

Designing for Care: Nonprofit Pediatric Therapy Center Provides Children a Place to Feel Safe

Encompass Snoqualmie, designed by Signal Architecture + Research, is highly sensitive both to its surroundings and the experience of its youngest occupants.

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[/Einpresswire.com/](https://www.einpresswire.com/) -- Nestled in the foothills of the Cascade Mountains just outside of Seattle, Encompass Snoqualmie is a 10,000 square-foot state-of-the-art pediatric therapy facility that is anything but institutional. Designed by Seattle-based Signal Architecture + Research, Encompass's new center incorporates adjustable color, light and transparency to create a space that is legible, gentle and welcoming to the children it aims to serve.

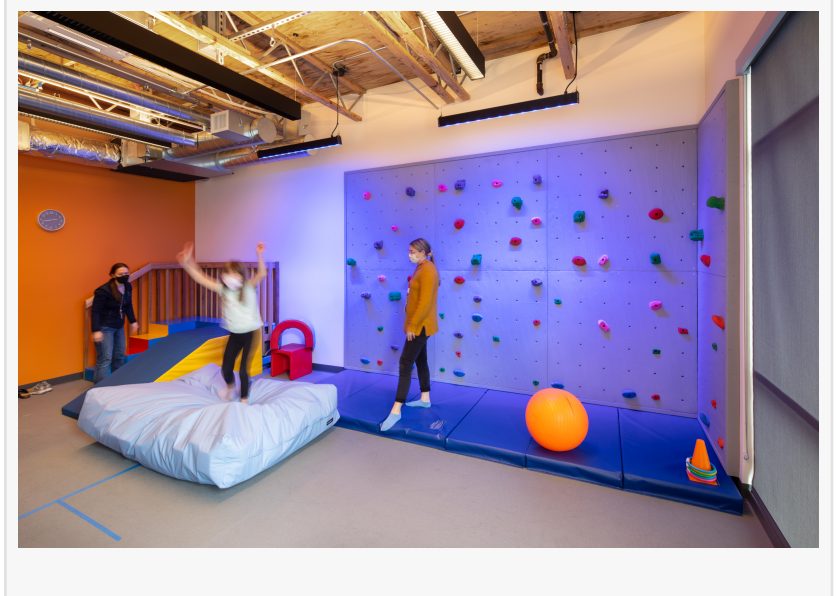
Ranging in age from birth to 8 years, children brought to Encompass for therapy have varying levels of need – from early learning and exercise programs, to full speech and language services, to motor learning therapy. In

discussions with Encompass therapists, parents, and children, Signal uncovered the anxiety that these small occupants often carry when entering an unfamiliar place. Aiming to see the building through a child's perspective, Signal created a highly-sensitive design that provides children comfort and ease within novel surroundings.

The building's interior programming is easily legible, allowing children to feel secure in their



sense of place. Wrapped within a burnt orange and cream metal-clad exterior are an assortment of interactive spaces, centered on the ways in which children perceive the world. Rather than an architectural object, the building was conceptualized as a responsive “tool” to equip this team in their use of multi-angled therapeutic techniques through close design collaboration with the nonprofit’s therapy staff. In early discussions, one therapist expressed that her favorite tools were a “rock and a stick” – objects with an open-ended utility, which invite interaction, creativity, and collaboration. This idea, of the building being able to serve as a kind of “rock-and-stick” in the therapeutic process, became a guiding principle for the Signal design team.



The main entry opens onto the center’s administrative spaces, with easy access into the gym for children seeking immediate immersion in play. Therapy rooms are nested further within the structure, with colorful spaces fitted with climbing walls and other features to inspire movement and encourage safe motor play. Several therapy rooms are equipped with color-control lights designed in collaboration with Blanca Lighting, to be used both for general ambiance and therapeutic purposes. Parent-child intensive rooms, bifurcated by a panel of two-way glass, allow for therapists to observe a parent and child and provide training from a distance. Meeting rooms on the North side of the structure are available for use by those outside the nonprofit, creating a larger system of social cohesion within the Snoqualmie community. Outdoor access is also a central facet of the design, and a therapy garden with clear sight lines from the interior allows children to safely explore their natural environment.

The site’s position on a floodplain provided an initial challenge for the design team. Finding inspiration in the wetland’s adversity, Signal designed the structure to sit lightly and enduringly on the landscape, raised five feet above the ground plane and surrounded by flood mitigation landscaping. This subtle elevation change provides for a gradually ramped approach, leading occupants toward a colorful entry that gently embraces and orients them to the rest of the building. Large windows allow children to see the staff and therapists from the outside, and the surrounding nature from within. Utilizing this series of simple and site-responsive tectonics, the team was able to integrate ideas of security and transparency into the building’s larger-scale relationships.

With 50 therapists and other stationary team members occupying the center on a consistent basis and up to 100 children, parents, and mobile therapy staff rotating through daily, the design

had to be both responsive and durable. Attention was paid to efficient and colorful details and long-lasting materials, working within the means of the project and ensuring ease of maintenance over the full lifespan of the building. Adhering to the budget was also of utmost importance, as the project was entirely funded by grants and charitable donations. Signal collaborated with the nonprofit team to craft a design narrative and model for Encompass to use in fundraising efforts, tangibly displaying to potential donors what their investment would achieve. The project was successfully constructed within budget due in large part to intelligent planning, including working with the contractor during preconstruction to address potential site challenges and advise on cost-effective building procedures. This integrated, collaborative process serves as a model for other budget-focused nonprofit projects.

With foresight, sensitivity, and an eye for the building's most vulnerable occupants, Signal designed a building that expands notions of "therapy" into a holistic experience. Imbuing the structure itself with notions of care, the building becomes a flexible container for its occupants' activities: vibrant play, self-discovery, and healing. As need for these facilities increases, the impact of this project extends beyond its property lines, forging a path for other nonprofits to follow.

Project Team

Lighting Design: Blanca Lighting Design

Contracting: Abbott Construction

Landscape: Osborne Consulting

Structural: Lund Opsahl

Electrical Engineering: TFWB

Civil Engineering: Goldsmith

Sustainability: O'Brien360

Photography: Lara Swimmer

Owner's Representative: OAC

About Signal Architecture + Research

Signal Architecture + Research is an award-winning design studio that weaves architecture, interiors, planning, and strategy together to create spaces and places of meaning that connect people to their place in the world. Our relationship with clients and communities becomes a partnership, where vision and pragmatism are intertwined. Our research based process balances function and environment with long term vision. Our work was awarded an AIA Seattle Honor Award in 2020 and 2021. Follow us on [Instagram](#), or visit our [website](#).

About Encompass Northwest

Encompass is a nonprofit that partners with families in the Snoqualmie Valley, Issaquah, and Eastside communities to build healthy foundations for children of all abilities. At Encompass, we passionately believe that every family deserves a place to turn when they need help. Through Early Learning, Pediatric Therapy, and Family Enrichment programs for children ages 0-8 and their families, Encompass has given thousands of children the foundation they need to get the

right start—and thrive for a lifetime.

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