



Presentation given by Cate Smith



Construction tour at a new Children's Mercy clinic

FEBRUARY: SOCIAL IMPACT & MENTAL HEALTH

Originally delayed by a winter storm, the February Pillars session persevered, bringing the group together at Children's Mercy Research Institute (CMRI) to explore how design shapes pediatric behavioral healthcare environments in Kansas City.

The day began with Catie Smith, Director of Planning and Design at CMH, presenting on Behavioral Healthcare and the Illuminate Campaign. She introduced various care models and key design strategies, emphasizing sensory-friendly elements for calming environments, privacy and security measures to protect patients and caregivers, and flexible design to accommodate evolving care needs.

Pillars then assembled Happy Kits for young patients before hearing from Donald "Scribe" Ross, a local artist whose murals at CMH demonstrate how art contributes to healing environments through storytelling and color.

The afternoon continued with a tour of CMH's Partial Hospitalization Program (PHP) Clinic, currently under construction. Catie Smith and Travis Lourens of Kelly Construction Group led the group through the space, discussing the importance of designing secure yet welcoming environments, balancing clinical functionality with patient comfort, and ensuring a smooth transition from construction to medical operations.

At The Children's Place, Ann Thomas (President & CEO) and Erin Nybo (Project Designer) shared how trauma-informed care models influence design. Their discussion focused on space planning for therapeutic support, asking the right questions early in design, and creating impactful spaces within budget constraints. They emphasized how the built environment can foster a sense of safety, stability, and routine for children who have experienced trauma. The conversation highlighted the importance of collaborating with clinicians, educators, and families to ensure that the space aligns with the needs of both the children and the professionals who care for them.

This session reinforced the critical role of design professionals in shaping supportive healthcare environments, highlighting the power of interdisciplinary collaboration in pediatric mental health care.



"A place where hurt finds hope" mural at the Children's Place