

Amani Center Expansion Project

The Amani Center

The Amani Center has seen a continued increase in the need for Child Forensic Assessment services in Columbia County. We have worked to expand services to children in our current space by working strategically and using technology to support expanded services. However, strategic reorganization alone cannot meet the existing demand for services to the community. The next critical phase is the addition of space for the Center's services to be offered.



Expansion Project Goals:



Reduce Trauma
Create additional trauma informed spaces



Safety/Security
Increase safety for Clients, Staff and Records



Accessibility
Make the building accessible and ADA Compliant.



Efficiency
Ensure staff have appropriate work spaces to meet client needs.



Confidentiality
Ensure the space complies with HIPAA rules and increases client privacy.

Why is this Important?

The Amani Center was founded in response to community need. We provide intervention and response services to child victims of: sexual assault, physical abuse, neglect, drug endangerment, witness to violence and other crimes. Without child abuse assessment services, children don't receive the support and medical care they need and are often further traumatized by the investigative and criminal justice processes.



Amani Center staff provide comprehensive, multi-disciplinary forensic interviews and medical assessments for children from birth to age 18. When appropriate, staff testify in court on behalf of the child. We provide children and non-offending family members/caregivers with support services, advocacy, referrals to community organizations and services, as well as compassionate trauma informed crisis support. The Amani Center is the only child abuse assessment center serving Columbia County.



“ It is wonderful to have a place for my child to express what has happened to them and get support for their future.
— Amani Center Client Feedback ”

Reduce Trauma

Currently, the Amani Center has only one space that is designed to provide trauma informed comfort to children and families. When we have a child or family here receiving services, no other clients in need of support are able to walk in our door and have a private and trauma informed space. We face this challenge on an almost daily basis. There is a significant need for additional space to support children and families privately and comfortably.



With only one family room for clients, we are forced to improvise and use what spaces we can. Families seeking services often have to discuss incredibly private matters in the administrative office. These offices are not designed for families and are far from the child-centered, trauma-informed environment for which we are known. When these circumstances occur, staff housed in the administrative space are asked to stop working and move from their desks while the client is assisted. Expanding the Amani Center will improve our quality of services, ability to serve more clients in our county, and the work efficiency of staff.



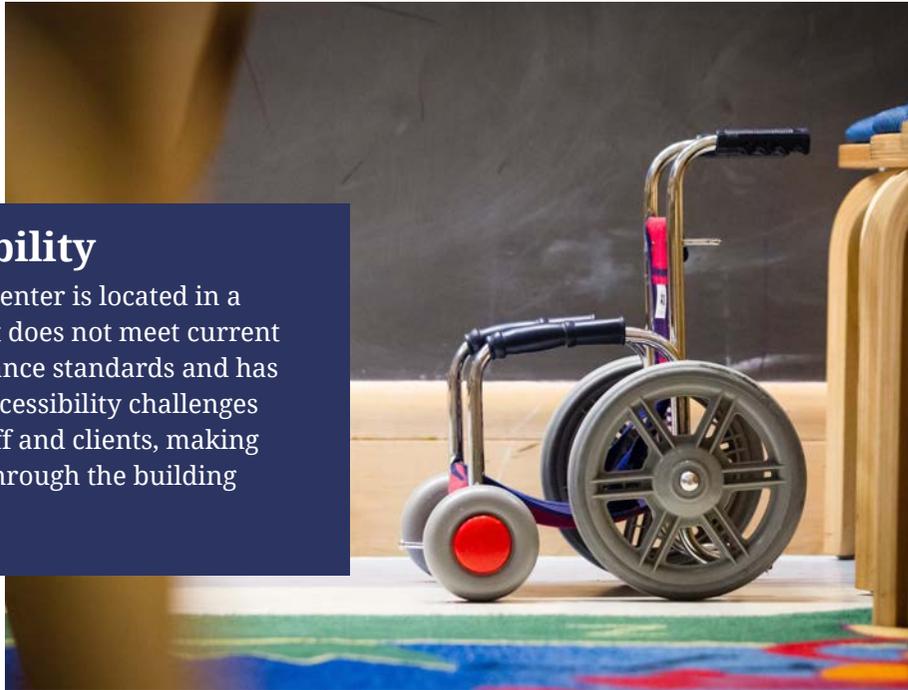
Safety and Security

The Amani Center is vulnerable to security threats. We work with high risk populations and are often a part of the investigation process for high profile or controversial cases that have left us the target of retaliatory behaviors. Our staff and clients face security risks due to the lack of a video security system, alarm system, secure locking solid doors throughout the entire building, and visibility issues at entry points.

The Center is responsible for the safety and security of clients, families, staff, guests and client records, which is difficult to achieve under current conditions. Improvements will provide for remote locking and unlocking of exterior doors, a secure entrance, video surveillance systems and a secured assessment area to preserve confidentiality and privacy.

Accessibility

The Amani Center is located in a building that does not meet current ADA compliance standards and has presented accessibility challenges for some staff and clients, making navigation through the building difficult.



The building expansion project will address accessibility gaps and include renovations to meet ADA building standards. This improves experiences for all clients, providing accessible parking, building entry access, level and durable floors throughout building, as well as bathroom upgrades.

Efficiency

The building expansion project will remedy cramped workspaces where as many as three staff members are housed in a single small office, a scenario repeated throughout the building. This will benefit both clients and staff, as it will reduce or eliminate worker displacement and spaces lacking in adequate seating for clients and families. It will increase privacy and comfort for families visiting the center in crisis.

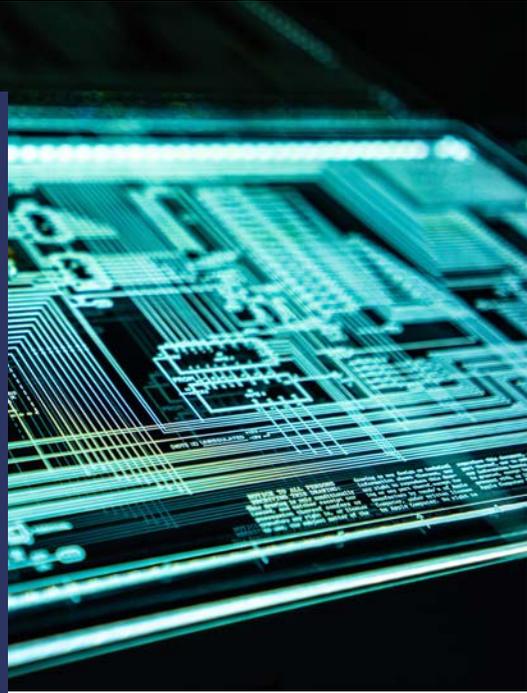
We experienced a greater number of intakes in 2019 than ever before and it has been challenging to provide a trauma-informed space for families in crisis, both over the phone, and in person. Combined workspaces are not conducive to low noise level during phone conversations, a sense of privacy, or the client's feeling of having the full attention of staff during the intake process and follow-up services.



Additionally, it is difficult to find space to conduct meetings and volunteer projects when families are receiving services. This drastically limits the business of the Amani Center when activities must be delayed until no families are on site. A dedicated space for assessments as well as administrative offices will increase organizational efficiency.

Confidentiality

The Amani Center has taken steps to ensure the safety and longevity of client records and to use electronic systems to work efficiently. This has led to an increased need for technology to support HIPAA security. Improvements to the building will provide physical space and room for “E-Storage” for the server that houses all client related records, images and recordings. The E-storage will also preserve the longevity and integrity of our data storage as it will address issues related to temperature and dust. Additional private workspaces will increase staff’s ability to comply with HIPAA’s rule for “minimum necessary” as it relates to information sharing.



Project Support & Progress



Leased the Space

The other half of the building we have occupied for more than a decade unexpectedly became available!



Donation of Engineering

Lower Columbia Engineering LLC has, to date, provided over \$18,000 in services, including creating our building plans.



Construction

We hope to begin construction in 2020 as the expansion and remodel are desperately needed.



Requests for Proposals

Seeking bids from contractors is the next step to assess the full cost of the project.



Seeking Funding

We are currently seeking capital support to allow us to move forward and complete the project.