ENABILITY

HOW ARCHITECTURE CAN ENABLE THE DISABLED

Disability in Architecture

Currently, in architecture there is a lack of urgency to design for inclusivity. There are guidelines put forward to create accessible buildings, but these guidelines are the minimum. The ADA guidelines, in general, ensure that all people can use all parts of a building and that people can get required information to get around a space. There are many kinds of disabilities that are not accounted for with these bare minimum rules and just as many creative solutions to include in designs to create a new way to design accessible buildings.

Going beyond the minimum in terms of inclusivity is not only thinking about physical disabilities and their limitations, but also considering other types of disability and putting just as much emphasis on their design solutions as we do the physical ones. Creating spaces that are accessible for cognitive disability should be as important as creating spaces for physical disabilities. Along with that, physical disabilities can look different than being wheelchair bound or having a visual impairment and can also be overlooked due to a lack of awareness of less common disabilities. An example of this is restroom changing stations. Restrooms have guidelines that require mothers have access to a location to change babies' diapers, but many adults or grown children with disabilities could also benefit from a space to change diapers, yet that is not a requirement and very rarely included in design.

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You Belong: The Inspiration

You Belong is a non-profit organization that specializes in providing services for families, individuals with disabilities, and their caregivers. You Belong offers respite care, family classes, and job training for adults with disabilities.

Their facility is located in Green Bay, Wisconsin and is a success around the area, but where You Belong struggles is in its physical building. The building is a collection of ajoining strip mall sections that have been acquired over some time. This is creating a problem when it comes to navigation, distance covered between one aspect and another, and general building aspects like natural lighting, air quality and accoustics.

You Belong has recently opened The Adventure Zone. It is an indoor accessible playground area that is available to community members, when not being used by You Belong in a class or program, in order to raise money. It can be hard to financially support businesses catering to individuals with disabilities, because in general individuals with disabilities have a harder time finding employment.

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Zabbs Place

“How 1 Thrift Store Is Helping Young Adults With Disabilities” covers Zabs Place and how it is changing the lives of its workers. Zabs Place is a thrift store that was specifically created as a place to teach individuals with special needs job skills. The couple that started Zabs has a son with special needs and when they asked him what he would like to do after high school he said work. They realized there were no places to teach people like their son the necessary job skills needed to work after school, so they created one. After a four month training period, workers specialize so that they are doing tasks that help them train skills needed for their future employment. Through working at Zabs the workers are taught skills like self-sufficiency, how to dress properly at a job, how to present yourself in the workplace and many more life skills for a person in the workforce. The thrift store is running solely on donations, so everything brought in needs to be sorted. This means that games and puzzles need to be checked for missing pieces and this gives the individuals working at Zabs the oppourtunity to learn how to check the content of these items.

Places like Zabs create an environment where individuals that might have been put down or overlooked in the future can contribute and show their value to their community. Zabs shows its workers that they can succeed in life and teaches them confidence, while also giving them a comforting workplace and community. It is important for more places to encourage people with disabilities to contribute and allow them to feel safe in their workplace. Amazing places like Zabs exist to teach people these skills, but it should not be necessary to have a designated place like this. All sorts of businesses should welcome disabled workers into their space, not because they can’t legally say no, but because we want everyone to feel like they are contributing to society. Having a disability should not deter someone from learning job skills or being a welcomed part of their community. Zabs Place should be an example to all businesses on how they can take part in pushing past societal norms and improving the lives of many differently abled individuals.

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Echoes Cafe

“The Delhi Cafe Run By The Differently Abled” shows Echoes Cafe, a restaurant in Delhi, India that employs deaf individuals to work as servers. Echoes has become very successful, to the point that its customers have started to learn sign language to communicate with the workers more easily. Aside from the customers that learned sign language, the cafe has coded menu items that customers write out for the staff and communication cards to communicate common phrases in restaurants, as well as lights that signal waiters if assistance at your table is needed. For example, cards may ask for the bill, menu or specific silverware. Echoes Cafe has found that they have no need for individuals who can speak or hear, because their staff is perfectly capable of running the restaurant without hearing individuals. The staff at Echoes have been taught to believe in themselves and have gained self confidence by successfully running a business all on their own.

By choosing to incorporate these case studies into my thesis project, Potential Point Community Center can also teach individuals job skills and life skills they will be able to continue using in their future. Potential Point will employ individuals from the community at its restaurant, childcare center and thoughout the main building, as administration staff, program staff, janitorial staff or anywhere else help might be needed.

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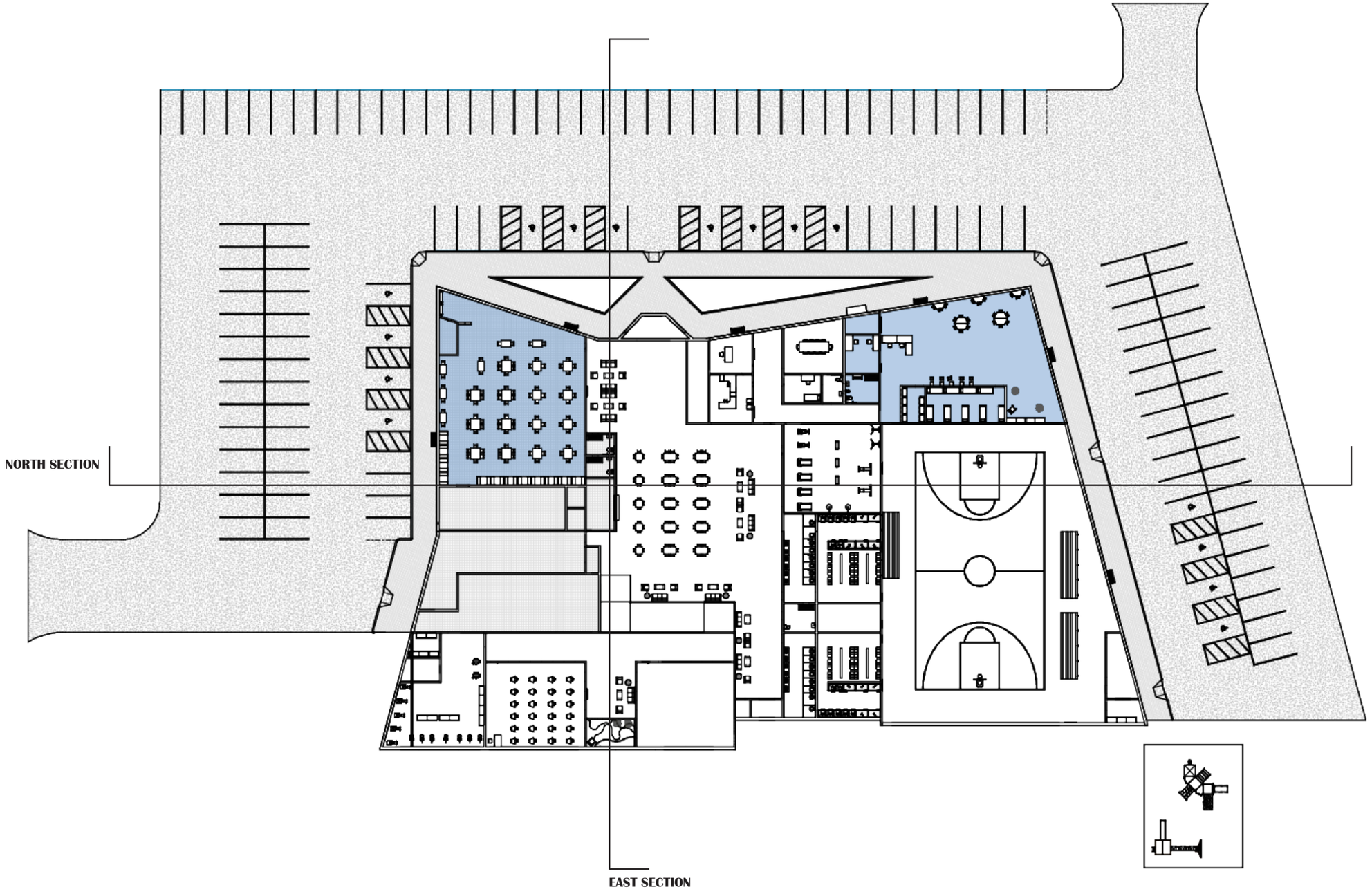

NORTH SECTION
EAST SECTION

Design Strategies

Physical Design:

Open Floor Plans - Allow for better mobility and for better communication

Wide Hallways - Allow for two individuals to travel nect to eachother and have better communication

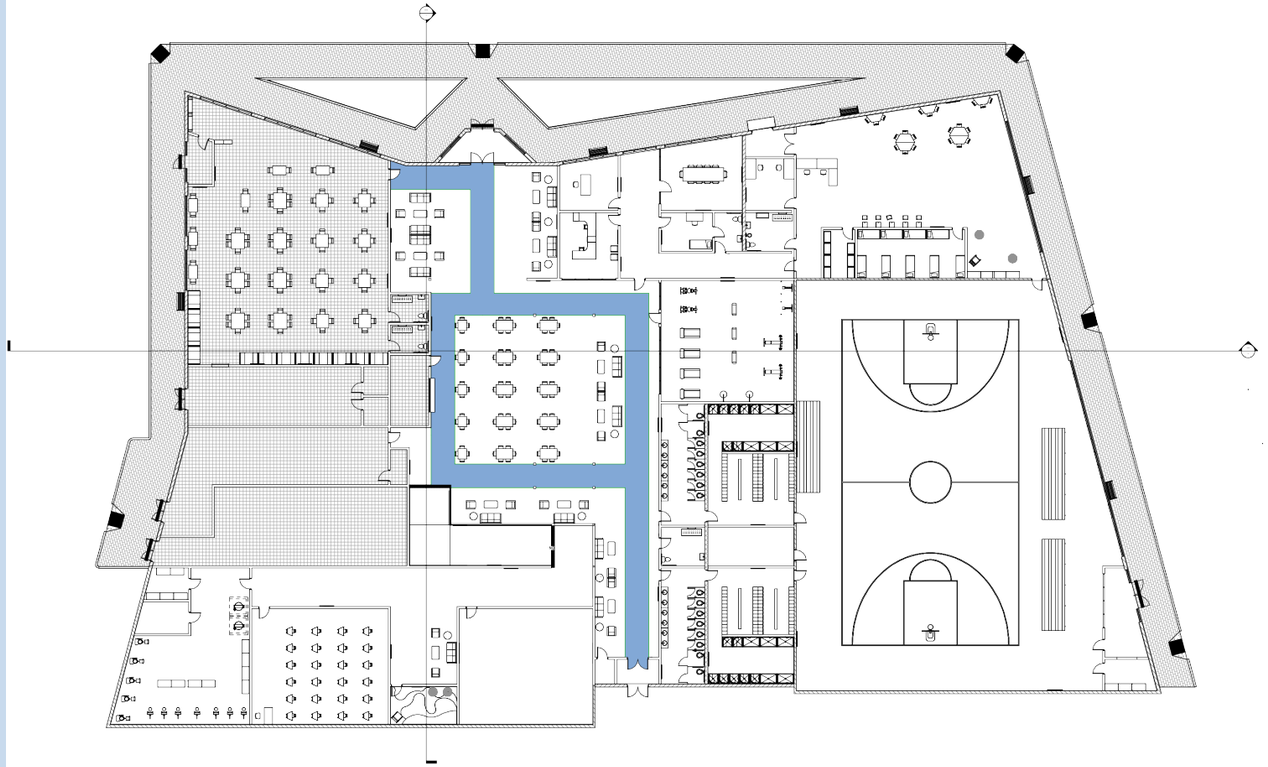
Color Choice - Neutral or soft colors are preferred to limit distraction and reduse PTSD symptoms

Safety:

Heat Sources - It is important to keep hazards, such as heat sources and pipes above ground level to prevent accidental burns

Corners and Tripping Hazards - Create safe pathways

Weighted Furniture



Design Strategies

Navigation:

Signage - Important for providing clear imformation to individuals who are prone to confusion or to Deaf individuals

Limiting Obstacles

Flooring Choice - Limit textures that hinder wheelchair users and avoid dark flooring or rugs for those who have vision impairments or dementia

Lowered Countertops, Sinks, Etc.

Large Bathrooms - Bathrooms should allow for easy navigation and turns of all individuals with assistive technology

Outdoor Movement - Clear pathways, close accessible parking and intentially placed seating

Alternate Forms of Communication

Directional Paving - Alerts blind individuals of intersections, doors, and path movement around a site

Design Strategies

Lighting Design:

Natural Lighting - Improves mood and limits eye strain for individuals who need to rely on their eyesight to get around a space

Wayfinding

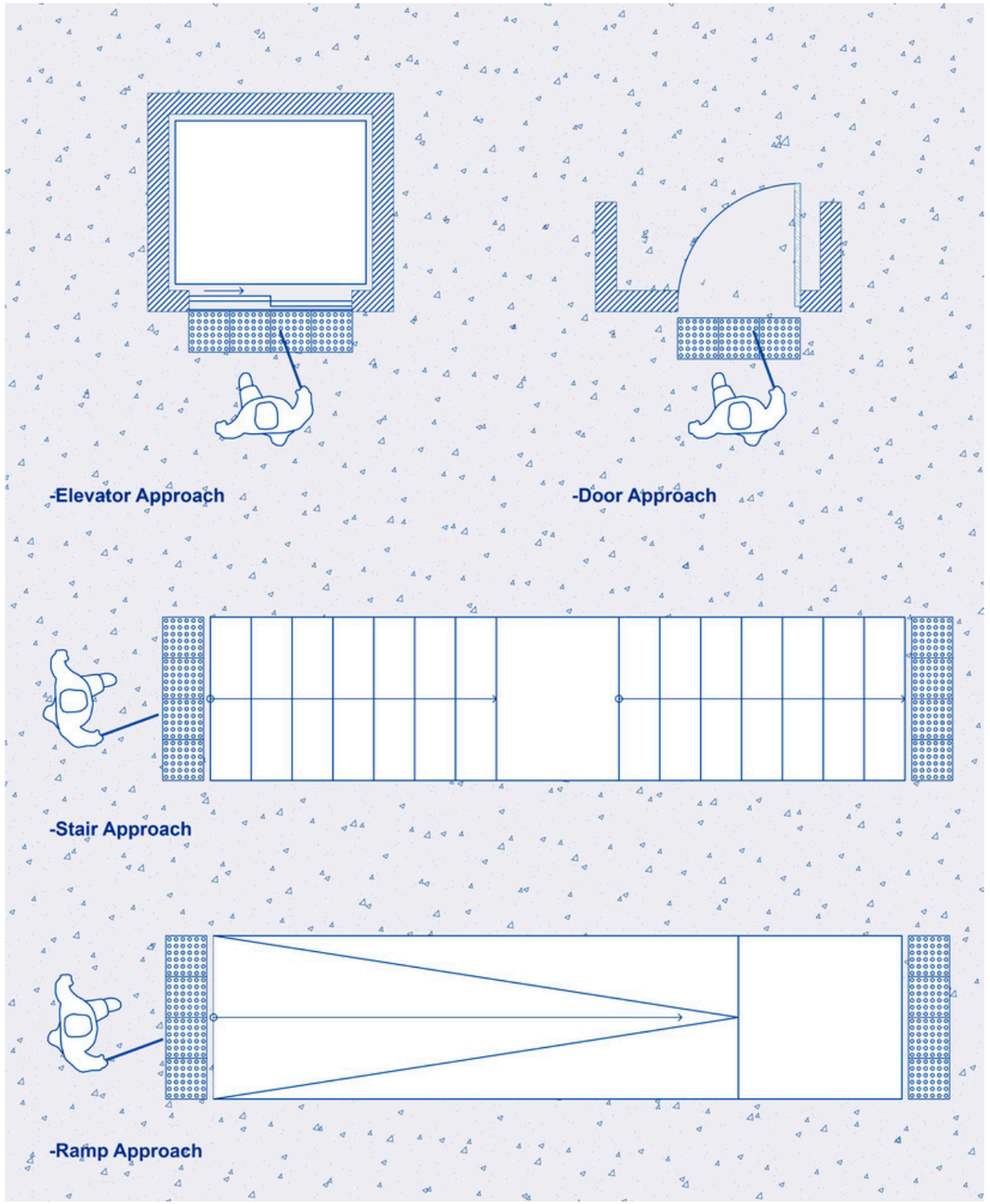
Dark Corners - Dark corners should be avoided because they can trigger symptoms in individuals who struggle with PTSD

Acoustic:

Materiality - Deaf individuals may get someone else's attention through vibrations

Echoes - Can hinder someone's ability to hear clearly, so limiting echoes is important to promote clear communication

Limit Loud and Distracting Machinery



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Design Strategies

Communication:

Audio and Visual - Include subtitles for auditory elements and sound for visual elements

Variation in Equiptment - Fire alarms, ATMs, intercom systems, etc. should be equipped to alert anyone to its function

Assistive Technology:

Variation in Usabilty - For individuals who cannot speak allow a writen option and vice versa

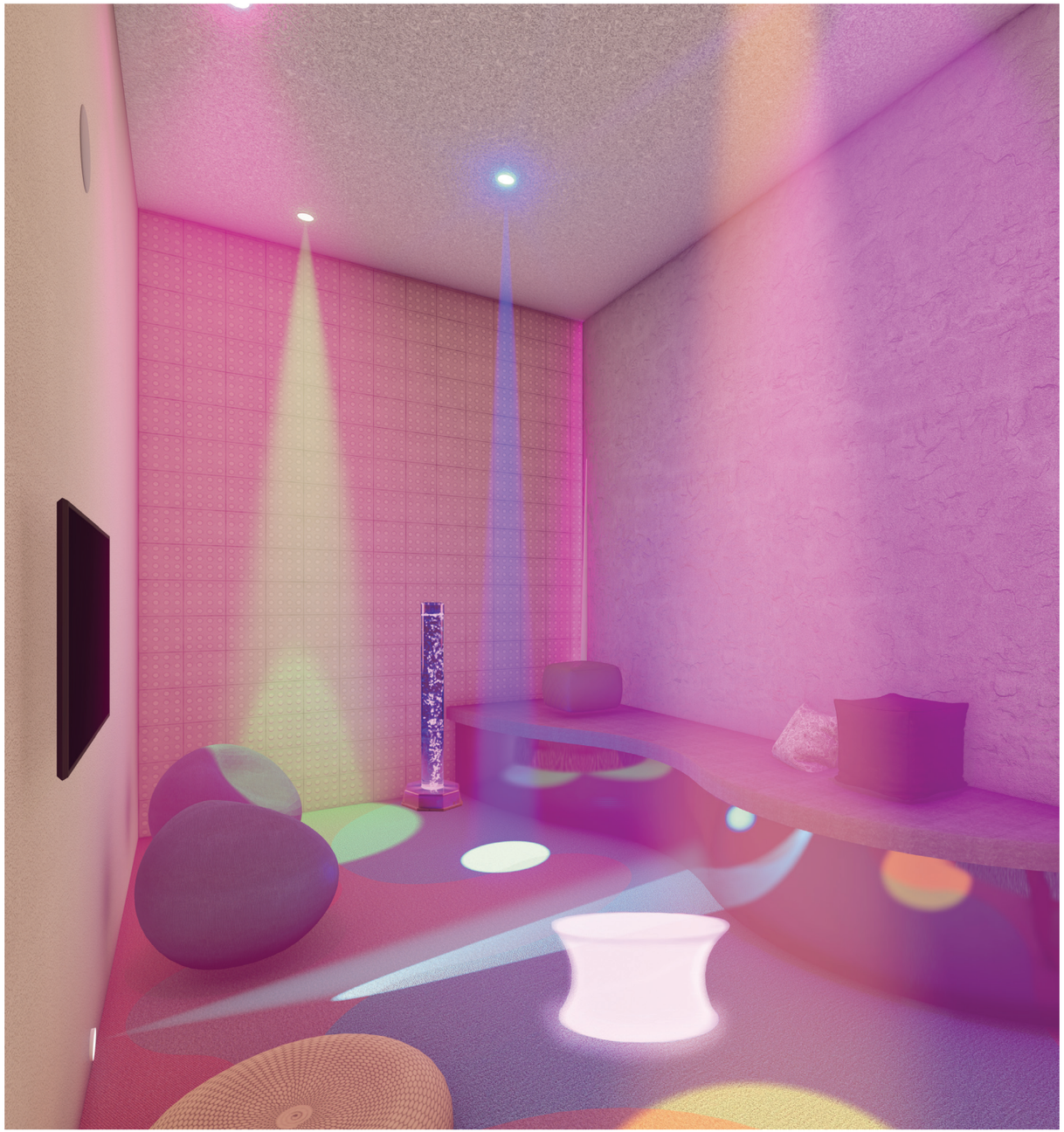
Text-to-speech, adjustable font size, dyslexia reading tools

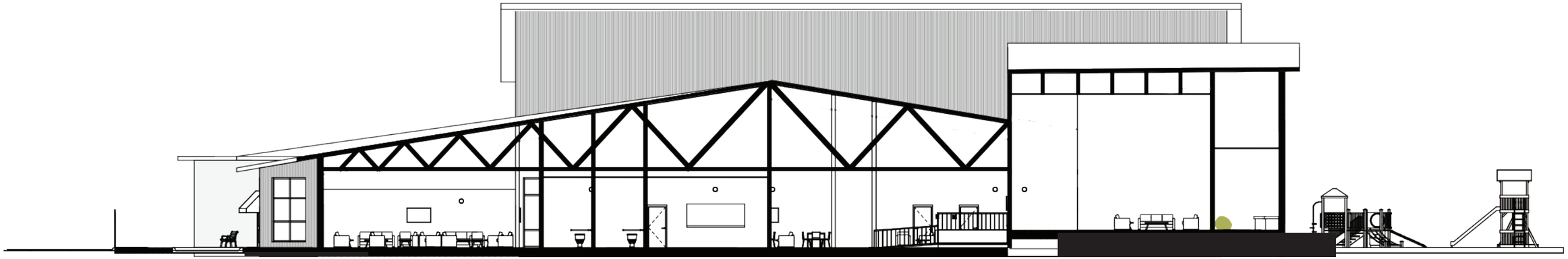
Adjustable Furniture - Can be helpful for individuals with spina bifida or other mobility limitations

Overstimulation:

Air Quality and Temperature

Sensory Rooms - Encourage interaction with lights, textures, and can be a great escape from external stimuli





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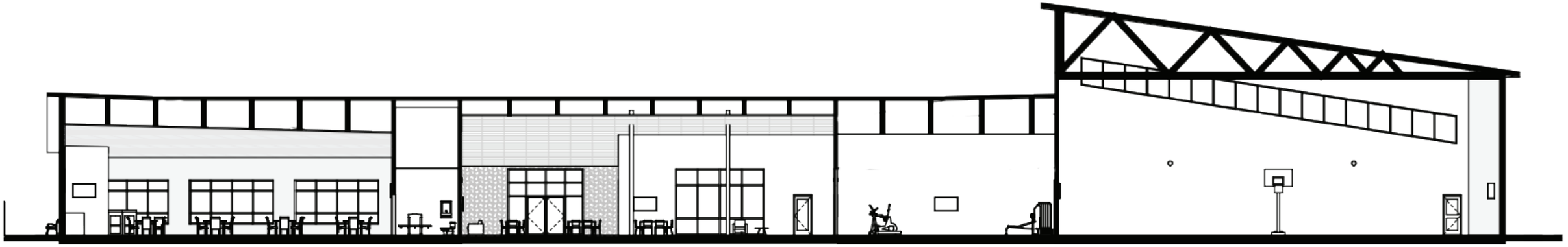

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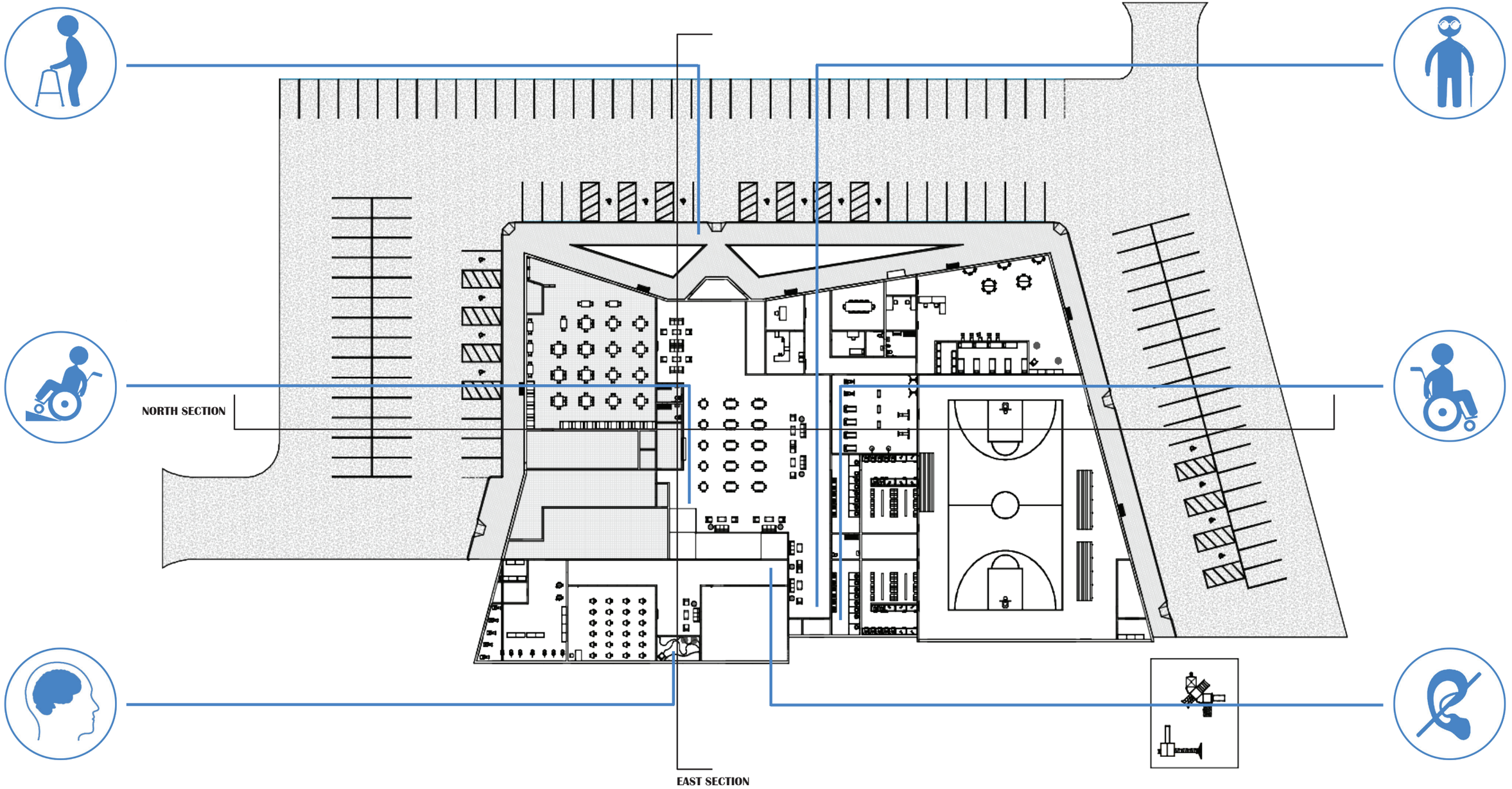
NORTH SECTION
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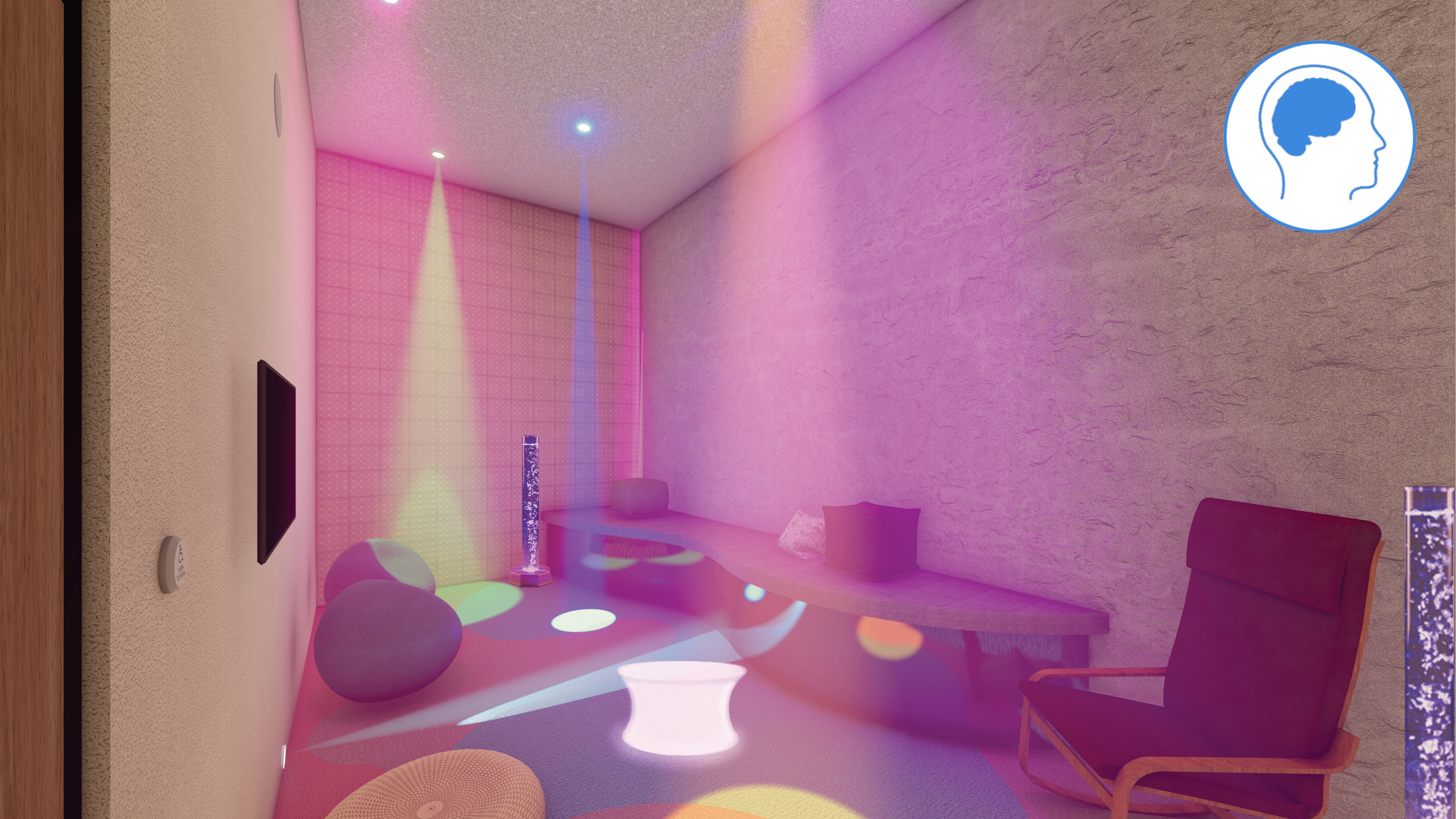
VAN
ACCESSIBLE
PARKING

BUSES FOR EVERYONE
CARS CUT NOT LIVES
LIFT NOT LIES
Disability is Strength - Desabilidad es Fuerza



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THANK YOU