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Valerie Capone, Marketing Communications + PR Manager
C 781.720.9906 T 617.889.4402 E vcapone@architecturalteam.com

For at-risk teens, thoughtful design considerations engage, offer opportunity

The Architectural Team, Inc., in collaboration with Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston, transformed the former public Mattapan Library into a dynamic \$2.6 million Teen Center to serve hundreds of neighborhood youth each year.

BOSTON, January 29, 2015 – The Architectural Team, a nationally recognized master planning and design firm specializing in adaptive reuse and urban revitalization, recently announced the completion of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston's Mattapan Teen Center. The 7,200 square foot project transformed a decommissioned public library, which the firm designed and built from a defunct public library branch into a space which supports the social, emotional and cognitive abilities of youth in a safe, contemporary, technology-rich environment.

This facility marks the fifth Boys & Girls Club designed by The Architectural Team, and the first with a design intended exclusively for teens, focusing its programs on academics, leadership, and the performing arts. Originally built in the 1920s as a public works project, the library had been closed since 2009. Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston bid on the library building after studying neighborhoods in Boston that needed outreach programs serving young people, particularly those in the 13-to-18-year-old age group.

“We worked collaboratively with the client to develop a thoughtful and inspired programmatic response for the needs of this specific age group, in order to promote an engaging and nurturing atmosphere. The library's location, historic detailing, space configuration and optimal day lighting provided a perfect reuse opportunity to create a re-enlivened community space,” said Mark Rosenshein, LEED AP, senior project manager with The Architectural Team.



Improving Lives At-Risk

In an effort to improve the lives of at-risk youth by delivering critical resources for an underserved Boston neighborhood, Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston bought the property from the City of Boston and soon engaged The Architectural Team to repurpose the space.

Josh Kraft, Nicholas President and CEO of Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston, says, "The building was an underutilized asset, and perfect for creating a safe, positive and enriching place for the teens in the Mattapan community to go to when they are not in school to help them achieve academic success, live healthy lifestyles and become good citizens."

The space includes a multi-purpose, 80-seat performance center equipped with movable chairs and stage platform, and a music studio with a performance/rehearsal room and an adjacent acoustically isolated recording booth. There is also a kitchen and culinary learning center, and -- as in all Boys & Girls Clubs facilities -- a computer lab and education room.

The Architectural Team's design solution for repurposing the library focused on creating a vibrant atmosphere that promotes engagement, participation, and a sense of ownership among those it serves. This is achieved largely through transparency: all of the separate areas, adjacent to the main lobby in a plus-sign configuration, have been made visible from the lobby through glass windows, doors or partitions. Even the soundproof recording room is visible through acoustically rated glass.

"Solid walls might make sense for a library," says Rosenshein. "But we wanted to promote activity and interaction, instead of separation and quiet. That meant inserting windows and replacing opaque walls with glass or openings, whenever and wherever possible. The design allows for organized instructional programs and supports opportunities for unstructured activities as well."



Serving The Community

The ongoing partnership between The Architectural Team and Boys & Girls Clubs also yielded an unusually community-focused process. Says Kraft, "We wanted the construction project, especially the jobs and economic activity, to benefit the Mattapan community itself as much as possible. So we decided that the Teen Center would be built by the people of that community." Kraft worked with the Architectural Team and consultancy Janey Company not only to focus on hiring locally, but also to hire as many minority and women-owned businesses among the contractors and laborers.

The results were outstanding. More than 85% of the people who worked on the project were either women or of color, or both, and nearly all of the labor and contractors were local. Initial criticisms and concerns among the more skeptical members of the community yielded to admiration.

"These kinds of hiring benchmarks are often an afterthought, but we made it a major goal of the project," says Rosenshein. "In addition to providing a boost for the local economy, the hiring benchmarks for locals, women and minorities created momentum within the community for the project."

Perhaps most importantly, the benchmarks have had a residual effect: by including people in the development who would benefit directly or indirectly from the project, the community feels overall that the Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston's Mattapan Teen Center truly belongs to them, an echo of the ownership that the teens who use the facility are meant to enjoy.

"Good design is good business," adds Kraft. "And working with The Architectural Team on the new teen center proved it. We have filled a critical gap in services for teens while bringing unexpected economic benefits to the community-at-large, none of which could have been accomplished without clear goals, commitment, and robust teamwork."



About The Architectural Team

Founded in 1971, The Architectural Team, Inc. is an 80-person master-planning and architectural firm that has grown through its design excellence and commitment to responsive and collaborative client relationships. The Architectural Team has developed a portfolio of distinctive design solutions for a broad range of building types and programs, and has earned more than 100 awards for design excellence. These include the new construction of large urban mixed-use developments, multifamily and senior residential, commercial, healthcare, hospitality, recreational, and academic facilities, as well as a national reputation for historic preservation and adaptive reuse. The firm is located in the restored 1840s-era Commandant's House in Chelsea, Mass. Visit www.architecturalteam.com.