

Empowering Community through Design-Build Education: A Playhouse for CASA

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This faculty-led, community-driven initiative demonstrates how design-build education can foster meaningful connections between students, faculty, and the wider community. Beginning as a one-week charrette within two fourth-year architecture studios, the project launched the semester with purpose by partnering with CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates), a non-profit supporting foster children. Twenty-six students collaborated with faculty, staff, and community volunteers to design and construct a playhouse for CASA's annual fundraiser. After presenting their designs, students worked with community partners who donated materials, refining details and collectively bringing the project to life.

The resulting playhouse not only supported CASA's mission to provide healthcare and social services to foster children but also empowered students to see the tangible impact of their work. This design-build process strengthened ties between the university and the local community, showcasing how architecture can serve as a tool for advocacy and social change. By applying their skills to support the underserved, students experienced firsthand the transformative power of architecture to create spaces that embody care, collaboration, and purpose.

Aligned with the conference theme Empowerment through the Architecture of Performance, this project illustrates the potential of architectural education to inspire lifelong engagement and foster a sense of responsibility in future architects. Through this initiative, students learned to step up as community leaders, leveraging their talents to enact change and deepen their understanding of the role of architecture in building stronger, more inclusive communities.

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MALEVICH PLAYHOUSE

