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Arts group transforms dated Phoenix office building into expanded space

Renovations will add extra square footage for events, training and more

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Free Arts for Abused Children of Arizona, a nonprofit organization that provides art programming to children who have experienced trauma like abuse or homelessness, is transforming a dated office building in central Phoenix into a “center for hope and healing.”

Construction began on the building in April and is expected to be completed by the end of the year, said [Matt Hargis](#), president of Point B Property Development and a board member of Free Arts.

The biggest change to the building is adapting a former open-air courtyard into an enclosed, two-story art gallery, which will be used to display children’s and professional artwork.

Enclosing the courtyard also allows Free Arts to increase security at the building, which allows Free Arts to have children come to the facility for programs and events without having to worry about people coming in or out without permission.



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A rendering by Studio Ma shows the new Free Arts for Abused Children of Arizona building.

“The renovation is very extensive,” Hargis said. “This is a complete rethinking of the building.”

Until 2016, the organization was based in a 5,000-square-foot rented office used for staff and volunteers.

“In order to serve more children, we needed a bigger space,” said Alicia Sutton Campbell, executive director of Free Arts.

The renovations will bring the building from 11,000 square feet to 14,000, Sutton Campbell said. The expanded space will give the organization room to host events, as well as space to offer other nonprofits for board meetings, trainings or other events.

It can be complicated for nonprofits to buy buildings, she said, as most funders want to wait until a group has chosen a building, while most sellers want to negotiate the sale after the organization secures funding.

After the group found the old office building, located at 352 E. Camelback Road, a one-year, lease-to-purchase agreement was inked, Sutton Campbell said. Free Arts moved in to the building in December 2016 and bought the building in September 2017.

Point B Inc. worked pro bono as a representative for Free Arts in the real estate process and is serving as the project manager for the renovation. Venn Construction is the general contractor and Studio Ma is the architect for the project, which will transform the building, which was designed for individual office suites, into a building Free Arts can use for programming with children, displaying art pieces and to house staff and volunteers.

The Bob and Renee Parsons Foundation was the primary donor for the project, donating a combined \$3.5 million for the purchase and renovations to the building, which will cost a total of \$4.5 million. The building will be named the Bob and Renee Parsons Center for Hope and Healing.

The arts group serves about 8,000 children a year, most of whom are living in shelters, and eventually wants to extend its reach further across the state. However, the majority of children who come from backgrounds with trauma live in

foster homes with foster families, and Free Arts did not have a way to reach those children, Sutton Campbell said. With the new building, there will be enough space for foster families to bring children into the facility and participate in programs there, which will expand the group's reach, she said.

The exterior of the building will feature a mural done by children served by the organization in partnership with a professional artist, which will be replaced from time to time to feature new artwork.

"This will be very recognizable as Free Arts," Hargis said. "It will be a landmark type of building."

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