

## Facts & Figures

**Owner:** Covenant House New York, Keturah W. Wood Mother and Child Crisis Center

**Type of Project:** Expansion and renovation of a crisis center

**Architect:** Terrence O'Neal Architect LLC, New York, NY

**Construction Manager:** Sweet Construction Corp., Long Island, NY

**Size:** 22,000 square feet

**Cost:** \$2.5 million

**Construction Time:** October 2002 - December 2003

**The Need:** To better accommodate the rising number of homeless young mothers and children in need of temporary shelter

**The Challenge:** Remaining within budget while meeting program requirements



Photos courtesy of Whitney Cox

New York, New York

# Covenant House New York, Keturah W. Wood Mother and Child Crisis Center

Covenant House New York, Keturah W. Wood Mother and Child Crisis Center has been operating in an old convent since 1987. No work had been done to the building before Covenant House moved in and began providing temporary housing for young mothers and their babies.

A few years ago, Covenant House decided that it was time to renovate and started a campaign to raise money for the project. Design plans for the renovation also began to take shape. "In this project, we took a step back and asked, 'What is important in a temporary shelter for teenage mothers with babies?'" said Terrence E. O'Neal, AIA, principal for Terrence O'Neal Architect LLC, the project's architect. "The answers evolved from a study answering questions such as 'Who is the facility really for?' We concluded that it is really for the children first, then the mothers."

The building's interior design reflects the decision to design for children first. Its color scheme includes bright colors and patterns on the walls that are thoughtfully placed at a child's eye level. Seating in the hallways is specifically designed for young

children, encouraging interaction and the development of necessary social skills.

The project included a complete gutting of the six-story building, which was brought up to code and outfitted with new mechanical systems. Located on three floors, the residential area contains 14 rooms on each floor — and each room houses one child and one mother. Instead of a communal shower, each room shares a bathroom with its neighboring room so residents don't have to leave their rooms to use the showers. "Before we renovated, we only had enough room for 70 people total, including children," said Dave Gregorio, program director at Covenant House at the time of construction. "This project has allowed us to expand our services and help more women and children."

Other renovations include the lounge, offices and reception area on the first floor. The new sixth floor, which is half the size of the other floors, will eventually be a computer education center. In addition, there is a kitchen/cafeteria floor and a day-care center in the basement, which is at ground level in the back of the building.

Several challenges were encountered during the project. A good deal more asbestos was found than had been anticipated, increasing the project's cost. Terrence O'Neal Architect LLC and Sweet Construction, the project's construction manager, adopted a team approach and extensively discussed ways to reach the project's goals without going over budget.

Thanks to the hard work of the project team, the young mothers and children who come to Covenant House now have a place that is uplifting as well as welcoming. "We worked to achieve a sense of order and calm for the young women — in contrast to the turmoil in their lives," said O'Neal. "We wanted the babies and young children that live here to leave with a positive impression of this place, even though they were forced to come to the facility due to unfortunate circumstances." ■

— A.B.

