on trauma-informed design and became passionate about creating spaces that support healing for vulnerable populations, particularly survivors of domestic abuse. Matt aims to specialise in this niche to make a social impact while differentiating their services in a competitive market.

Goals:

- o Deepen understanding of trauma-informed design principles, such as safety, privacy, and emotional well-being.
- o Access case studies and examples of successful projects, like Hope Street by Snug Architects.
- o Connect with other professionals or mentors in the field for collaboration or guidance.
- o Stay updated on research and best practices to enhance their design practice.

Challenges:

- o Limited access to comprehensive, accessible resources on trauma-informed design.
- o Difficulty finding mentors or experienced designers specializing in this area.
- o Balancing social impact goals with the commercial viability of their practice.

Behavioral Traits:

- o Actively follows design blogs, subscribes to industry newsletters, and engages on LinkedIn with groups focused on socially responsible design.
- o Prefers online learning platforms, webinars, and downloadable resources for flexibility.
- o Values real-world examples and practical applications over theoretical content.

Website Usage:

- o Reads articles and blog posts on trauma-informed design principles and applications.
- o Explores project galleries and case studies to understand successful implementations.
- o Downloads guides or toolkits, such as design checklists or material recommendations.
- o Signs up for newsletters or webinars to stay informed.
- o Uses the contact form to inquire about collaboration or mentorship opportunities with you.

Quote: "I want my designs to not only look good but also support the well-being of people who've experienced trauma."

Persona 2: Organisation Representative

Name: Sarah Patel

Age: 45

Occupation: Operations Manager at a Domestic Abuse Charity

Location: Manchester, UK

Background: Sarah has worked in the non-profit sector for 15 years, focusing on supporting survivors of domestic abuse. She oversees the operations of a charity that runs multiple shelters and support centres across the region. Inspired by projects like The Rowan SARC by Keppie Design, Sarah is committed to improving her organisation's facilities to create safe, welcoming environments that promote healing.

Goals:

- o Understand trauma-informed design and how it can be applied to shelters and support centres.
- o Identify and collaborate with qualified designers, who specialise in trauma-informed spaces.
- o Access funding or resources to implement design improvements within budget constraints.
- o Share knowledge with staff and partners to enhance service delivery.

Challenges:

- o Limited budget for renovations or new builds, often relying on grants or donations.
- o Ensuring designs meet the specific needs of survivors, such as privacy and safety.
- o Navigating complex stakeholder needs, including staff, survivors, and funders.

Behavioural Traits:

- o Relies on recommendations from peer organisations or charity networks like Women's Aid.
- o Attends sector-specific conferences or workshops to learn about best practices.
- o Prefers straightforward, jargon-free resources that are easy to share with colleagues.

Website Usage:

- o Seeks information on trauma-informed design tailored to shelters or support centres.
- o Look for a directory or profiles of specialised designers, including your portfolio.
- o Downloads practical tools, such as space assessment checklists or funding guides.
- o Uses the contact form to discuss potential projects or request consultations.
- o Reads case studies, like hope street, for inspiration.

Quote: "Our shelters are a lifeline for many women, and I want every aspect of them, including the physical space, to help them feel safe and supported."

Persona 3: Survivor of Domestic Abuse

Name: Amina Rahman

Age: 33

Occupation: Former Teacher, Currently in Recovery

Location: Bristol, UK

Background:

Amina recently left an abusive relationship after years of emotional and physical coercion. With the help of a local women's shelter, she and her young son have been placed in temporary accommodation. Although grateful to be safe, she finds the space cold, clinical, and disorienting. She often feels on edge and struggles to sleep, especially with unfamiliar sounds at night.

Goals:

- o Understand how safe spaces are designed for survivors like her.
- o Feel reassured that her needs — emotional and physical — are valid and being considered.
- o Find resources she can share with her case worker or housing officer.
- o Feel part of a community that acknowledges her trauma without judgement.

Challenges:

- o Navigating overwhelming, impersonal systems after leaving abuse.
- o Living in transitional housing that doesn't feel safe or soothing.
- o Advocating for her needs when she's still healing and easily triggered.
- o Difficulty focusing on long texts or complex diagrams due to trauma-related brain fog.

Behavioural Traits:

- o Uses her phone late at night when she feels unsafe or can't sleep.
- o Responds to gentle, visually calm content that avoids sensationalism.
- o Follows survivor support pages and trauma recovery spaces on Instagram.
- o Shares articles or visual resources with support workers or other women in the shelter.

Website Usage:

- o Visits the site to explore examples of warm, safe environments for survivors.
- o Uses the site to explore different options of how trauma-informed design can improve her space and help her recover.
- o Downloads PDFs to show staff when requesting improvements or items.
- o Looks for affirming messaging and imagery that reminds her she's not alone.
- o May return multiple times quietly before reaching out directly.

Quote: "I've lost so much already — I just want somewhere that feels human, not like I'm being hidden away."

WEBSITE DESIGN IMPLICATIONS

These personas guide the structure and content of designedtoheal.co.uk to ensure it meets diverse user needs:

Educational Section (Matt – Design Professional)

For Matt, include a blog with articles on trauma-informed design principles, case studies (e.g., Hope Street), and links to resources like webinars or research papers. Use clear, engaging language to appeal to designers seeking professional development.



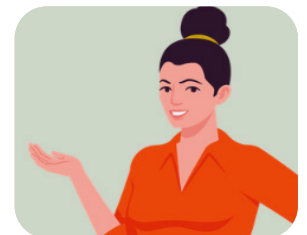
Resources Page (Sarah – Charity Worker)

For Sarah, provide downloadable tools, such as checklists for assessing trauma-informed spaces or guides on securing funding for renovations. Include a directory of designers, highlighting expertise, to facilitate collaboration.



Survivor Support Section (Amina – Survivor in Recovery)

For Amina, create a calming, visually-led section with practical resources like visual guides and room design ideas, affirming messages, and PDFs she can share with case workers. Provide short, digestible content with minimal jargon and optional audio narration for accessibility. Include a discreet “Quick Exit” button for safety.



Figures 50–52

To reach these personas effectively:

Matt Thompson (Designer/Architect)

Promote the website through design blogs, LinkedIn groups focused on social impact design, and architecture webinars. Share snippets of educational content on X to attract designers. Offer a newsletter sign-up to keep Matt engaged with updates.



Sarah Patel (Charity Worker)

Partner with Women’s Aid, SafeLives, or the Domestic Abuse Commissioner’s office to promote the website. Attend sector conferences or workshops to distribute flyers or present the work. Share case studies via email campaigns to charity mailing lists.



Amina Rahman (Survivor)

Reach Amina through Instagram and survivor support networks, sharing gentle, affirming visuals and safe, practical tips (e.g., what to include in a SafeStart bag). Collaborate with shelters to include resources in welcome packs. Create short Instagram Reels showing trauma-informed spaces or unboxing the SafeStart kit.



Figures 53–55

WEBSITE USER JOURNEY

The Designed to Heal user journey has been intentionally **crafted to be intuitive, empowering, and trauma-sensitive**. It recognises that different users—survivors, designers, and professionals—arrive with varying levels of urgency, emotional states, and digital confidence. The journey prioritises clarity, calm, and choice at every touchpoint.

1. Initial Entry Point

Users typically arrive via:

- Word of mouth, referrals from support services, or social media
- QR codes or printed resources in safe public spaces
- Direct search or linked from partner organisations

The homepage acts as a calm, welcoming landing zone. No distressing imagery, no jargon, and no immediate demands. Users are greeted with gentle, reassuring language and a clear introduction to what the site is and how it can help.

2. Quick Orientation

Visitors can self-select a path based on who they are:

- Survivor seeking resources or understanding
- Designer/architect looking for trauma-informed guidance
- Organisation or frontline worker looking to apply the toolkit

This branching system avoids overwhelming users with irrelevant information and ensures emotional safety by offering appropriate tone and content for each group.

3. Exploration and Access

Users are then guided through:

- Toolkit resources, including visual aids, checklists, and illustrative templates
- Design precedents, where they can learn about real-world examples
- Research and insights, offering credibility and context without academic overload

All content is presented in bite-sized, scannable blocks, with the option to dive deeper. The site uses progressive disclosure—content is revealed gradually, preventing overstimulation or confusion.

4. Interaction and Support

Interactive features include:

- Optional survivor and professional-led testimonials
- Personalisation tools e.g., colour palette and furniture customisation (future development)
- Anonymous feedback or story-sharing features (clearly signposted as optional)
- Navigation is consistent and unobtrusive, with a fixed menu bar and a prominent “Quick Exit” button always visible.

5. Exit and Follow-Up

Visitors are encouraged—but not pressured—to:

- Download tools or resources
- Signpost the site to others
- Reach out to suggested services if in crisis

No login required, preserving anonymity and ease of access. For professionals, a separate section provides contact forms and partnership pathways.

1. Initial Entry Point

2. Quick Orientation

3. Exploration and Access

4. Interaction and Support

5. Exit and Follow-Up

Figure 56

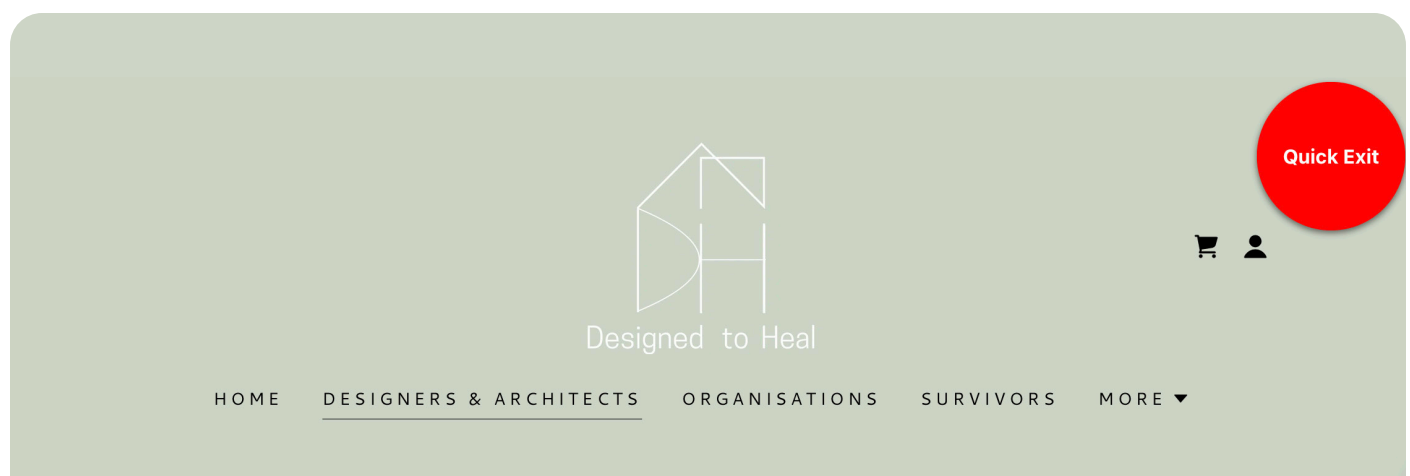
STRUCTURE & INTENTIONS

The Designed to Heal website is **organised for clarity, ease of navigation, and emotional safety**. It follows a simple, linear structure with clearly labelled sections: Home, Designers & Architects, Organisations, Survivors, and More. A fixed, **minimalist menu allows users to move between sections without getting lost**. Information is broken into **digestible parts with dropdowns** and progressive disclosure, so users are not overwhelmed with content all at once. The structure prioritises users in distress who may be navigating the site under emotional strain or time constraints.

The website serves three main purposes:

- To **educate architects**, designers, and support organisations on the importance and application of trauma-informed design.
- To **empower survivors** with resources that validate their experiences and promote safer environments.
- To **advocate for systemic change** within the built environment, encouraging trauma-literacy across design disciplines.

It **bridges the gap between theory and practice** by offering tangible tools, real-world precedents, and flexible strategies that users can apply in shelters, public services, and even private homes. The site is designed to be non-commercial, supportive, and usable by a wide range of audiences.



Purpose:

To inform, inspire, and equip architects, designers, and spatial practitioners with the knowledge, strategies, and tools needed to implement trauma-informed design in real-world projects. Bridge research with application, ensuring professionals can create spaces that prioritise emotional safety, dignity, and recovery.

Figure 57

VISUAL STYLE

The visual identity of Designed to Heal strikes a **delicate balance between calm and strength**. It is soft enough to be **soothing for trauma survivors, but purposeful enough to feel empowering**—more like a TED Talk than a charity leaflet. The **visual tone is subtle but bold, designed to hide in plain sight**. At first glance, it feels contemporary, minimal, and inclusive—but beneath the surface, every element is intentional, carrying deeper meaning.

The **colour palette uses muted neutrals like soft cream and sage**, alongside stronger **accent tones such as olive, and forest green**. These warmer hues evoke energy and resilience without being harsh or alarming. Typography combines rounded, readable typefaces with bold headers that create visual emphasis and confidence. Layouts are clean and grid-based, with considered white space that allows the content to breathe.

Imagery is carefully curated to avoid anything overtly triggering, but also resists the stereotype of victimhood. Instead, it leans into abstract patterns, symbolic graphics, and editorial-style photography that speak to growth, strength, and possibility. Movement is used sparingly—hover effects, gentle reveals, or fade-ins—to keep the experience dynamic yet grounded. The overall aesthetic supports quiet power, dignity, and layered depth.

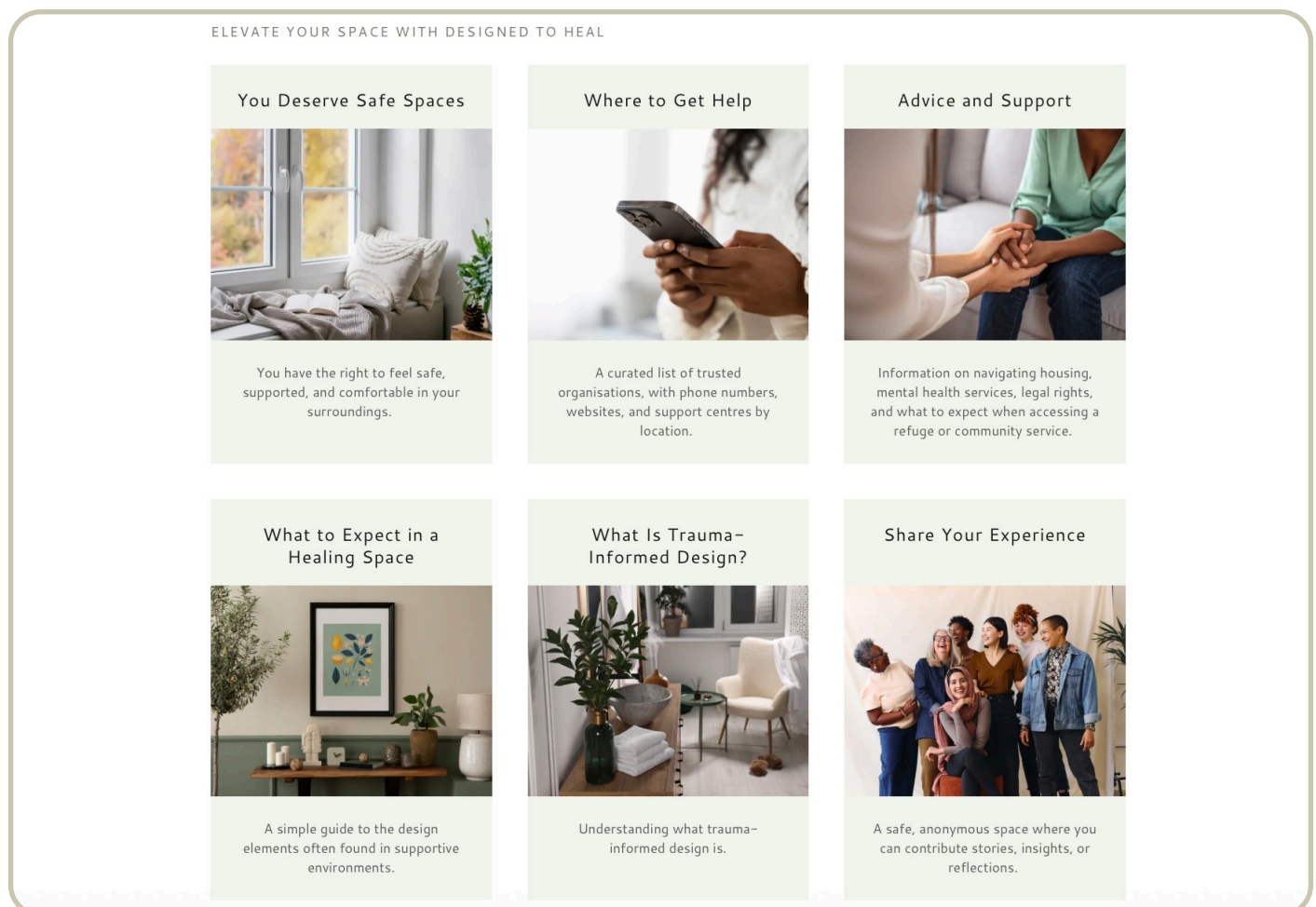


Figure 58

ACCESSIBILITY & SECURITY FEATURES

Accessibility

The Designed to Heal website prioritises accessibility for all users:

- High-contrast mode and text resizing for visual impairments
- Alt text for images and diagrams
- Clear, simple language for cognitive accessibility
- Screen reader compatibility
- Calm animations with disable option
- Navigation supports keyboard-only use and assistive technologies. Content avoids triggers—no autoplay media or distressing language.

Security & Safeguarding

Given the sensitivity of domestic abuse, the site includes:

- Data Privacy: No personal data collected unless via optional anonymous feedback; securely stored, never shared
- Quick Exit: Redirects instantly to a neutral page without leaving a trace
- SSL Encryption: Full HTTPS protection
- Moderation & Monitoring: IP tracking, spam filtering, and misuse prevention
- Blocking Harmful Use: Limits on downloads, watermarking, and credential checks for sensitive resources
- Community Guidelines: Clear anti-harassment policies and moderation for interactive areas
- Accessible Security: Safeguards without creating barriers for legitimate users

These measures ensure the site is trauma-informed in both content and technology—offering survivors and professionals a safe, supportive online space.

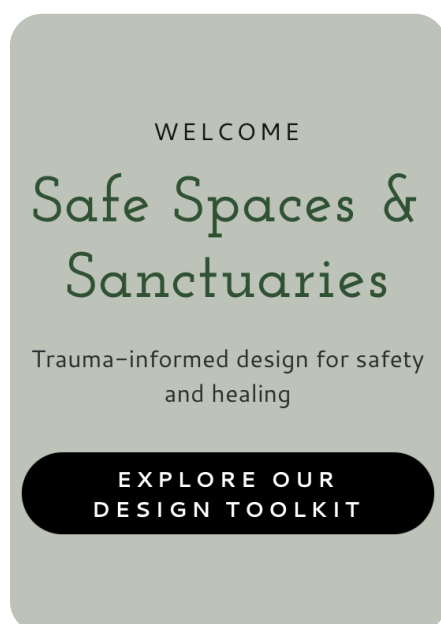


Figure 59

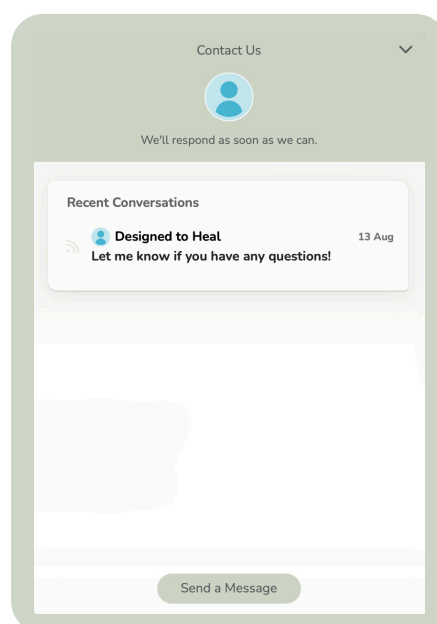


Figure 60

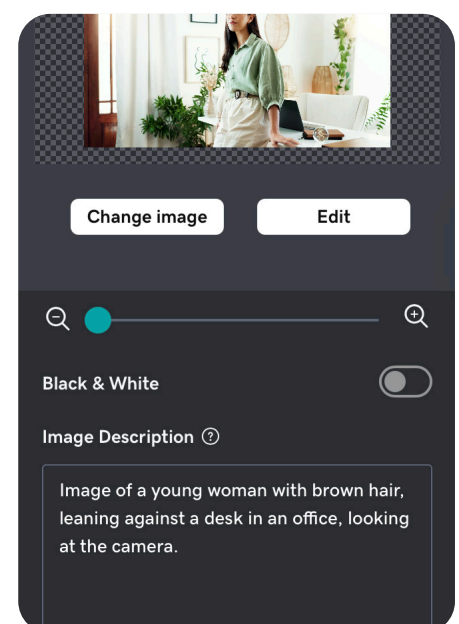


Figure 61

SECTIONS & CONTENT

1. For Designers & Architects

Purpose: To inform, inspire, and equip architects, interior designers, and spatial practitioners with the knowledge, strategies, and tools needed to implement trauma-informed design in real-world projects. This section bridges research with application, ensuring professionals can create spaces that prioritise emotional safety, dignity, and recovery.

– Introduction to Trauma-Informed Design

A comprehensive overview of trauma-informed design as a discipline.

– The Toolkit

Downloadable and interactive tools created for design professionals.

– Design Case Studies

In-depth analyses of successful trauma-informed environments.

– Specification + Spatial Guides

A library of practical guides covering key interior and architectural considerations.

– CPD, Training & Workshops (Coming Soon)

Opportunities for professional growth.

HOME DESIGNERS & ARCHITECTS ORGANISATIONS SURVIVORS MORE ▼

Figure 62

2. For Domestic Violence Organisations

Purpose: To support charities, refuge providers, support services, and housing organisations in improving the physical environments they oversee. This section offers practical, cost-effective strategies to help transform spaces into safe, empowering, and healing environments for survivors of domestic abuse and trauma.

– Why Design Matters

A clear, compassionate explanation of how the built environment directly impacts trauma recovery, user comfort, and safety.

– Simple Interventions Toolkit

A set of low-cost, low-effort changes that make a meaningful difference. Designed for offices, communal areas, bedrooms, and waiting rooms.

– Working with Designers

Guidance for organisations on how to confidently approach design projects, whether large or small.

– Case Examples

Real stories of change from organisations that have implemented trauma-informed design improvements.

3. For Survivors of Trauma and Domestic Abuse

Purpose: To honour and validate the lived experiences of survivors by offering supportive, empowering, and easy-to-understand resources. This section explains how the spaces we live in can affect our emotional safety, well-being, and healing journey. It aims to build awareness, foster trust, and reassure survivors that they deserve environments that support their recovery.

– You Deserve Safe Spaces

An empathetic, accessible introduction that affirms the survivor's right to feel safe, supported, and comfortable in their surroundings. Includes how small design details can have a powerful emotional impact.

– What Is Trauma-Informed Design?

Explains the idea of trauma-informed design in plain language. Uses relatable examples and gentle visuals to show how spaces can reduce stress, increase comfort, and help people feel more in control.

– What to Expect in a Healing Space

A simple guide to the design elements often found in supportive environments, such as warm lighting, calming colours, privacy, and sensory-friendly features, so survivors know what to look for or ask for.

– Where to Get Help

A curated list of trusted organisations, with phone numbers, websites, and support centres by location (national and local). Includes Women's Aid, Refuge, housing support, and 24/7 helplines.

– Advice and Support

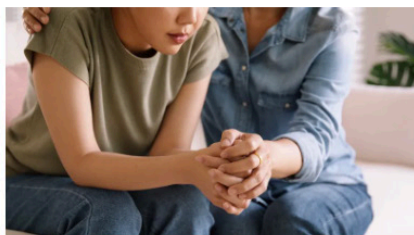
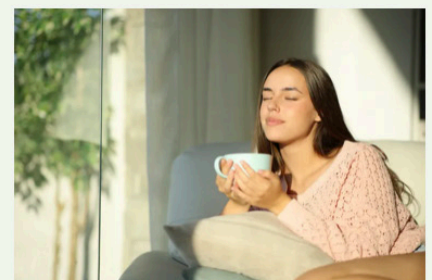
Offers information on navigating housing, mental health services, legal rights, and what to expect when accessing a refuge or community service. Written in reassuring, survivor-first language.

– Share Your Experience (Optional and Confidential)

A safe, anonymous space where survivors can contribute stories, insights, or reflections. Includes clear ethical guidelines, emotional safety notices, and consent-based participation.

Safety

Safety means more than just being free from physical harm. It means having the freedom to make choices, to close your eyes at night without fear, and to move through the world without being controlled. If you ever feel unsafe at home, in public, or online, you are entitled to ask for help and to be protected. There are services across the UK — refuges, housing teams, legal protections, and police support — that exist to make sure you do not have to face danger alone. Your wellbeing matters, and there are people and places ready to stand beside you.



Support

Reaching out for help can feel daunting, but support is there to meet you with kindness, compassion, and respect. You deserve to be listened to and believed, without judgment or blame. Trained professionals and survivor-led organisations understand what you are going through and can guide you through the next steps. Support can take many forms: a calm voice on the end of a helpline, a safe place to stay, counselling sessions, or practical guidance with housing, benefits, and legal rights. Whatever form it takes, support is about reminding you that you do not have to walk this path alone.

Figure 63

Shared Pages/Navigation (for all groups)

– About Us

Purpose: To introduce the mission, values, and people behind Designed to Heal.

– Contact

Purpose: To provide a clear and respectful way for individuals, organisations, or collaborators to connect.

– FAQs

Purpose: To answer common questions and make information about the platform easy to access.

– Merchandise & Funding

Purpose: To give supporters opportunities to sustain the platform through donations, purchases, or sponsorships.

– Research & Development

Purpose: To share ongoing projects, studies, and innovations that underpin trauma-informed design.

– Community & Co-Design Hub

Purpose: To create a collaborative space where lived experience, ideas, and design solutions can be shared and developed.

– Glossary

Purpose: To provide clear definitions of key terms and concepts used across trauma-informed design.

– Blog

Purpose: To publish articles, updates, and insights from the team and guest contributors.

– Accessibility Statement

Why: As a trauma-informed platform, accessibility is critical—not just physically but digitally and emotionally.

– Design Directory or Database (future development)

Why: It positions the site as a long-term hub.

– Toolkit Customiser (future development)

Why: Increases usability by letting people generate space-specific recommendations.

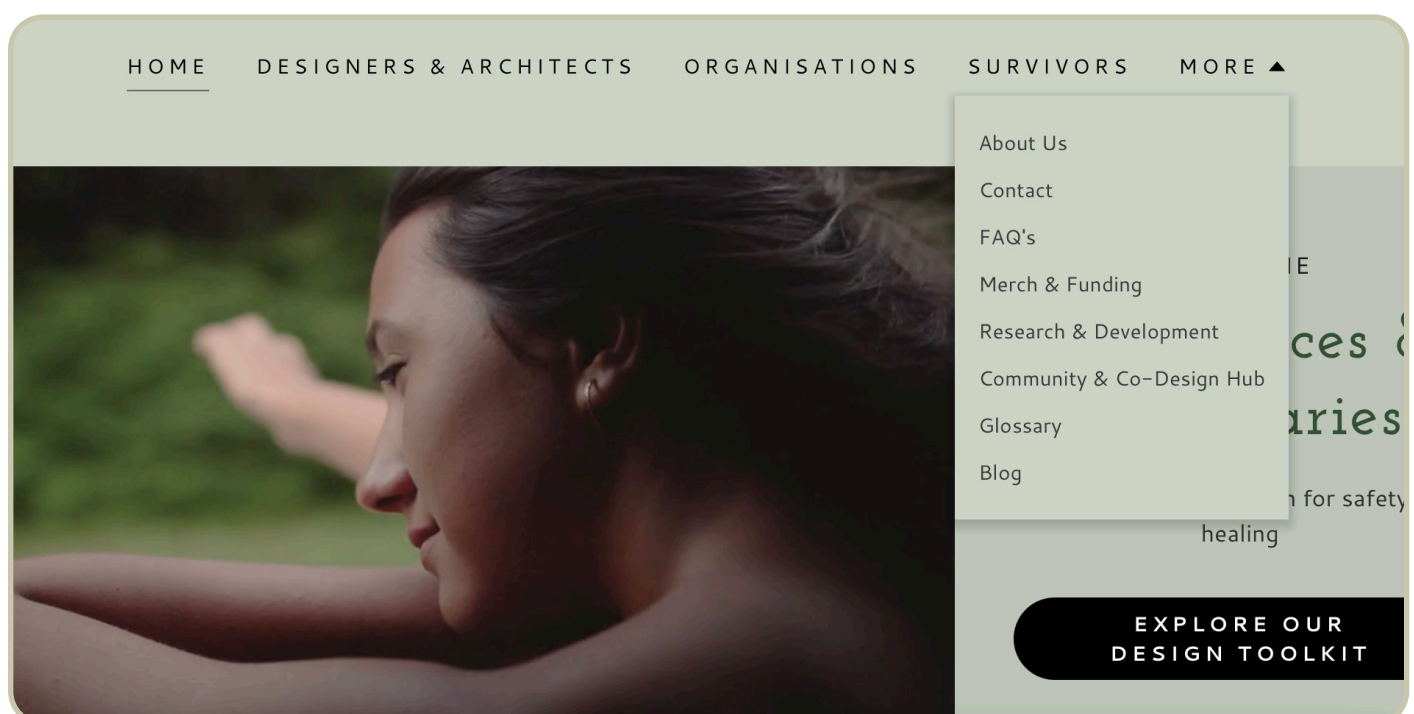


Figure 64

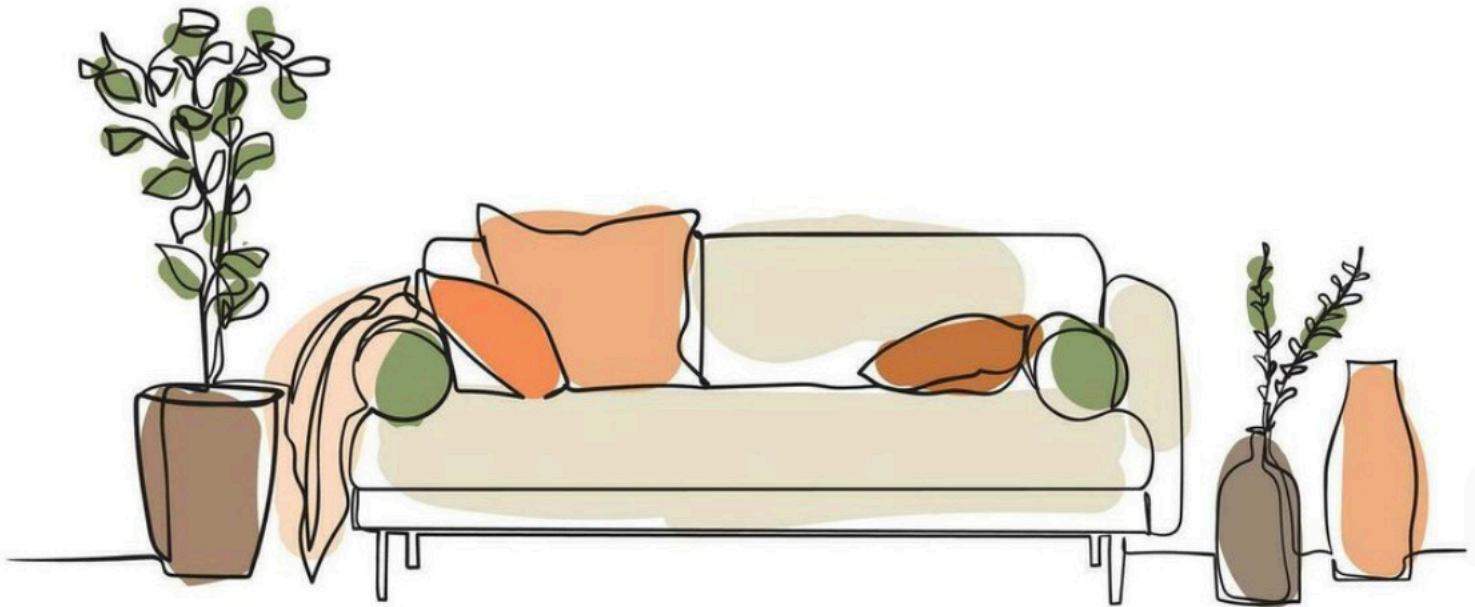


Figure 65

What is Trauma-Informed Design?

‘Trauma-informed design is about integrating the principles of trauma-informed care into design with the goal of creating physical spaces that promote safety, well-being and healing. This requires realizing how the physical environment affects identity, worth and dignity, and how it promotes empowerment’.

– Neha Gill, Forbes Nonprofit Council, 2019

Trauma-informed design starts with recognising that all buildings have an effect on people and communicate all the time. They communicate what is considered important, how people should be treated, who is in power, how you should behave and if people can be trusted, amongst many other things. What is particularly significant with trauma informed design, is that those who have suffered trauma are more susceptible to picking up on these cues and will have triggers that take them back to past traumas.

What is the Effect of Trauma?

Trauma is a psychological and physiological response to deeply distressing or disturbing experiences. These may include violence, abuse, neglect, displacement, or sudden loss — events that overwhelm an individual's ability to cope and feel safe (van der Kolk, 2014).

Trauma isn't just about what happened — it's about how the body and brain remember and respond to what happened. Survivors often live in a state of hypervigilance, anxiety, or emotional shutdown.

"Trauma is not what happens to you, it's what happens inside you as a result of what happened to you." – Gabor Maté

Bessel van der Kolk, a prominent psychiatrist and researcher, has extensively studied trauma. In his book *The Body Keeps the Score*, he explains that individuals who have experienced trauma react and are triggered differently to events and environments compared to those who haven't (van der Kolk, 2014).

The amygdala, an area of the brain, functions like a smoke detector. It reacts quickly, triggering a fight-or-flight response to perceived stressful situations. It detects both actual and perceived threats, raising adrenaline levels to prepare the mind and body to cope (LeDoux, 1996).

The medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC) acts like a watchtower, providing objectivity and enabling the executive brain to regulate the immediate impulses of the emotional brain. In individuals with trauma or PTSD, this balance shifts toward the emotional brain, impairing the executive brain's ability to calm the body by overriding the initial stress response (Shin et al., 2006).

This imbalance leaves trauma survivors in a state of heightened alertness and anxiety. Prolonged distress can deactivate the prefrontal cortex, hindering critical thinking and rationality. This keeps individuals in survival mode, reducing concentration and their ability to engage in healing from past traumas (Arnsten, 2009).

"Trauma occurs when an external event overwhelms a person's physical and psychological coping mechanisms or strategies."

– van der Kolk, 2014

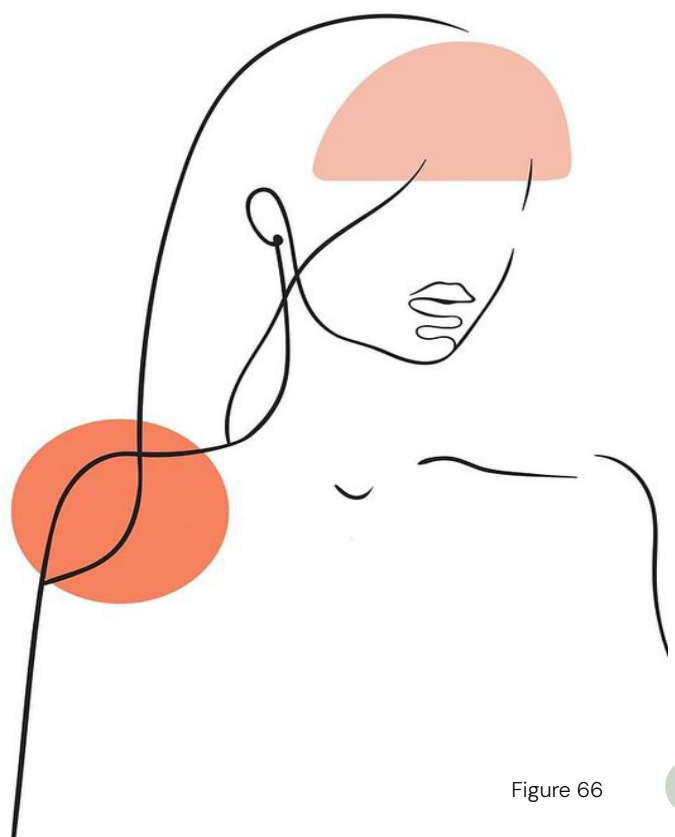


Figure 66

How to Tackle the Effects of Trauma?

One aspect of trauma is that the triggering of memory or association with a past traumatic event takes a sufferer back to the original traumatic event. This is experienced not just as an unpleasant memory but as a powerful reliving of the original event, as evidenced by medical studies of brain activity (Bremner, 2006). This explains, in part, the common avoidance of discussing past traumatic events and the tendency to seek to numb out the memory (van der Kolk, 2014).

This means that design must consider potential triggering situations and environments that may take a person back to past traumas. While each individual's experience of trauma is highly personal, some experiences may be shared, allowing design to avoid common triggers (Herman, 1992).

It also means that counselling and therapy are likely to generate substantial emotion and discomfort, as they place the person back into the traumatic past. Therefore, counselling spaces are a particular focus of trauma-informed design, which aims to support the associated emotions and experiences contained within them (Elliot et al., 2005).

To regulate the amygdala in individuals who have experienced trauma, two groups of techniques are commonly used: top-down and bottom-up.

Top-down therapies engage the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC), supporting the executive brain in regulating and rationalising the fight-or-flight response. Examples include counselling and talking therapies (Siegel, 2012).

In contrast, bottom-up therapies such as sensorimotor psychotherapy engage the body's sensory and motor systems, using breathing, movement, and tactile experiences to restore balance between body and mind (Ogden et al., 2006).

Therefore, architectural responses for trauma-informed environments should consider how the design of buildings can reduce triggering factors and support the healing and regulation of traumatic responses. The overall goal is to design spaces mindful of the effects of trauma to better support and serve organisations like OST in their work with traumatised women.

As Zach Morris puts it in his article, "Buildings that can heal in the wake of trauma" (Morris, 2023), for architects engaged in trauma-informed design, buildings are seen as "the first line of therapy."

Those involved in trauma-informed design emphasise understanding its effects, recognising that one traumatic experience or context is not the same as another, listening to the lived experiences of end users and occupants, and applying this trauma-informed design (TID) lens to both strategic conceptual design decisions and specific details (Bloomberg et al., 2020).

Five core values of a trauma-informed approach:

Safety: ensuring physical and emotional safety

Trustworthiness: creating respectful environments where personal boundaries are maintained

Choice: creating environments where individuals have choice and control

Collaboration: making decisions with the individual and sharing power

Empowerment: prioritising empowerment and skill-building

(Harris and Fallot, 2016)

DESIGN TOOLKIT COMPONENTS

Taking into account all of the academic and precedent research I have created a structure for a trauma-informed toolkit. Each component should operate as part of a cohesive ecosystem. A trauma-informed space is only effective when physical safety, emotional comfort, and psychological security align seamlessly.

A. Furniture & Layout

- › Movable, soft-edged, and multi-functional pieces
- › Clear division of communal vs private zones
- › Modular, reconfigurable layouts to adapt to needs

B. Sensory Design

- › Acoustics: noise buffering with soft finishes
- › Lighting: warm, dimmable, layered for mood control
- › Texture: natural, soft, and non-triggering materials
- › Scent & air: neutral base, optional calming aromas

C. Material & Colour Palette

- › Warm neutrals, muted tones for calmness
- › Avoid institutional greys or high-contrast triggers
- › Tactile, natural finishes that feel comforting

D. Accessories & Art

- › Meaningful, calming artwork
- › Provide personalisation opportunities
- › Accessories that serve a purpose

E. Inclusive Design Overlays

- › Neurodivergent-friendly features
- › Child-friendly planning for mother-and-child spaces
- › Full disability access with sensory regulation options

F. Safety & Security

- › Discreet yet robust security measures: SecureEase portable locks, SafeStart survival kits
- › CCTV and lighting plans for refuge exteriors and thresholds
- › Safe exit strategies embedded into spatial flow
- › Smart tech: personal alarms, motion sensors, and emergency call points

FURNITURE & LAYOUT

- > Choose movable, lightweight furniture in both communal and bedroom spaces to give users control over layout, enhancing autonomy and comfort.
- > Select soft-edged, cushioned pieces to reduce injury risk and create a soothing, non-threatening environment.
- > Incorporate modular elements such as beds with under-storage or adaptable shelving, allowing flexibility without clutter.
- > Position beds and seating against solid walls with clear sightlines to doors and windows to provide a sense of safety and reduce hypervigilance.
- > Provide adjustable lighting and small personal items in bedrooms (e.g., lamps, throw blankets) to support self-soothing and personalisation.
- > Avoid overcrowding and heavy, fixed furniture, which can increase anxiety and limit escape routes if a person feels unsafe.



Figure 67



Figure 68



Figure 69



Figure 70

Figure 71



SENSORY DESIGN

> Buffer noise with soft finishes such as rugs, curtains, acoustic panels, and upholstered furniture to create a calm, quiet environment and reduce overwhelming sound.

> Use warm, dimmable lighting and layered sources (e.g., floor lamps, wall lights) to allow control and create safe, soothing atmospheres, avoiding harsh glare or flicker.

> Incorporate natural, soft textures like wood, cotton, and felt to offer tactile comfort and grounding; avoid cold, clinical, or harsh materials that can feel institutional.

> Maintain clean, neutral air quality and provide optional calming scents (e.g., lavender or chamomile) through diffusers or scented pouches, ensuring scents are subtle and user-controlled to avoid triggers.



Figure 72

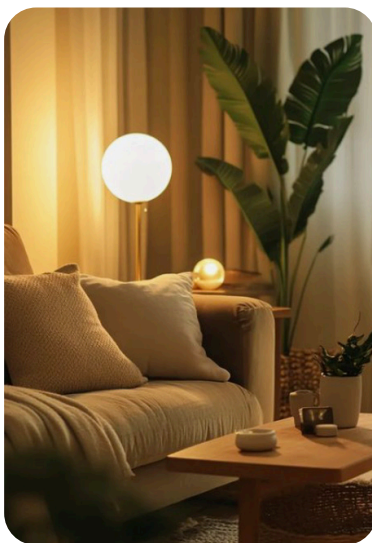


Figure 73

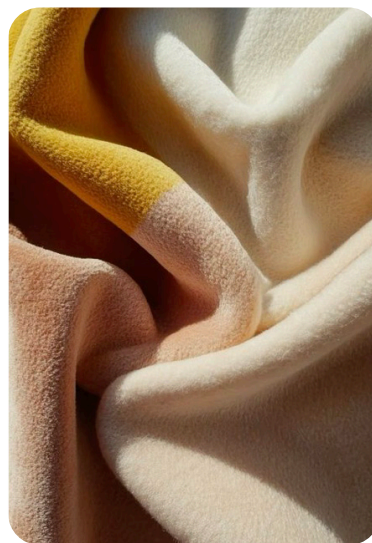


Figure 74



Figure 75



Figure 76

MATERIAL & COLOUR PALETTE

- > Select calming, warm neutrals and muted tones like soft beige, sage green, dusty blue or burnt orange and rose to create an environment that feels safe and soothing rather than clinical or stark.
- > Avoid institutional colours such as harsh whites, greys, or bright primary tones, which can feel cold or triggering and evoke hospital or prison-like environments.
- > Incorporate tactile, natural materials like wood, cork, linen, and wool to provide warmth and sensory comfort, fostering grounding and connection to nature.
- > Use matte finishes over glossy ones to reduce glare and visual overstimulation, which can heighten anxiety.
- > Introduce subtle accent colours through artwork, textiles, or furniture for personality and hope without overwhelming the senses.



ACCESSORIES & ART

- > Use meaningful, calming artwork with nature, abstract forms, or uplifting imagery to create a sense of hope and connection.
- > Avoid triggering visuals (e.g., depictions of violence, chaos, or overwhelming colors) to maintain emotional safety.
- > Provide personalisation opportunities, such as pinboards or display shelves, allowing residents to add photos or mementos for identity and comfort.
- > Choose accessories that serve a purpose, like soft-texture throws, weighted cushions, or sensory-friendly objects that reduce anxiety.
- > Incorporate inspirational artwork and decor to reflect diverse cultures, resilience, and hope, fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment.



Figure 78



Figure 79

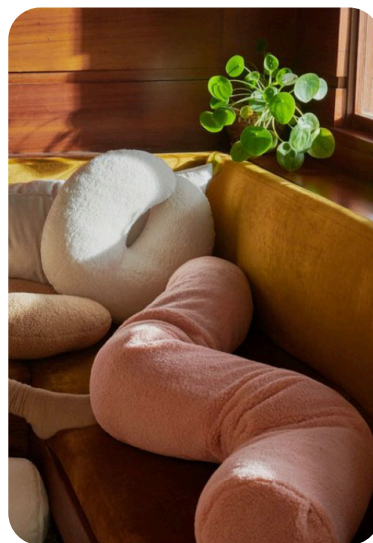


Figure 80

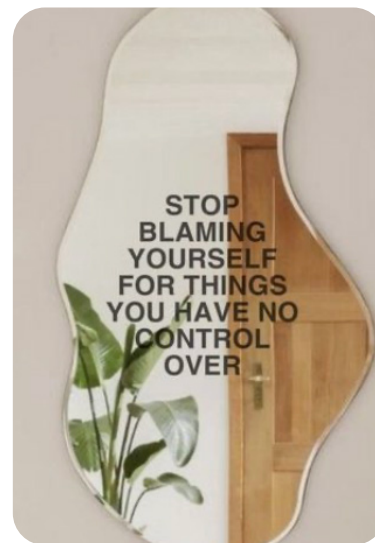


Figure 81



Figure 82

INCLUSIVE DESIGN

> Integrate sensory regulation options such as quiet rooms, noise-cancelling partitions, and dimmable lighting for neurodivergent users or those with trauma-related sensitivities.

> Design for mother-and-child needs by including child-friendly areas within sight of adult spaces, breastfeeding-friendly zones, and storage for child essentials.

> Ensure full accessibility for people with physical disabilities: wide doorways, non-slip flooring, and accessible toilets should be standard.

> Provide clear visual cues like contrasting colours for edges, tactile signage, and simple wayfinding to reduce disorientation and anxiety.

> Offer multi-modal engagement, such as visual guides and audio cues, to accommodate different cognitive and emotional needs.



Figure 83



Figure 84

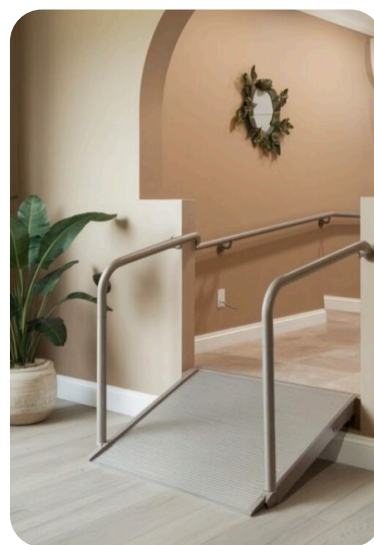


Figure 85



Figure 86

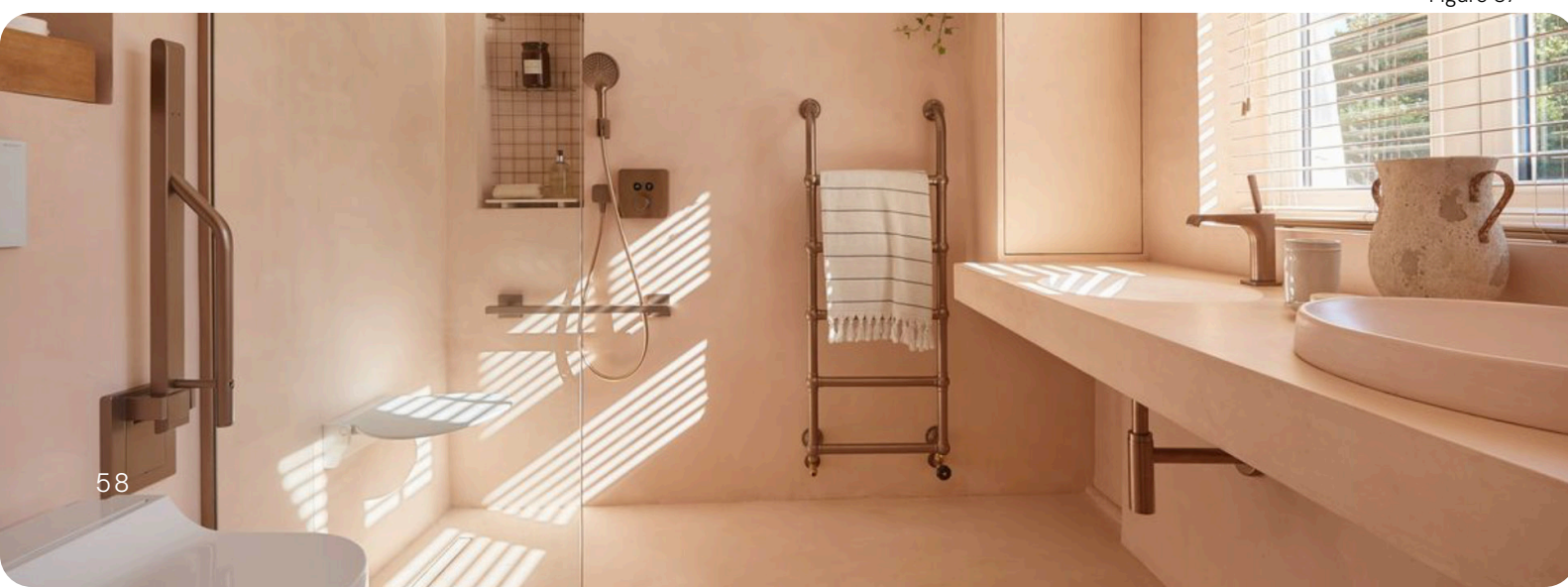


Figure 87

SAFETY & SECURITY

- > Provide multiple, clearly marked exits to avoid feelings of entrapment and to ensure safe evacuation during emergencies.
- > Use controlled access systems (e.g., keypads, fob entry) to prevent unauthorised entry while maintaining a welcoming environment for residents.
- > Incorporate discreet security measures such as CCTV in communal zones, visible enough to deter threats but not intimidating.
- > Ensure personal security options like secure bedroom locks that allow escape from the inside without tools and personal alarms for residents.
- > Ensure windows have secure locks and are fitted with curtains or privacy screens to maintain both safety and discretion.
- > Include external lighting around entry points and pathways to enhance perceived and actual safety, using warm, non-harsh tones for comfort.



Figure 88

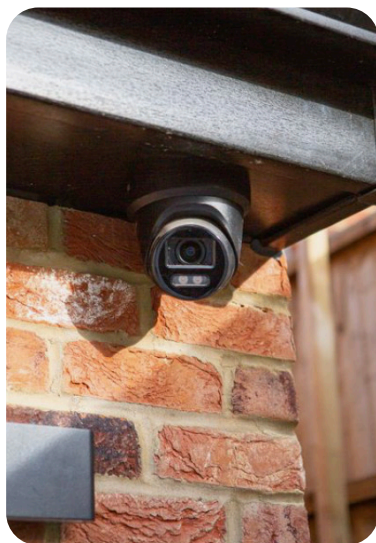


Figure 89



Figure 90



Figure 91



Figure 92

PUTTING THE TOOLS TO USE

Trauma-informed design is achievable in any setting — it doesn't need to be daunting, expensive, or complex. Simple choices and thoughtful swaps can transform a space into one that feels welcoming, safe, and respectful of those who use it. Whether in a private home, shelter, police station, hospital, or pharmacy, the same core principles apply. The examples below represent adaptable, non-specific spaces that demonstrate how small design interventions can reduce stress, honour lived experience, and support healing outcomes across both public and private environments.



TRAUMA-INFORMED CHECKLIST

This checklist offers a simple, practical tool for embedding trauma-informed design principles into any space. It is not prescriptive, but rather a guide for thoughtful reflection, helping designers, architects, and organisations ensure their environments are supportive, inclusive, and safe for survivors of trauma.

Use it at early planning stages, during design development, and when reviewing completed spaces.

Safety & Security

- ☐ Are sightlines clear, with no hidden corners or obstructed views?
- ☐ Is there a mix of open space and private retreat areas?
- ☐ Are entry/exit points secure and easily visible without feeling exposed?
- ☐ Are locks, alarms, and surveillance systems integrated discreetly and respectfully?

Sensory Comfort

- ☐ Are lighting levels adjustable and warm rather than harsh or clinical?
- ☐ Are acoustics softened using fabrics, furniture, or layout?
- ☐ Are materials tactile and non-triggering (no cold metal, no sterile surfaces)?
- ☐ Is scent used gently or not at all?
- ☐ Is there space for sensory regulation—quiet zones, soft textures, or grounding visuals?

User Control & Autonomy

- ☐ Can users move or rearrange furniture to create their own space?
- ☐ Are there options for how users enter, sit, interact, or exit a room?
- ☐ Are visual and spatial choices (lighting, noise, positioning) adjustable or varied?

Dignity & Inclusion

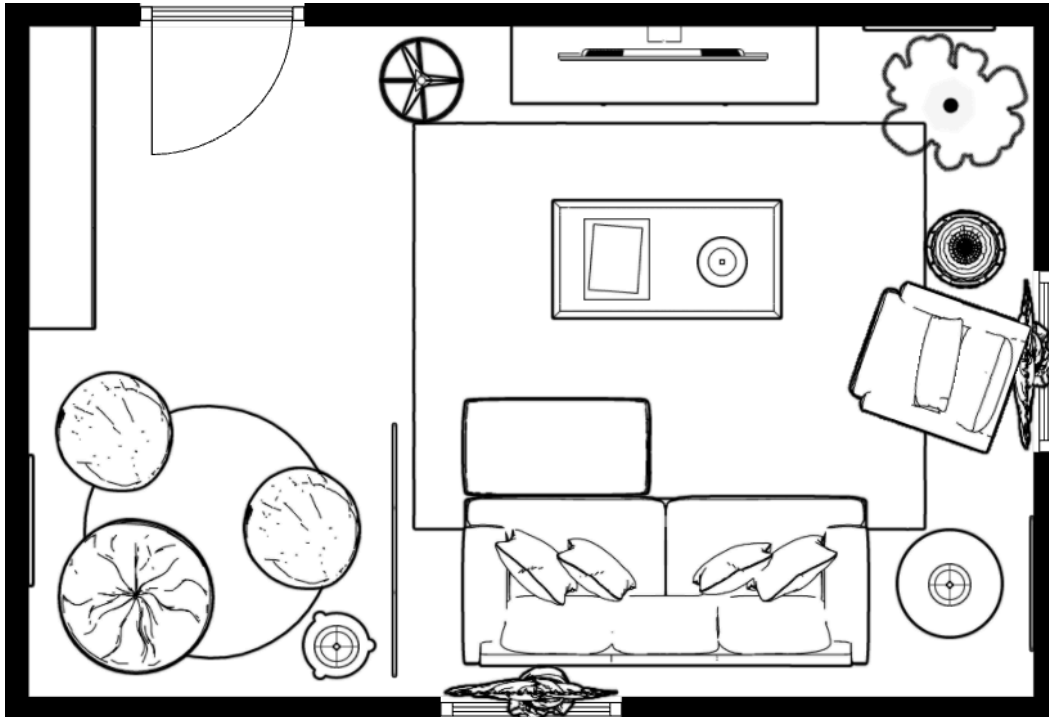
- ☐ Does the space avoid institutional or clinical aesthetics?
- ☐ Are materials and colours warm, calming, and non-stigmatising?
- ☐ Does artwork or decoration reflect different identities and experiences?
- ☐ Are accessibility features built-in (step-free access, clear signage, easy navigation)?
- ☐ Are cultural, gendered, and neurodiverse needs considered?

Emotional & Psychological Support

- ☐ Is the environment predictable and coherent (no chaotic layouts)?
- ☐ Are staff or users supported by clear, empathetic communication tools?
- ☐ Are feelings of safety reinforced through consistency in tone, visuals, and layout?
- ☐ Does the space honour the lived experience of trauma without retraumatizing?

LIVING / COMMUNAL ROOM

Illustrated here a living space either for a private home or a small shelter/shared living facility designed to balance connection and calm, with soft furnishings, layered lighting, and optional quiet zones for those needing space to decompress. These principles could also be applied to a larger communal space.



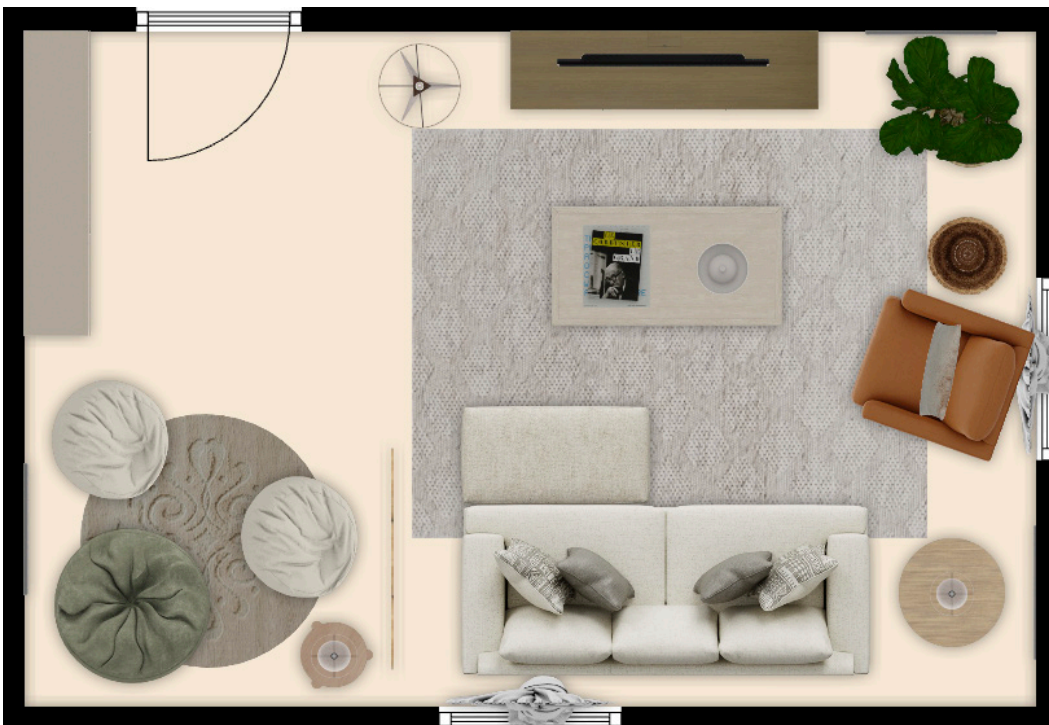
Clear Sightlines

Adjustable Lighting

Mix of Open and Private areas

Room Dividers for Privacy

Warm and Calming Colours



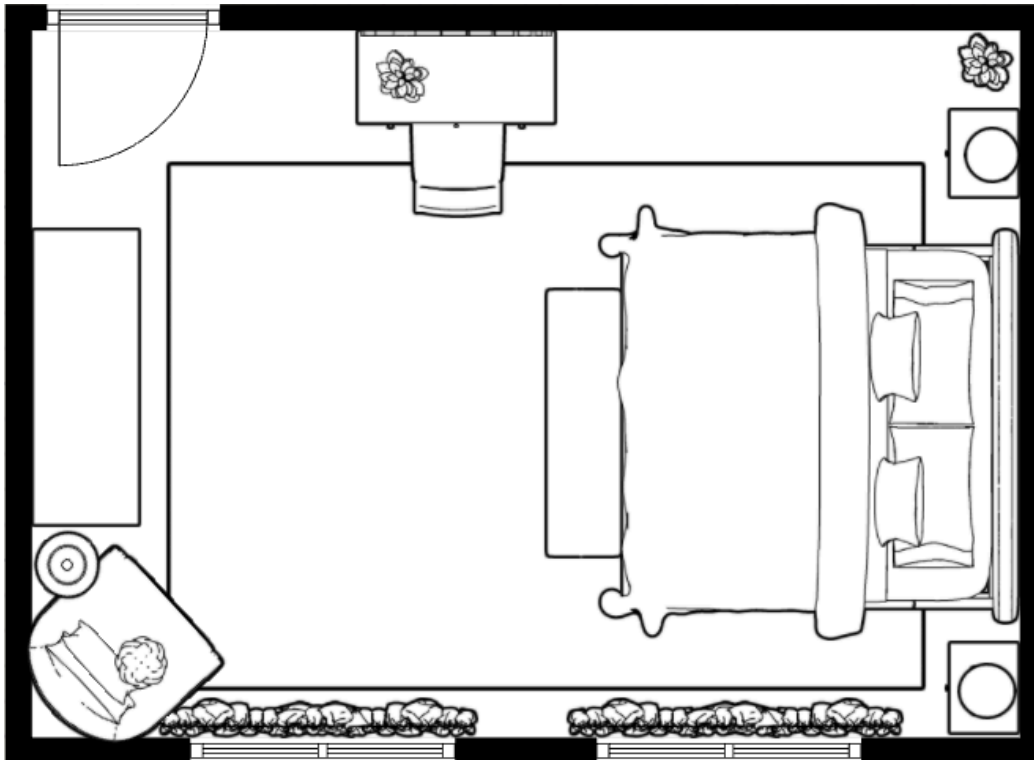
Soft Tactile Materials and Textures

Movable Furniture for Control and Autonomy

Multiple Seating Options

BEDROOM

Whether in a private home or a shared living facility, a bedroom should be a personal retreat offering control over lighting and temperature, soft textures, and layout choices that promote safety, rest, and emotional recovery.



Secure and Visible
Exit Point

Predictable Layout

Softened Acoustics

Warm and Calming
Colours

Soft and Tactile
Furnishings



Curtains for Privacy
and Light Control

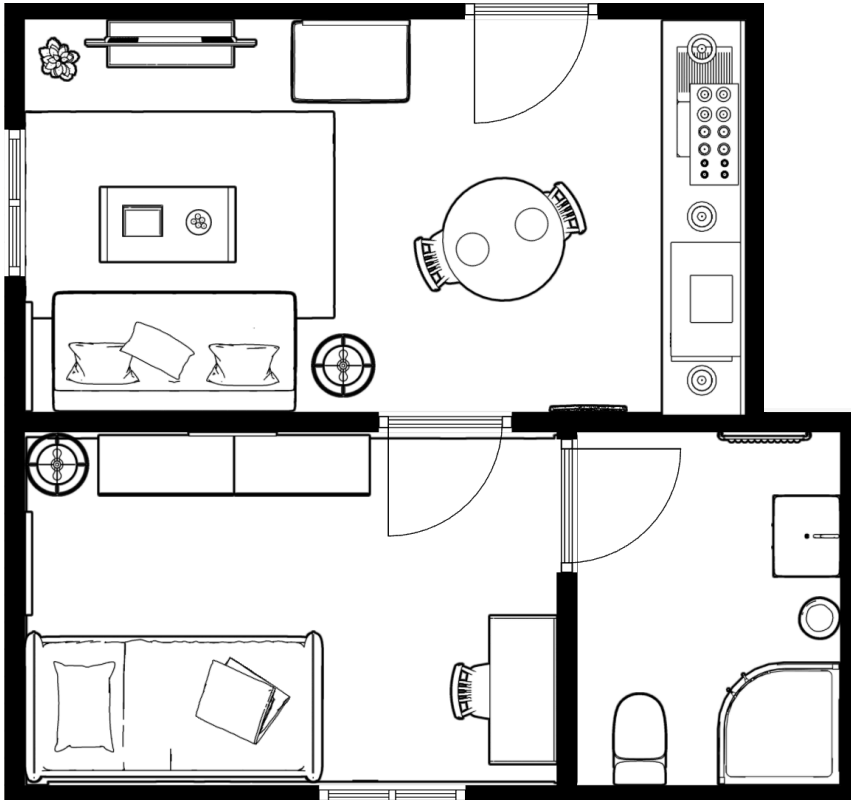
Multiple Seating
Options

Lamps for Ambient
Lighting

Empowering
Artwork

FLAT / INDIVIDUAL UNIT

A self-contained space supporting independence and dignity, designed with intuitive layouts, personalisation options, and built-in trauma-sensitive materials. This can be applied to private residential flats or individual units in a shared living facility.



Personal Storage Spaces

Soundproofing or Noise Reduction Measures

Comfortable and Flexible Furniture

Personalisation Opportunities



Easily Accessible Kitchenette / Cooking Area

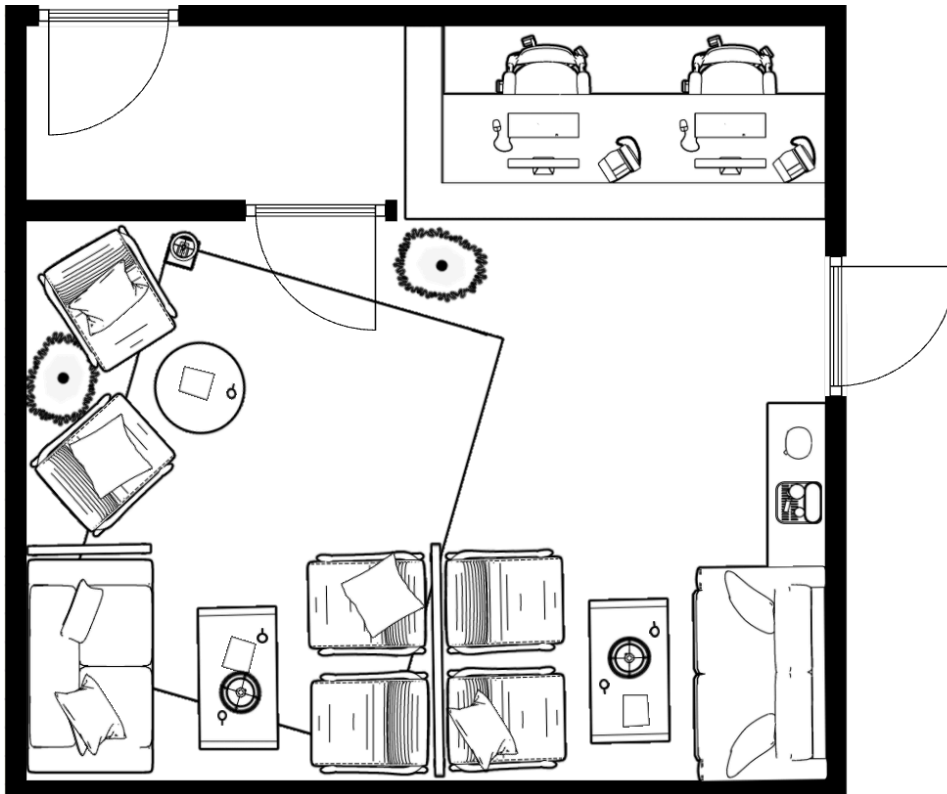
Secure Entry and Lockable Doors

Safety Features (rounded edges, non-slip surfaces)

Sofa Bed and Pull-out Bed for Children to use

RECEPTION / WAITING ROOM

Designed to ease arrival anxiety with a warm, welcoming atmosphere, soft acoustics, visible exits, and seating arrangements that offer both comfort and control.



Secure and Visible
Entry and Exit Point

Clear Signage and
Wayfinding

Rounded Furniture
Edges

Room Dividers for
Privacy



Private Corners or
Alcoves

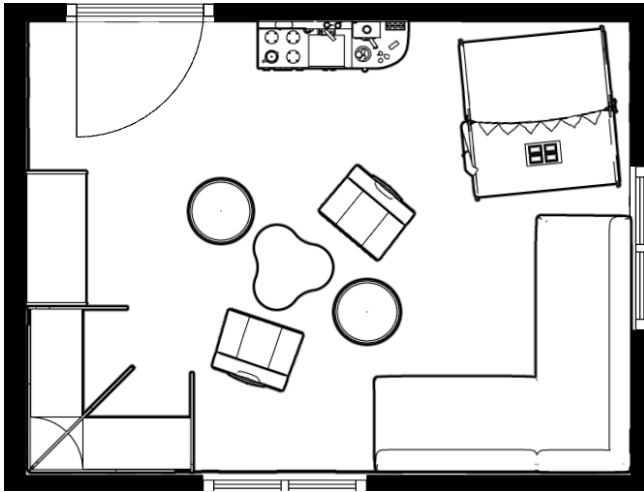
Adjustable Seating
Arrangements

Accessible Facilities
(e.g., for mobility or
sensory needs)

Welcoming
Reception Desk

KIDS' PLAY ROOM / CRECHE

A sensory-considerate space using soft surfaces, calming colours, and supervision-friendly design to support emotional regulation and safe, joyful play.



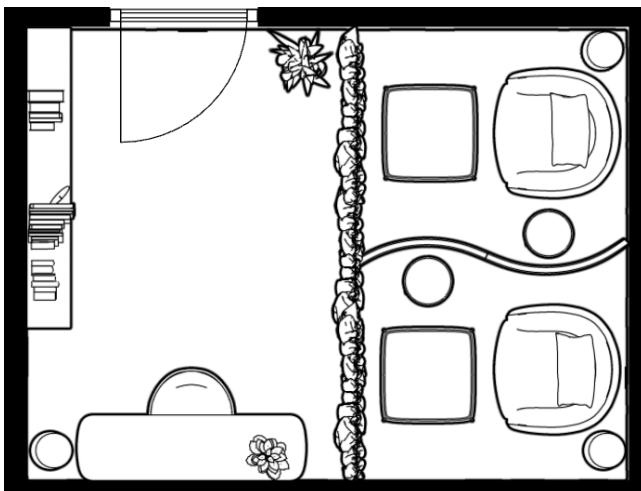
Figures 102,103



Soft, Impact-Absorbing Flooring
Age-Appropriate, Safe Toys and Equipment
Clear Sightlines for Supervision
Comfortable Seating for Parents

QUIET ROOM

A low-stimulation sanctuary for grounding and emotional regulation, featuring soft textures, warm muted tones, and minimal visual clutter. A room like this can be used in any trauma-informed building from a police station to accommodation.



Figures 104,105



Soft, Adjustable Lighting
Comfortable, Cushioned Seating and Floor Areas
Sound Dampening or Soft Background Sounds
Tactile and Multi-Sensory Objects (e.g., textured fabrics, sensory panels)

Final Note:

This toolkit is designed to support designers, individuals, and organisations in creating spaces that actively promote the mental health and well-being of survivors of domestic abuse. Its core aim is to reduce environmental stressors and avoid design decisions that may unintentionally retraumatise users. While not every principle will apply to all contexts, the toolkit is structured to guide decisions across both public shelters and private residential spaces.

It is assumed that public shelters already meet baseline security regulations to ensure the physical safety of their guests. This toolkit focuses on what comes after safety: the healing. Trauma-informed design is not just about protection—it's about creating environments that feel calming, empowering, and restorative. Survivors' safety must always come first; but how we design the spaces they inhabit can shape how they recover.

Thank you – Designed to Heal



Designed to Heal

Figure 106

ARTEFACT 1

SafeStart Bag

The SafeStart Bag is a **trauma-informed emergency kit** designed to support survivors of domestic abuse in their most critical moments—**immediately after fleeing a dangerous environment**. Rooted in principles of dignity, psychological safety, and practical care, this **kit provides essential items** such as hygiene supplies, warmth, communication tools, emotional grounding aids, and resources for ongoing support.

For many women experiencing domestic abuse, escaping safely often means leaving suddenly, without warning, and often in the middle of the night — when the abuser is asleep, intoxicated, or least likely to intervene. In these moments, there is **no time to pack, plan, or collect belongings**. Survivors frequently leave with only the clothes they're wearing, sometimes carrying children or leaving with nothing at all.

The SafeStart Bag is **compact and discreet, intended for quick escape and immediate survival needs**, this kit could be **distributed by frontline organisations such as domestic violence charities, housing services, women's refuges, NHS emergency departments, police stations, and GP practices**. They can be provided through partnerships with local authorities, social care networks, or community donation drives, and placed in emergency shelters, hospitals, or discreet collection points such as libraries or pharmacies. By offering these kits, services not only meet survivors' immediate needs, but also send a powerful message: you are seen, you are supported, and you are safe to begin again.



SAFESTART BAG

Precedents



Figure 108



Figure 109



Figure 110

ESCABAGS

<https://escabags.org/what-are-escape-bags/>

Description

Hand-sewn tote bags filled with toiletries, sanitary items, tissues, and more—distributed through police stations, hospitals, and shelters. The hidden, pre-packed bags can be collected discreetly when needed.

SLEEC

<https://sleec.net/what-we-do/>

Description

Launched a free emergency kit including burner phones, personal alarms, spray, locksmith credits, and temporary cameras to plug urgent safety gaps during and after escape situations.

AMAZON

<https://www.amazon.co.uk>

Description

Amazon, in partnership with UK police forces, has donated grab bags containing clothing, toiletries, and comfort items for adults and children fleeing domestic abuse, delivered via law enforcement support.

SAFESTART BAG

Precedents Reflection

My research into existing emergency and escape bags, such as Escabags, Amazon Emergency Grab Bags, and SLEEC Kits, revealed important strengths—but also critical gaps that SafeStart aims to address.

Functionality vs. Discretion

While all existing initiatives serve their intended purpose, **providing essentials for immediate survival, none address the need for discretion.** Many women escaping abuse need to do so without raising suspicion. For instance, the Amazon Emergency Grab Bag is highly visible and branded as an “emergency” kit. If a perpetrator discovered this in the home or in the victim’s possession, it could escalate risk and put them in immediate danger. SafeStart intends to solve this by **designing a bag that blends seamlessly into daily life: stylish, familiar, and “hidden in plain sight.”**

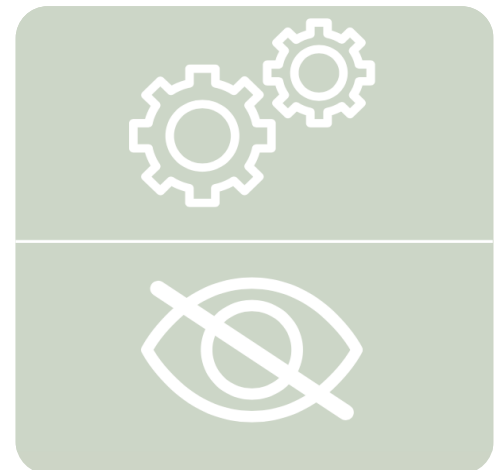


Figure 111

Accessibility & Financial Barriers

A key strength of these initiatives is that most are **free of charge, which is essential since financial control is often a major aspect of coercive abuse.** Following this principle, I intend to research stakeholders, collaborators, and donation methods to ensure SafeStart is similarly free and accessible to those who need it most.



Figure 112

Comprehensive Safety vs. Emotional Recovery

The SLEEC kit stood out for including personal safety measures such as alarms, spray, locksmith credits, and temporary cameras, items **I had not initially considered but now plan to integrate.** However, the SLEEC approach **focuses almost exclusively on physical safety, overlooking the emotional and psychological needs of survivors.** Trauma-informed design **requires attention to both immediate security and emotional well-being.** SafeStart will therefore combine essential safety tools with comforting, dignity-restoring items (e.g., soft textiles, hygiene products, and small tokens of self-care), reinforcing the message that survivors deserve not only to survive but to feel human again.



Figure 113

SAFESTART BAG

Items and Rationale

1. Wind-up Torch – Reliable light source without batteries—essential for safe navigation in low-light situations.
2. Scarf or Wrap – Multi-purpose: warmth, comfort, and discreet coverage in public spaces.
3. Hygiene Pouch (Deodorant, wipes, hairbrush, toothbrush, sanitary items) – Maintains dignity and well-being during transition; restores a sense of normalcy.
4. Disposable Socks and Underwear – Critical for cleanliness and comfort when moving quickly between safe locations.
5. Emergency Transport Card/Cash Card – Provides immediate mobility and independence when leaving a dangerous environment.
6. Emergency Phone – A lifeline for contacting support networks and emergency services, separate from perpetrator-controlled devices.
7. Small Power Bank – Ensures devices stay charged during critical moments of escape.
8. Personal Alarm – Instant deterrent and alert tool to draw attention in unsafe situations.
9. Safety Spray – Non-lethal self-defense option to enhance confidence and personal security.
10. Locksmith Credits – Empowers survivors to quickly secure new accommodations and prevent forced entry.
11. Temporary Security Cameras – Provides urgent safety surveillance for temporary housing or post-escape situations.
12. Notebook and Pen – For recording essential information, safety plans, or evidence if needed.
13. Mini Resource Guide – Includes helplines, safe shelter contacts, legal advice, and mental health support.
14. First Aid Basics (Plasters, antiseptic wipes) – Covers immediate medical needs for minor injuries.
15. Pocket Affirmation Card – Provides emotional strength and reassurance during moments of crisis.



SAFESTART BAG

Stakeholder, collaborator, and donation strategy

Item-by-Item Collaborators:

Wind-up Torch

→ Amazon Business UK (bulk torches)

Scarf or Wrap

→ Primark (affordable fashion donations)

Hygiene Pouch (deodorant, wipes, toothbrush, sanitary items)

→ Boots UK (full hygiene kit donations)

Disposable Socks and Underwear

→ George at ASDA (budget clothing)

Emergency Transport Card / Cash Card

→ Visa / Mastercard (prepaid cards through CSR)

Emergency Phone

→ Carphone Warehouse (device partnerships)

Small Power Bank

→ Amazon Business UK (bulk power banks)

Personal Alarm

→ StaySafe (personal safety devices)

Safety Spray

→ StaySafe (approved UK legal alternatives)

Locksmith Credits

→ Timpson (locks & key services)

Temporary Security Cameras

→ Blink UK (portable indoor/outdoor cameras)

Notebook and Pen

→ WHSmith (CSR-driven stationery packs)

Mini Resource Guide

→ Women's Aid & Refuge (content creation support)

First Aid Basics (plasters, etc.)

→ Boots UK (first aid kits)

Pocket Affirmation Card

→ Mind UK (mental health charity for positive messaging)

Donation & Funding Initiatives:

Ways to make the bag free for survivors:

Corporate Sponsorship

Partner with UK retailers like John Lewis, Marks & Spencer, or Tesco to sponsor bags as part of their CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility).

Charity Partnerships & Grants

Apply for National Lottery Community Fund, Comic Relief, or Lloyds Bank Foundation grants for social impact projects.

Crowdfunding Campaign

Launch a JustGiving or GoFundMe campaign titled "Help Survivors Start Safe", tied to the campaign concept (Hidden in Plain Sight).

One-for-One Model

Collaborate with an accessory or lifestyle brand (e.g., Oliver Bonas, Radley London) where for every bag sold, one SafeStart bag is donated.

Pharmacy Counter Collection Points

Boots/Superdrug could allow customers to round up purchases or donate items at checkout.

Local Business Partnerships

Coffee shops, gyms, salons in urban areas can run sponsor-a-bag drives as part of community engagement.

SAFESTART BAG

Design Precedents



Figure 115



Figure 116



Figure 117



Figure 118

Lucy Orta – Refuge Wear / Body Architecture

Why it fits: Orta's work transforms clothing into shelter—symbolic, wearable, and empowering. Her practice blurs fashion and emergency preparedness, much like your safety bag.

Use: Exaggerated silhouettes conceal and protect, emotionally and physically.

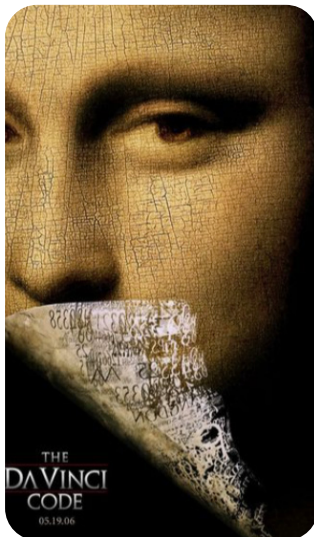


Figure 119



Figure 120

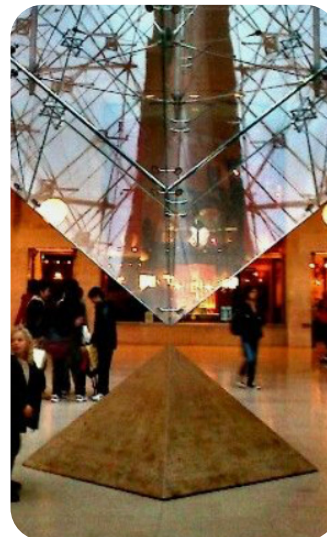


Figure 121



Figure 122

The Da Vinci Code – Secret Compartment Design

Why it fits: The cryptex and hidden message concept aligns with SafeStart being discreet but protective.

Use: Internal pockets, disguised compartments, or lockable sections that carry hidden meaning or practical function.

SAFESTART BAG

Design Precedents



Figure 123



Figure 124



Figure 125



Figure 126

Survival Kits / Military Tactical Bags

Why it fits: Modular, rugged, functional designs made for efficiency and survival.

Use: Tactical gear reimagined in a soft, trauma-informed aesthetic. Multiple secure compartments, soft-to-touch handles, quick access zippers.



Figure 126



Figure 128



Figure 129

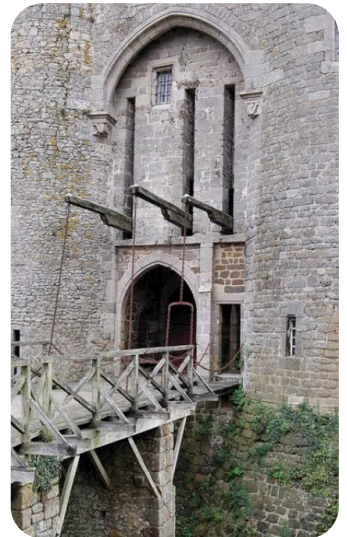


Figure 130

Medieval Armor / Fortress Aesthetics

Why it fits: Ties back to the “symbol of strength” your tutor mentioned for the secure door. The idea of wearable protection that blends strength with elegance.

Use: Stitch lines that resemble protective layering, metal-inspired details, embossed symbols of strength or protection.

SAFESTART BAG

Design Challenges

Overcoming the tension between protection and perception — **creating something that is fully functional, empowering, and potentially life-saving, yet looks like a beautiful, everyday item.** Survivors often live “hidden in plain sight,” their strength unseen beneath soft exteriors. The safestart bag needs to reflect that reality: **discreet yet powerful, elegant yet practical, and designed with trauma-informed care** so that it offers psychological comfort as much as physical safety. It challenges assumptions about femininity, strength, and survival — showing that safety can be subtle, and empowerment doesn’t have to shout.

1. Dual Identity: Safety vs. Aesthetics

Designing a bag that functions as a survival toolkit while appearing like a stylish, everyday accessory — not just to preserve discretion, but to reflect the lived reality of women who are navigating danger invisibly. By ensuring the bag doesn’t outwardly signal its true purpose, it protects the survivor from arousing suspicion, preventing perpetrators from recognising that she may be planning to leave.

2. Hidden Strength in Softness

Creating a product that is physically durable and protective, but visually delicate or elegant. Like many survivors, the bag must be strong on the inside, even if it looks “soft” on the outside — challenging how society underestimates femininity.

3. Concealment Without Compromise

Every item inside (SIM phone, alarm, hygiene kit, secure lock, etc.) must be easy to access, secure, and logically placed — but the overall form must avoid suspicion or attention. This mirrors how many survivors carry heavy secrets with grace and subtlety.

4. Embodying the Message: Hidden in Plain Sight

The visual campaign and the bag itself reflect the emotional experience of many survivors — being visible but unseen, present but ignored. The bag becomes a metaphor for the survivor: overlooked, but powerful and prepared.

5. Balancing Empowerment with Camouflage

Empowerment doesn’t have to be loud or aggressive. The bag should make its owner feel in control and safe — without needing to “announce” vulnerability. It’s empowerment by knowing, not showing.

6. Designing for Psychological Safety

Every material, shape, and detail must feel calming and affirming to touch and hold. Trauma-informed principles guide even the tiniest decisions — from warm textures and non-threatening forms to the comfort of a silent zip or secure compartment.

SAFESTART BAG

Advertising Vision



Figure 131



Figure 132



Figure 133



Figure 134

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

The SafeStart advertising vision draws on the haunting reality that **many women experiencing domestic abuse feel invisible—hidden in plain sight**. Through surreal yet elegant visuals, the advertising vision uses the SafeStart bag as the central focus. **At first glance, it's just a beautiful, well-designed object**. But upon closer look, there are **women—strong, courageous, and resilient**—concealed behind the bag, waiting to be seen, heard, and free.

This creative decision speaks directly to the emotional dissonance many survivors face: being present, yet overlooked; strong, yet silenced. **The bag symbolises a tool for survival, but also a vessel for reclaiming identity**. It's not just a product—it's a statement. One that says, "I'm here. I'm surviving. And I deserve safety, dignity, and power."



Figure 135



Figure 136



Figure 137



Figure 138

SAFESTART BAG

Design Outcome

Figure 139



Figure 140

The SafeStart Bag is a **discreet emergency kit** that is **disguised as an everyday-looking bag** with **hidden pockets and compartments** that **hold essential survival items**. The bag gives survivors of domestic abuse the essentials they need in the critical moments after escape—hygiene items, warmth, communication tools, and emotional support aids. By meeting urgent survival needs, it **helps survivors leave dangerous situations safely** and begin rebuilding their lives with dignity and reassurance.

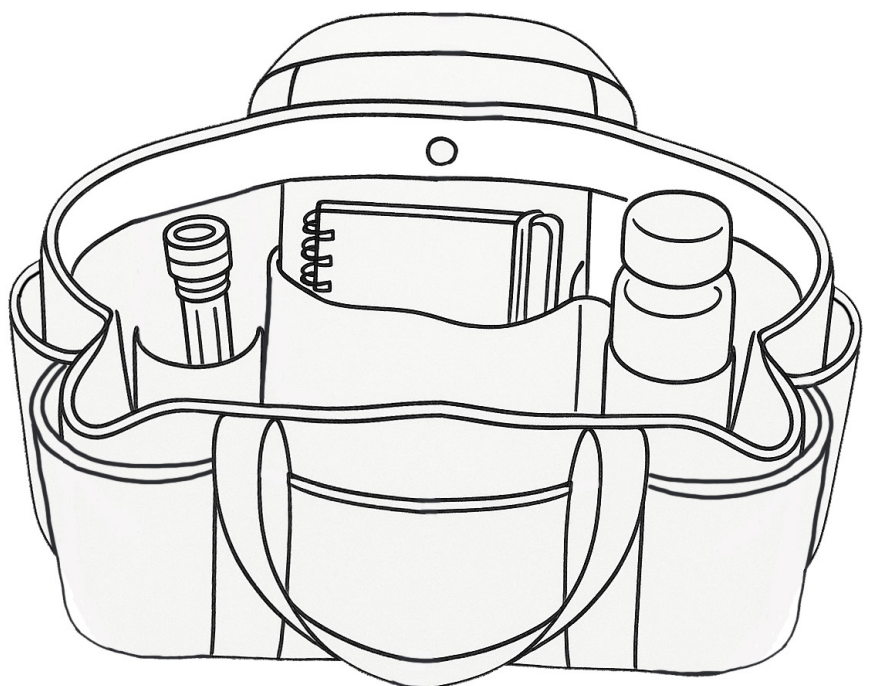


Figure 141

SAFESTART BAG

Design Outcome



SAFESTART BAG

Bag Production

The SafeStart Bag will be made from **durable, lightweight, and water-resistant fabrics** such as recycled polyester or nylon, ensuring resilience in all weather conditions while keeping **weight low for easy carrying**. These materials are chosen for their **strength, discreet appearance, and ability to withstand regular use**. Surplus or donated textiles from outdoor gear or luggage manufacturers can be repurposed, reducing costs and environmental impact while supporting sustainable production.



Figure 144

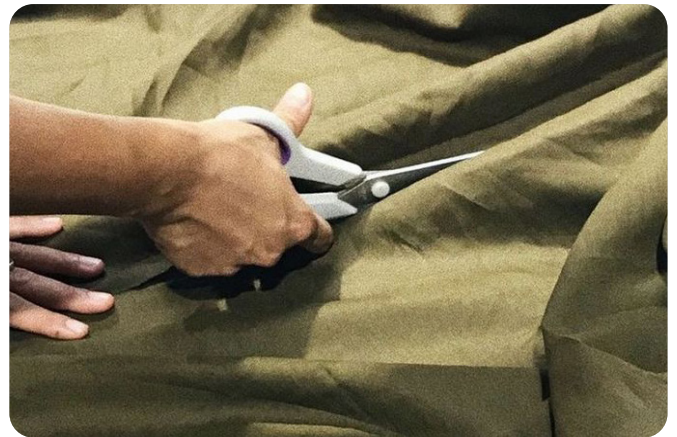


Figure 145



Figure 146



Figure 147

The bag's design includes **discreet styling with integrated hidden pockets**, produced using efficient cutting patterns to minimise waste. By **partnering with ethical manufacturers and collaborating with companies** willing to subsidise costs, donate labour, or provide surplus stock, production costs can be kept as low as possible. Assembly can take place in facilities experienced in outdoor or travel bag manufacturing, ensuring quality and durability. This collaborative approach makes it possible to produce the bags at scale for free distribution to survivors.

ARTEFACT 2

SecureEase Lock

Concept: “SecureEase” Portable Door Lock

Overview:

A compact, self-contained lock designed for temporary security without the need for drilling or permanent installation. Inspired by existing travel locks but upgraded for strength, adaptability, and trauma-informed design.

Key Features:

Portable & Lightweight

Made from reinforced polymer composite (strong but light) with a soft-touch silicone grip for comfort. Fits inside the SafeStart bag (roughly 15cm length, under 250g).

Adaptable for Different Doors

Dual-adjustable steel pin + wedge mechanism that works with:

Standard inward-opening doors.

Variations in door frame gaps (2mm–8mm).

Includes sliding tension bar to tighten on uneven frames.

Detachable & Movable

Clip-on installation: Insert steel plate into latch slot, then close door and tighten the internal mechanism.

Quick-release button allows removal in seconds.

Self-Contained

No extra tools or parts required—just the single integrated unit.

Built-in carry case to keep components together (case doubles as leverage handle when locking).

Safety & Psychological Comfort

Quiet lock system (no loud clicks).

Minimalist but fortress-inspired aesthetic for symbolic strength (brushed matte finish, geometric angles).

Security alarm integrated for when forced entry is happening.

Optional built in alarm system.

Why This Works:

Combines visual reassurance (fortress-like look) with practical ease-of-use.

No drilling, no permanent change, ensuring safety for temporary stays (refuges, hotels, friends' homes).

Trauma-informed: One-handed operation, tactile materials for calmness, empowering branding.

SECUREEASE LOCK

Design Considerations



Figure 148

PORTABLE

Rationale

The lock should be **lightweight and portable for easy transport**, while remaining simple to use and adaptable to a variety of door types, ensuring it can be used by anyone, in any room.

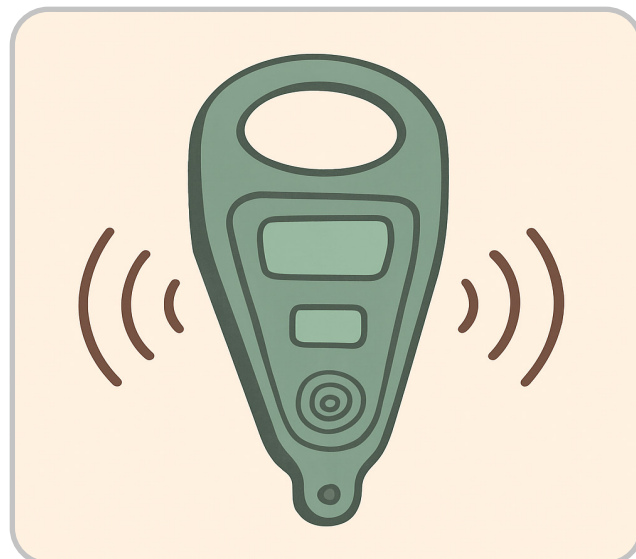


Figure 149

ALARM

Rationale

The lock should include a **built-in alarm to provide an immediate deterrent against forced entry**, while also alerting the user and those nearby to potential danger, offering both protection and peace of mind. This ensures that survivors feel not only physically secure but also reassured that help may be drawn if the lock is tampered with. The alarm system should be able optional encase a user needs it to not make a sound.

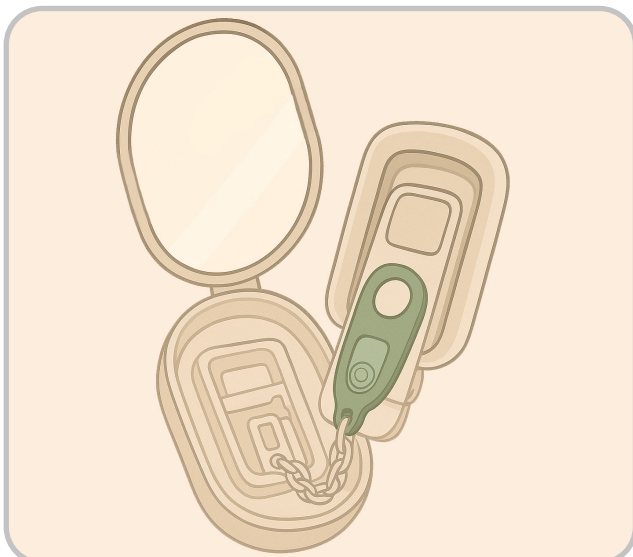


Figure 150

HIDDEN

Rationale

The lock should also be **designed discreetly so it can be carried and used without drawing the perpetrator's attention**. This subtle design will give the victim greater confidence to keep it hidden in plain sight and access it quickly when needed, without raising suspicion or causing concern.

SECUREEASE LOCK

Advertising Vision



Figure 151



Figure 152



Figure 153



Figure 154

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

The advertising vision combined with the SafeStart bag, positions the SecureEase lock as a secondary focus. **At first glance, it appears to be an ordinary, stylish object—something you'd never question. But behind that simplicity lies strength, resilience, and a promise of security.**

This creative direction reflects the duality survivors experience: the **need to protect themselves discreetly while carrying immense inner strength**. The SecureEase lock will use the same branding techniques as the SafeStart bag to continue the brand's identity. The lock isn't just a functional tool; it's a symbol of control and empowerment—a quiet, powerful statement that says, "My safety is mine to claim, even when the world can't see it."



Figure 155



Figure 156



Figure 157



Figure 158

SECUREEASE LOCK

Design Outcome



Figure 159



Figure 160



Figure 161



Figure 162

SECUREEASE LOCK

Door Device Production

The secure door device will be made from **high-strength yet lightweight metals such as anodised aluminium or reinforced steel alloys**, chosen for their durability and resistance to tampering. **Non-slip, impact-resistant polymer components will be used in areas that require grip** or door surface protection, preventing damage during use. Where possible, recycled metals and plastics can be sourced to reduce costs and environmental impact, while still ensuring the device meets safety and performance standards.

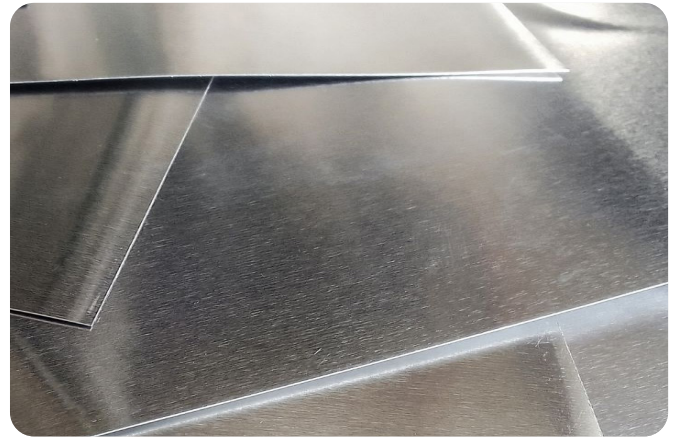


Figure 163



Figure 164



Figure 165



Figure 166

The device will be **precision-engineered to ensure compatibility with a wide variety of door types**, using CNC machining or die-casting for metal parts and injection moulding for polymer components. **Production partners will be selected for their ability to meet strict quality control and safety standards**, with each unit tested for strength, reliability, and ease of use. To keep costs low and allow free distribution to survivors, manufacturing will leverage bulk material orders, donated or discounted production time, and **partnerships with companies willing to subsidise costs or provide surplus materials**. The device will be assembled with minimal moving parts to reduce potential faults and will maintain a discreet, everyday appearance to allow safe, inconspicuous carrying.

CONSTRUCTION METHODS

Trauma-informed construction prioritises psychological safety and adaptability alongside structural integrity. The approach should minimise disruption, avoid institutional cues, and allow for future changes without invasive renovation.

Key considerations include:

Modular and lightweight systems that allow for reconfiguration without demolition.

Dry construction methods (e.g., timber framing, prefabricated panels) to reduce noise, dust, and disruption during build.

Non-intrusive installation of technology such as CCTV, lighting, and locking systems, designed to blend with interiors.

Avoiding harsh finishes like exposed concrete or metal mesh, which can evoke institutional or punitive settings.

Where possible, construction teams should receive trauma-awareness briefings to respect the emotional context of the space being created.



Figure 167



Figure 168

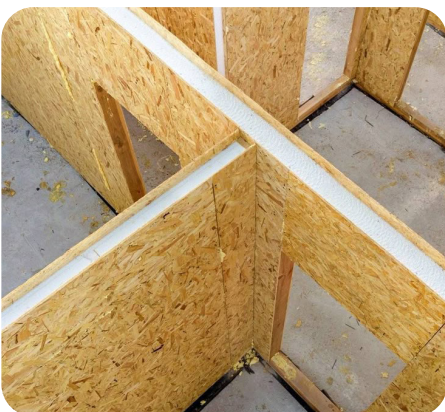


Figure 169

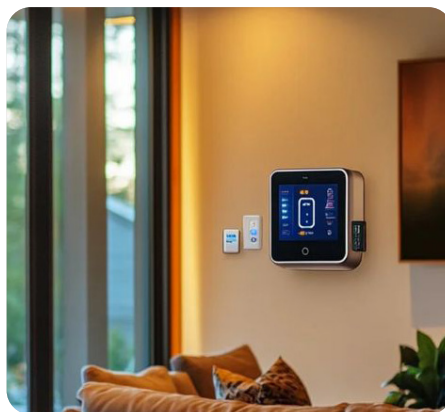


Figure 170



Figure 171

MATERIAL SOURCING

Choosing the right materials is both an ethical and sensory priority.

Sourcing should prioritise:

Natural, breathable materials like timber, cork, bamboo, and wool for warmth and grounding.

Tactile finishes that avoid harshness—matte surfaces, soft textiles, cushioned edges.

Sustainable and ethical sources, including recycled or low-carbon products where possible.

Non-toxic paints, adhesives, and sealants to maintain air quality and avoid sensory irritation.

Local suppliers when feasible, to reduce environmental impact and support community economies.

The palette should never feel sterile or institutional. Material stories should reflect care, consideration, and human dignity.

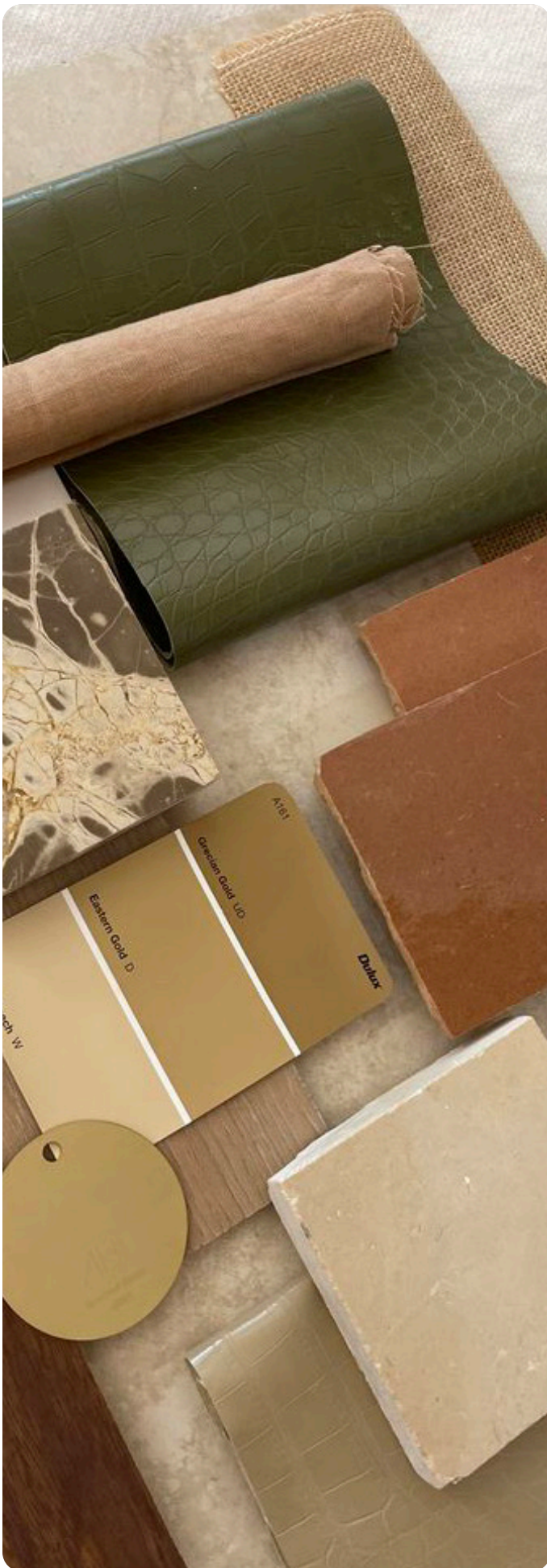


Figure 172



Figure 173

INSTALLATION TIPS

Installing trauma-informed features should be done carefully, with attention to how users may experience the construction process itself.

Key tips include:

Minimise intrusive noise and disruption during installation where spaces are already in use or nearby.

Avoid intimidating equipment being left visible in communal areas.

Communicate clearly with stakeholders about the timing and purpose of installations.

Install safety or security features discreetly, avoiding overly visible locks, alarms, or surveillance that could evoke control or institutionalisation.

Test installations with users if possible—especially lighting, seating, and layouts—to ensure comfort and function align.



Figure 174

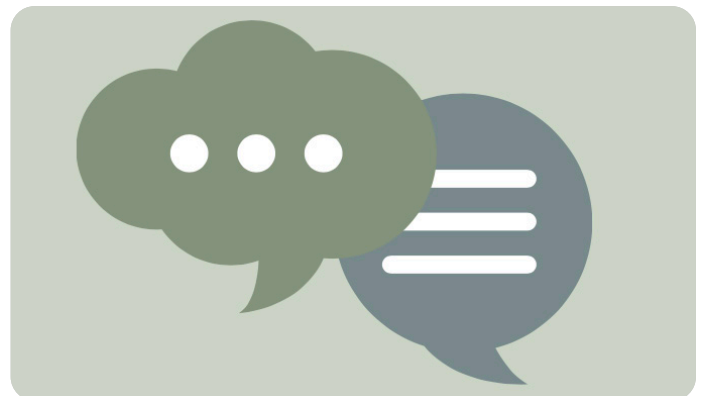


Figure 175



Figure 176



Figure 177

CCTV + LIGHTING

Surveillance and lighting should enhance safety without compromising dignity or creating feelings of being watched.

CCTV should focus on external entry points, corridors, and shared access areas—not bedrooms or therapy spaces.

Footage access must be strictly limited and stored securely, following GDPR and safeguarding protocols.

Install signage indicating surveillance clearly and respectfully, promoting transparency rather than fear.

Lighting should use layered systems—ambient, task, and accent—so users can control levels.

Avoid flickering lights, harsh fluorescents, or overly bright spaces, which can be distressing for trauma survivors.

Lighting and surveillance should work together to build a quiet sense of safety, not hypervigilance.

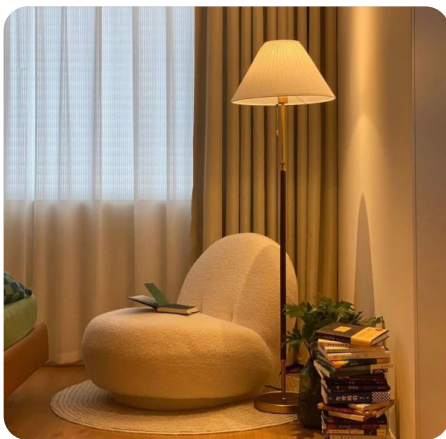


Figure 178

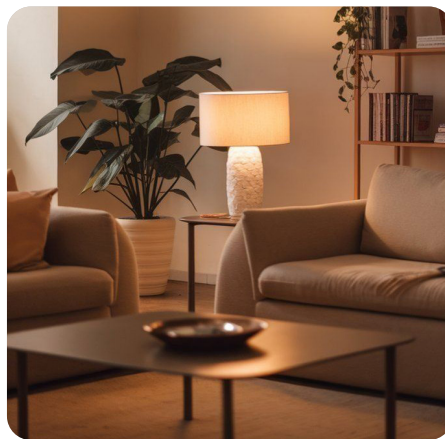


Figure 179



Figure 180



Figure 181



Figure 182

ACCESSIBILITY NOTES

A trauma-informed space must also be universally accessible to all users, including those with physical, sensory, or cognitive impairments.

Entrances should be level-access, with automatic or easy-open doors.

Wayfinding should be intuitive, using signage, colour cues, and visual consistency.

Lighting and contrast must support visual accessibility while avoiding overstimulation.

Furniture layouts should accommodate mobility aids, with clear circulation paths.

Quiet zones and **sensory refuge** spaces support users with neurodiversity, PTSD, or anxiety.

Online environments (e.g., the toolkit website) should meet WCAG accessibility standards.

Trauma-informed design is inclusive by default. If a space isn't accessible, it isn't truly trauma-informed.



Figure 183



Figure 184



Figure 185

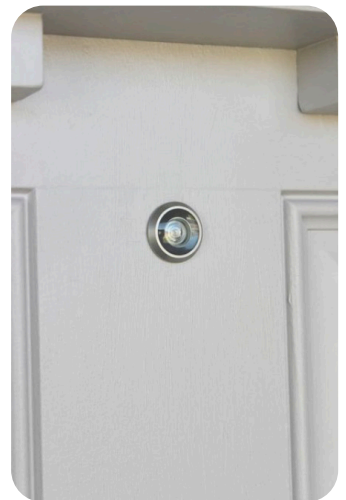


Figure 186



Figure 187

DESIGNED TO HEAL

Description

The Designed to Heal website serves as a **central, accessible hub for the Trauma-Informed Design Toolkit**. It is aimed at designers, architects, domestic violence organisations, and survivors seeking guidance on creating spaces that prioritise safety, psychological wellbeing, and dignity.

The site offers:

- **Practical resources** – Downloadable toolkits, checklists, and case studies showcasing trauma-informed principles in real-world spaces.
- **Sector insights** – Research on the UK domestic violence landscape, including funding challenges, policy frameworks, and design opportunities.

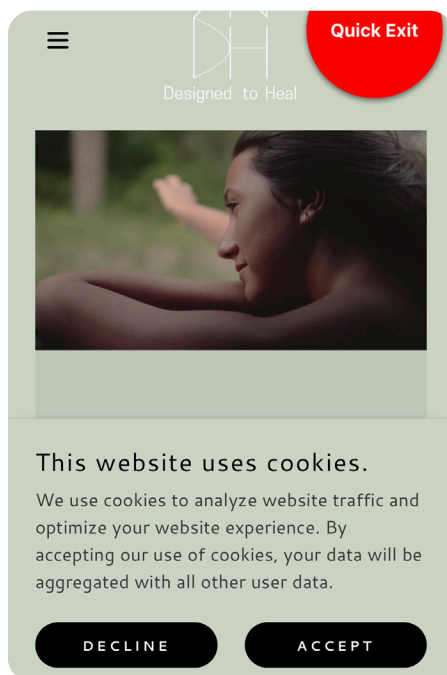


Figure 188

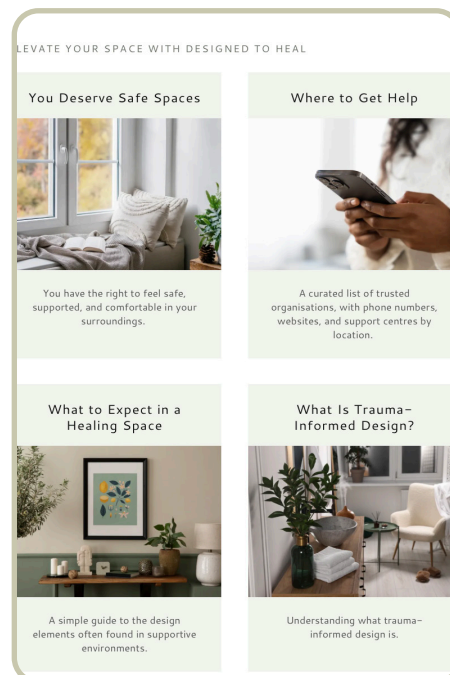


Figure 189

- **Survivor-focused design guidance** – Room-by-room examples and design considerations that can be applied to shelters, public spaces, and homes.
- **Interactive features** – A “Quick Exit” button for user safety, high-contrast mode, text resizing, and alt text for all imagery.
- **Secure, non-triggering environment** – No autoplay media, calm visual design, and a clear, respectful tone.



Work with us

Want to work with us? Contact us today to schedule a consultation and let us help you.

SCHEDULE NOW

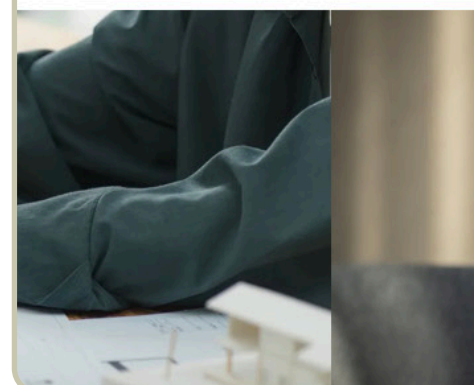
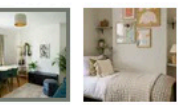


Figure 190



Description

Furnishing Futures is a London-based charity that creates fully furnished, trauma-informed temporary accommodation into permanent housing. Founded by interior design worker Emily Wheeler, the organisation works at the intersection of design, mental health, and social justice.

FURNISHING FUTURES WEBSITE



Figure 191

Outcome

This website is **both a practical tool and a public-facing representation of the project's mission**—showing how thoughtful design can directly contribute to healing and recovery for survivors of trauma. It is **intended to evolve over time**, with the potential to **integrate more interactive elements**, downloadable templates, and links to active funding or collaboration opportunities.

<https://designedtoheal.co.uk>

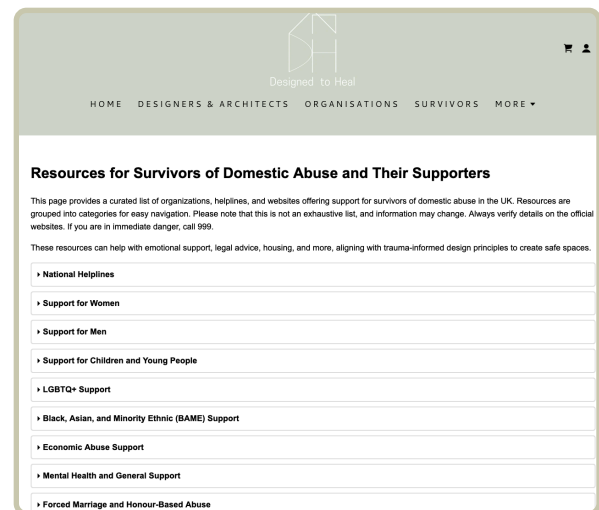
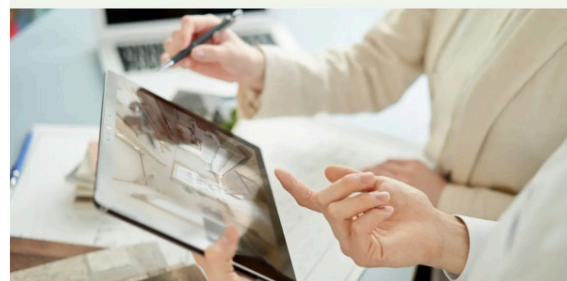


Figure 192

Why Design Matters



A clear, compassionate explanation of how the built environment directly impacts trauma recovery, user comfort, and safety.

Figure 193

FUTURE WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT

While the Designed to Heal website is fully functional as a resource hub, there are several features that could not be implemented at this stage due to limited technical website design skills and financial resources. These will form the next phase of development to enhance accessibility, interactivity, and overall impact.

Some planned future developments include:

Interactive Toolkit Builder – Allowing users to create customised trauma-informed design plans for specific spaces.

Downloadable Templates & 3D Visualisations – Professionally produced visual assets to support grant applications, presentations, and project planning.

Survivor & Practitioner Forums – A secure, moderated space for sharing experiences, questions, and peer-to-peer advice.

Multi-language Support – Translation into key community languages to make the toolkit more inclusive.

Funding & Collaboration Portal – Connecting users with relevant grants, charities, and professional partners.

Professional Member Area – Gated access to advanced resources for architects, service providers, and funders.

Some of these developments require advanced programming, database integration, and ongoing moderation—resources that are currently beyond the project's scope. **Securing funding or partnering with a web developer** would allow these features to be built and maintained, ensuring the site continues to grow as a national resource for trauma-informed design.

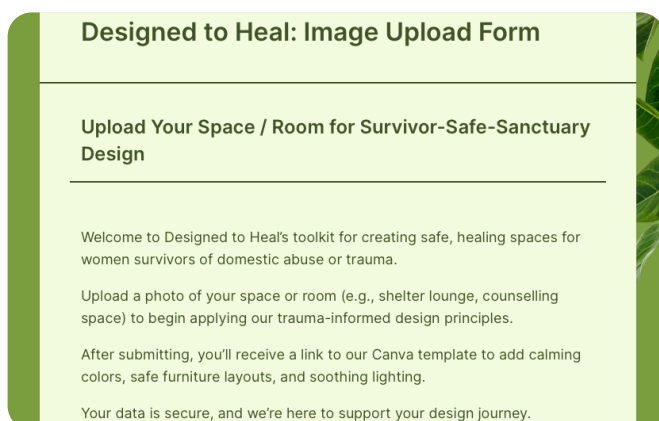


Figure 194



Figure 195

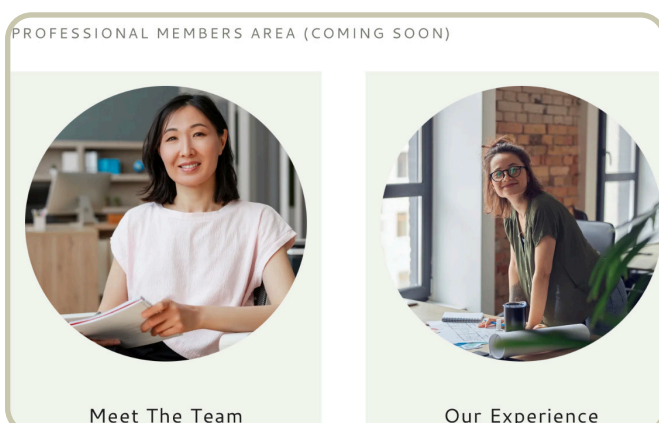


Figure 196

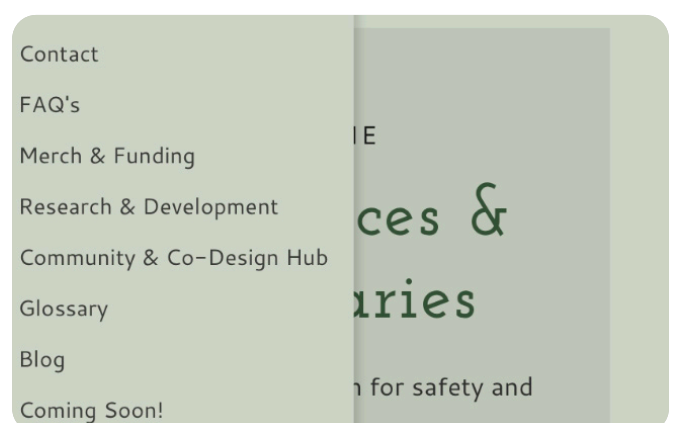


Figure 197

BRANDING IDENTITY

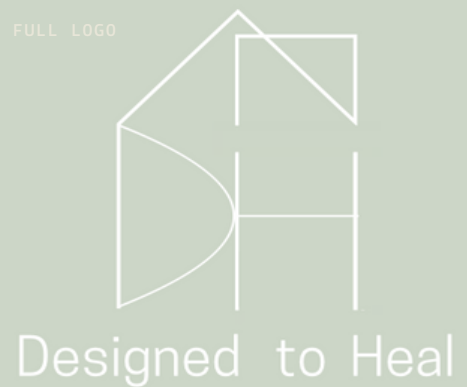
01. MAIN LOGO



02. BRANDING



03. FULL LOGO



04. FONT GUIDE

Designed to Heal

Designed to Heal is a trauma-informed design initiative that champions safety, dignity, and empowerment for survivors of domestic violence. Blending evidence-based design principles with empathy-driven innovation, it reimagines spaces to promote healing, resilience, and community. Through bold visual storytelling, practical toolkits, and survivor-centered resources, Designed to Heal empowers designers, architects, and organisations to create environments where psychological safety and hope can thrive.

_____	COOPER HEWITT
_____	LEKTON
_____	ARIAL NOVA

05. COLOR GUIDE



SAGE GREEN
#E8E6D8



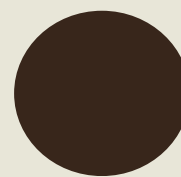
SKY BLUE
#91A6EB



WHITE
#892F1A



GREEN
#BDAF62



DARK
#624A41

ADVERTISING VISION

Hidden in Plain Sight

Designed to Heal's visual language is **rooted in the concept of being hidden in plain sight—a reflection of the women we support** and a vital safety requirement in everything we design, produce, and promote. Just as survivors often must move through the world unnoticed to protect themselves, **our products are crafted to appear ordinary at first glance, while holding extraordinary strength and purpose within.**



Figure 199

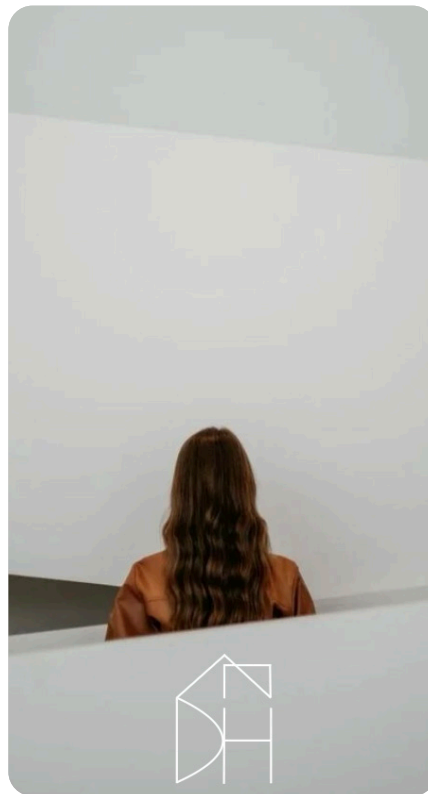


Figure 200

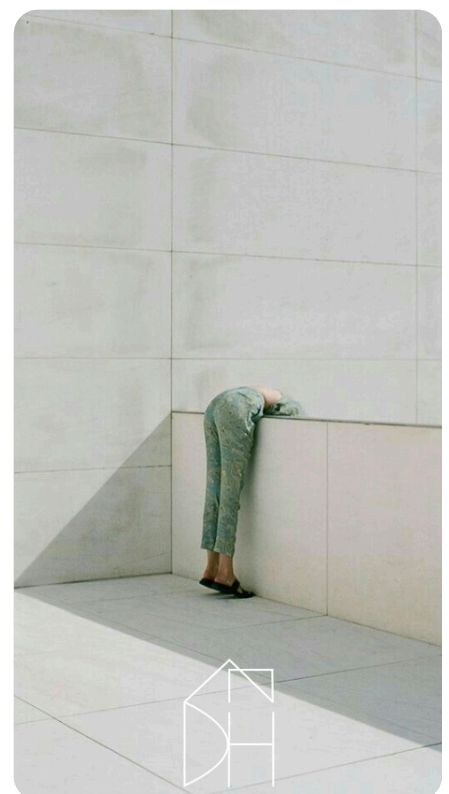


Figure 201

This creative direction honours the duality of survivors' experiences: the **quiet necessity of staying unnoticed, paired with the unwavering strength to take control of their safety.** By implementing this concept consistently across all advertising, branding, and product design, we create a unified identity that is not only symbolic but practical—protecting survivors from unwanted attention while communicating a message of empowerment.

PRODUCT ADVERTISING

SafeStart Bag

A stylish, **everyday-looking bag with hidden compartments holding life-saving essentials**—hygiene items, warmth, communication tools, and emotional support aids. Designed to blend in, it allows survivors to move safely and discreetly, carrying everything they need to begin again without drawing attention.



Figure 202



Figure 203



Figure 204

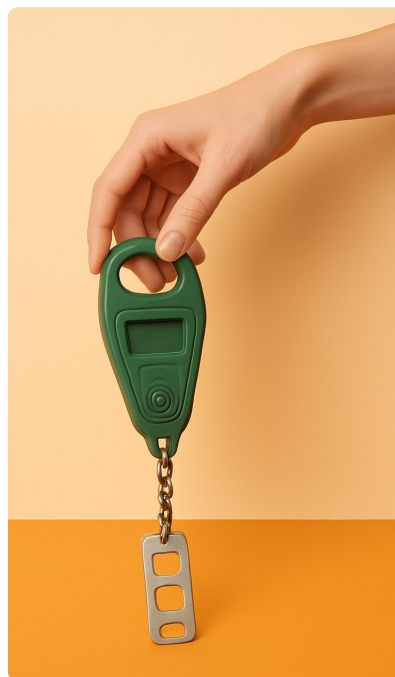


Figure 205

SecureEase Lock

A **lightweight, portable door lock that looks like an ordinary accessory** but provides instant, discreet security on almost any door. Its understated design conceals strength and resilience, giving survivors the power to protect themselves anywhere, at any time.

Figure 206



FUNDRAISING

Community Fundraising Events

- Host walks, runs, or cycling events themed around “safe journeys” or “steps to safety.”
- Organise art auctions, fashion shows, or craft markets featuring designs from local makers, with proceeds going to your cause.
- Offer DIY safety workshops for a small donation.



Figure 208

Product-Based Fundraising

- Sell merchandise with meaning— badges, water bottles, notebooks or prints with empowering designs.
- Collaborate with ethical fashion or design brands to produce limited-edition items.



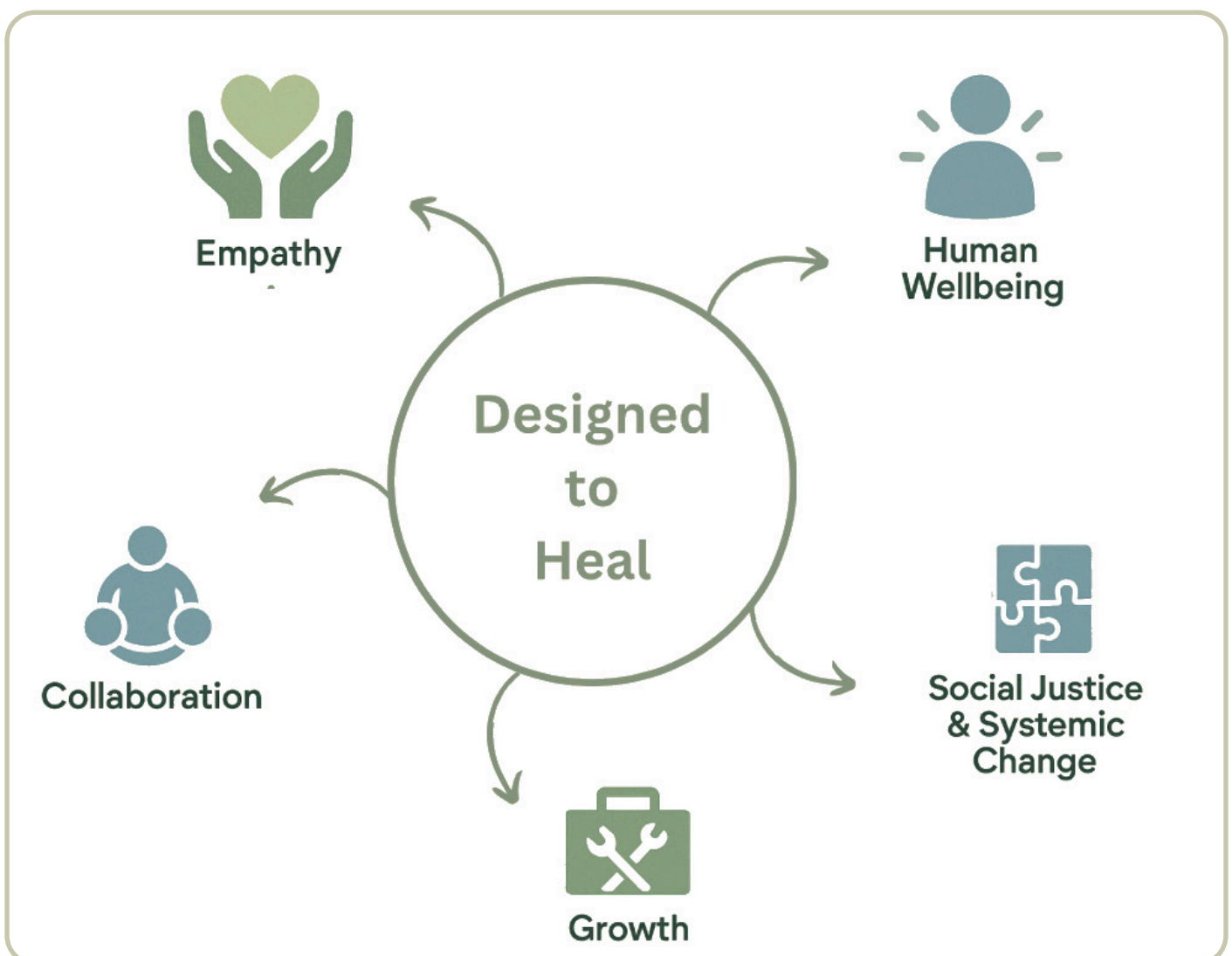
Figure 207

FUTURE PATHWAYS

While this is a significant university project, it is **more than just an academic submission**—it is a purposeful step toward **my future career**. Throughout the development of Designed to Heal, I've approached each decision with a **long-term mindset**, using this work to explore what it means to design with empathy, responsibility, and intention.

Although I may not yet have a fixed job title or a fully mapped career path, I am certain of the direction I want to move in: **socially conscious, trauma-informed design that centres human wellbeing**. This could lead to working within the charity or healthcare sectors, collaborating with domestic violence services, or pursuing further research into design as a tool for social justice. I am also **open to developing the Designed to Heal platform further, expanding the toolkit into a real-world resource that bridges gaps between survivors, service providers, and designers**.

This project has clarified not just what I care about, but how **design can be a tool for advocacy, empowerment, and systemic change**. Whatever the next step is, I want to carry this ethos with me.



FUTURE COLLABORATORS

While *Designed to Heal* has so far been developed independently, the next stage of **the project offers strong potential for collaboration with a range of partners**. Building trauma-informed environments is a multi-layered challenge, and **working alongside experts from different disciplines would expand both the reach and the impact of the toolkit**.

Potential future collaborators and stakeholders include:

Domestic Violence Organisations – Groups such as SafeLives, Women’s Aid, and Refuge could provide lived-experience insight, sector expertise, and routes to reach survivors in need.

Support Workers and Frontline Professionals – Direct input from those working in shelters, outreach, and advocacy would ensure that every design recommendation is practical, sensitive, and survivor-focused.

Architects, Product Designers, and Service Designers – Collaborative design work could lead to innovative, real-world implementations of the toolkit’s principles.

Psychologists and Trauma Specialists – Their expertise would help refine the emotional and behavioural considerations embedded in every space.

Academic Institutions and Research Bodies – Partnerships could strengthen the project’s evidence base, ensuring credibility when seeking funding or influencing policy. Furthermore, I am in communication with Dr Kate Williams at the University of Wolverhampton (Course Leader of Criminology and Policing Degrees, with a special interest in domestic abuse) with a view to co-author an article for publication in suitable journals.

By bringing together these perspectives, **Designed to Heal could evolve into a collaborative, sector-wide initiative**—combining design, psychology, and lived experience to create spaces that truly support recovery and resilience.



ETHICAL DESIGN

Designed to Heal is grounded in the belief that **design is never neutral—it always affects those who interact with it**. Ethical design, particularly in trauma-informed contexts, demands more than aesthetics or usability; it requires deep care, accountability, and a commitment to “do no harm.”

This project was developed with the understanding that **survivors of domestic abuse may carry complex and long-lasting trauma**. Therefore, every element—from the tone of the website to the physical products—was approached with empathy and respect. **Ethical considerations included:**

Avoiding Re-traumatisation: Designs avoid harsh lighting, cold materials, or institutional cues that may echo past experiences of violence or control.

Honouring Dignity: Aesthetic choices aim to feel warm, empowering, and meaningful, not clinical or stigmatising.

Privacy and Safety: The platform avoids collecting personal data, prioritises secure browsing, and includes safeguarding measures to reduce risk.

Inclusive Representation: Content and imagery were chosen to reflect a range of experiences and cultural backgrounds, ensuring no one feels invisible or excluded.

Non-Extractive Research: Survivor testimony and existing research were used sensitively, with credit and context, and without sensationalising trauma.

Design has the power to uplift or disempower. This project strives to be part of a design culture that chooses the former.

**Design is never neutral—
it affects everyone who interacts with it**



MEASURING IMPACT

As this is a speculative and developmental project, **measuring its full real-world impact is not yet possible but building a framework for future evaluation is crucial.** If implemented, Designed to Heal could be assessed through both qualitative and quantitative methods, including:

User Feedback: Gathering testimonials from survivors, support workers, and designers who use the toolkit or products.

Behavioural Impact: Observing how the design interventions affect mood, stress levels, or engagement in physical spaces.

Engagement Metrics: Tracking visits to the website, time spent on the toolkit, or downloads of the checklist and templates.

Adoption by Organisations: Monitoring how many shelters, community spaces, or public institutions begin to use or reference the materials.

Collaborative Growth: Identifying whether the platform facilitates new conversations, partnerships, or policies in the design and support sectors.

Evaluation methods would need to be trauma-informed in themselves—voluntary, anonymous where necessary, and supportive rather than extractive. Ultimately, the success of this project should be measured not by numbers alone, but by how well it fosters dignity, safety, and healing for those who need it most.



FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

My final major project sets a foundation to build on and expand, establishing trauma-informed design as a practical and ethical framework for supporting recovery from domestic abuse. It is my intention to develop the project further in the following ways, ensuring it evolves into a dynamic resource that bridges theory with real-world application, always prioritising emotional safety, dignity, and empowerment.

1. Developing Partnership Strategies: In Q4 2025, I plan to identify partners through targeted research into architect practices (e.g., Snug Architects, Keppie Design, MillsPower), DV organisations (e.g., Women's Aid, SafeLives), and fundholders (e.g., National Lottery Community Fund, Tudor Trust, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation). I intend outreach via personalised emails sharing project summaries and proposing virtual meetings, followed by calls or in-person discussions to co-create plans, aiming for at least three partnerships.

2. Academic Publishing: In Q4 2025, I will follow up with Dr Kate Williams to adapt this project publication. In Q1 2026, we aim to submit proposals to suitable interdisciplinary journals like Journal of Urban Design and Mental Health and Health Environments Research & Design Journal (HERD) to disseminate and invite collaboration.

3. Survivor Co-Design: Aim to incorporate participatory workshops and anonymous feedback with survivors to refine designs, reflecting diverse realities and centering impacted voices.

4. Broadening Inclusivity: While this project focuses on women (disproportionately affected) I want to look to explicitly adapt the project to ensure inclusivity and adaptation for all genders and LGBTQ+ individuals.

5. Piloting and Testing I aim to collaborate with a shelter/shelter(s) or other venues providing spaces for survivors for small-scale toolkit pilots; collect pre/post feedback via custom surveys to measure stress reduction and safety improvements.

6. Emphasising Sustainability: Expand the toolkit's material sourcing to eco-options (e.g., recycled fabrics, low-VOC paints); quantify benefits like reduced carbon footprints to align with ethical design and attract green funders.

7. Enhancing Digital Interactivity and Website: Add room previews, interactive toolkit customiser, and anonymous chats to boost engagement and accessibility.

8. Refining Impact Measurement: Set KPIs (e.g., 20% increase in reported safety via surveys, analytics on repeat visits); partner with academics for longitudinal studies.

9. Ensuring Artefact Accessibility: Prototype and test for universal usability (e.g., one-handed lock operation, braille bag labels).

10. Addressing Cultural and Regional Variations: Adapt principles for diverse contexts (e.g., prayer spaces, rural/urban needs) to respect trauma's intersections with identity and location.

11. Exploring Scalability and Funding Models: Phased rollout: digital toolkit distribution first, then prototyping and implementations. Secure sustainability via premium resources and grants, transforming into a leading resource for industry adoption and survivor benefits.

Through this vision, the project advocates for restorative spaces that heal, empower, and restore sovereignty.

Glossary of Terms

Accessibility – Designing spaces to be usable by people of all abilities, including mobility, vision, and hearing needs.

Acoustics – How sound behaves in a space. Minimising noise stress and triggers is vital in trauma-informed design.

Attachment to Place – The emotional bond people form with spaces, helping survivors feel safe, familiar, and supported.

Autonomy – The ability to make independent choices and have control over one's environment, crucial for trauma recovery.

Biophilic Design – Incorporating natural elements like plants, light, and organic materials to promote calm and connection to nature.

Calming Spaces – Areas intentionally designed to reduce stress and anxiety through sensory, spatial, and material choices.

Circular Economy – A sustainable approach that reduces waste and reuses materials, creating eco-friendly, adaptable shelters.

Choice Architecture – Structuring environments so users can make meaningful decisions about how they interact with spaces.

Cognitive Load – The mental effort needed to process information. Lowering it helps environments feel calmer and safer.

Colour Psychology – The study of how colour influences emotions and behaviour, used to create calming environments.

Control in Design – Designing for user control over lighting, temperature, and privacy to promote empowerment.

Cohesion in Design – Ensuring visual, spatial, and functional consistency to create comfort and predictability.

Cultural Sensitivity – Designing spaces that respect diverse cultural backgrounds through inclusive features like multilingual signage or prayer areas.

Defensible Space – A design concept that increases safety through visibility, territory, and access control.

Deinstitutionalisation of Spaces – Moving away from cold, clinical spaces towards more personal, comforting, home-like environments.

Dignity in Design – Designing environments that make individuals feel respected, valued, and in control.

Domestic Abuse – Controlling, coercive, threatening, violent, or abusive behaviour by a partner or family member.

Empowerment in Design – Creating spaces that offer choice and control, helping survivors regain autonomy.

Entry Sequencing – Designing gradual transitions between public and private spaces to increase feelings of security.

Environmental Psychology – The study of how surroundings impact emotions and behaviours, guiding supportive design choices.

Environmental Stressors – Aspects of a space (noise, crowding, poor lighting) that can increase anxiety or hypervigilance.

Flexible Spaces – Rooms or zones that can adapt to different activities, needs, or occupancy levels.

Healing Architecture – Design that promotes physical and emotional recovery through thoughtful spatial and material choices.

Human-Centred Design – Prioritising users' needs, emotions, and experiences to create supportive, healing spaces.

Hypervigilance – A state of constant alertness to potential threats, common in trauma survivors. Design can help mitigate this through clear sightlines and calming features.

Inclusive Design – Designing environments that consider all users, regardless of gender, age, culture, or ability.

Lighting Design – Using natural and artificial light thoughtfully to influence mood, safety, and well-being.

Materiality – Choosing materials with textures, colours, and durability that impact comfort and safety.

Mental Health and Well-being – Supporting emotional and psychological states through calming, secure environments.

Modularity – Designing elements that can be moved, adapted, or reconfigured to suit changing needs and promote autonomy.

Nature Connection – Incorporating views, plants, or natural materials to enhance calm, recovery, and well-being.

Orientation Cues – Visual or physical indicators that help users navigate a space and feel secure.

Personalisation – Allowing individuals to personalise their spaces to foster identity, ownership, and emotional safety.

Polyvagal Theory – A theory that explains how the nervous system responds to danger and safety, forming the foundation for trauma-sensitive design.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – A trauma-triggered condition causing anxiety and flashbacks; spaces must be designed to reduce triggers.

Privacy in Design – Giving individuals control over their space, reducing vulnerability, especially in communal living.

Resilience – The ability to recover from adversity, supported by stable and empowering environments.

Restorative Environments – Spaces designed to promote relaxation, recovery, and emotional well-being after trauma.

Safe Zones – Designated areas where individuals feel physically and emotionally protected.

Safety and Security – Design features that offer both physical and emotional protection, including locks, sightlines, and protected zones.

Sensory Regulation – Designing spaces that manage noise, light, and textures to prevent sensory overload or distress.

Shelter Design – Creating safe, emotionally supportive spaces for individuals escaping domestic abuse.

Spatial Legibility – Clarity in the arrangement of spaces to reduce confusion and cognitive load.

Spatial Planning – Arranging rooms, furniture, and circulation for privacy, functionality, and emotional support.

Supportive Furniture – Seating, surfaces, and fixtures that provide comfort, safety, and adaptability.

Survivor-Centred Design – Design that prioritises the experiences and needs of survivors to foster healing.

Therapeutic Environment – A setting designed to support mental, emotional, and physical healing.

Threshold Spaces – Transitional zones between environments, easing emotional and sensory shifts.

Trauma – An emotional response to distressing events that can have long-lasting psychological effects.

Trauma-Informed Design (TID) – Design based on understanding trauma's effects, ensuring safety, empowerment, and healing.

Triggers – Environmental or sensory stimuli that can cause distress or flashbacks; must be minimised.

Wayfinding – Design elements that help people navigate a building or site intuitively and safely.

Zoning – Separating spaces for different activities or privacy levels to improve comfort and safety.

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Figure 1 – Personal Portrait of Megan Wilson (Megan Wilson, 2025)

Figure 2 – Designed to Heal Logo (Megan Wilson, 2025)

Figure 3 – Illustration created in Canva (Megan Wilson, 2025)

Figure 4 – Illustration created in Canva (Megan Wilson, 2025)

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Figure 13 – Illustration created in Canva, Edited in Photoshop (Megan Wilson, 2025)

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Figure 41 – Illustration created in Canva (Megan Wilson, 2025)

Figure 42 – Furnishing Futures (2025). What we do, Healing Homes/Refuges. Available at: <https://www.furnishingfutures.org/supporting-survivors/refuges> [Accessed June 2025].

Figure 43 – Furnishing Futures (2025). What we do, Healing Homes/Refuges. Available at: <https://www.furnishingfutures.org/supporting-survivors/refuges> [Accessed June 2025].

Figure 44 – Snug Architects Ltd. Website created by Arc. (2007–2024). Hope Street: A trauma-informed design case study. Available at: <https://snugarchitects.co.uk/our-work/hope-street> [Accessed June 2025].

Figure 45 – Snug Architects Ltd. Website created by Arc. (2007–2024). Hope Street: A trauma-informed design case study. Available at: <https://snugarchitects.co.uk/our-work/hope-street> [Accessed June 2025].

Figure 46 – Keppie Design Ltd (2025). Keppie Design: The Rowan: A HOLISTIC, CO-ORDINATED RESPONSE FOR VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE. Available at: <https://www.keppiedesign.co.uk/project/the-rowan-sarc/> [Accessed June 2025].

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Figure 50 – Illustration created in Canva (Megan Wilson, 2025)

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Figure 56 – Illustration created in Canva (Megan Wilson, 2025)

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