

## AQSARNIIT\_A SAFE HOUSE FOR INUIT YOUTH IN NUNAVIK

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### // ABSTRACT .....

This project aims to design a Safe House for Nunavik Inuit youth. It consists of a physically and psychologically safe space, including a hybrid program of gathering and healing spaces as well as supplementary accommodation for temporary stays. In practical terms, the Safe House program offers day-long workshops on mental health, suicide prevention, leadership skills, home economics, etc., and during the night welcomes and nurtures children for whom it is not possible to return home. Some housing for women with children is also included in the project.

The public nature of institutional environments such as youth centers makes the perception of intimacy difficult. The familiar space becomes a hypothesis to create a real home that carries places of exchange to get in touch with oneself, others and its traditions. The mission of the project is to provide to young Inuit a moment of rest in a safe haven in support of a personal and collective identity quest. For Inuit youth, affirming their identity will enable them to mobilize, break cycles of violence, and define their aspirations.

### // OBJECTIVES AND CHALLENGES .....

- Provide a safe place, constantly supervised by qualified staff to gather, exchange, and share
- Consolidate family services to promote accessibility and multidisciplinary
- Develop a site in the heart of the village, in order to create a community pole
- Privilege open views to the bay and direct links to vegetation
- Develop a program outline that reflects the cultural aspirations of Inuit youth and development criteria that could serve as a starting point for broader reflection on this type of service

### // CONTEXT AND COLLABORATORS .....

The village of Puvirnituq was selected for the project, as several stakeholders in this community have already expressed interest in building a Safe House. The chosen site is on the edge of the water with views towards the territory and close to the school or sports facilities to facilitate the spontaneous use of youth.

During a visit to Inukjuak and Puvirnituq in February and March 2017, several professionals were met. Their relevant experiences in youth intervention and social services have helped to deepen certain aspects of the project. Among them :

- Maïna Beaulne, Coordinator of Prevention and Promotion Programs, Inuulitsivik Health Center
- Staff at the Inukjuak Girls Rehabilitation Center
- Women from the Saturviit training group in Puvirnituq

## // RESULTS AND SOLUTIONS .....

The project is set up around a circular shape creating a protected courtyard around which the Safe House and women's housing are articulated. The circle, which is significant in Inuit culture, is an echo of living together and sharing. The building was designed to protect the prevailing winds from the SW, as Inuit youth spend their evenings outdoors, both summer and winter. Attention was paid to the conservation of pedestrian trails through the project, in order to respond to Inuit travel patterns. The visual links between the different wings of the building contribute to the feeling of security.

At the program level, the quiet areas of rest (bedrooms, meeting rooms) are close to the living spaces (kitchen, dining room and living room). A complete wing is dedicated to family services; stakeholder offices, meeting rooms and a community hall. A prevention section for school groups can also be held in the meeting rooms. Near the center, six small supportive accommodations welcome women with their children as they recover from difficult situations.

Some subspaces were particularly interesting for the development of the project's intentions. First, the bedroom is a space reserved for the child where he can find himself alone to contemplate the landscape, daydream, and reflect. Separated by a corridor, acting as a buffer space, the bedrooms are protected from daily hubbub. This corridor could be a place for artistic expressions of young people in order to increase their sense of belonging. The porch in the yard offers a transition to the outdoor space. In response, the balcony of women's housing becomes a place of informal monitoring, when women settle in to discuss. The living space of the units overlooks the courtyard, helping to create a safe and comfortable play area.

The living space on two levels allows curious young people to see the action before taking part. On the mezzanine, we can chat in small groups, or play without being the center of attention. The kitchen, also open on two levels, like the living room, to allow the staff to involve the children in the preparation of the meals while keeping an eye on what happens in the areas of the bedrooms, on the ground floor or even upstairs.

At nighttime, the Safe House is intended to be a lantern that guides young people seeking a physical or psychological refuge. The name of the project, Arqsamiit, was inspired by the Northern Lights which guided the walkers in the night. The project has, as a guideline, the idea that it could be developed to benefit to all communities. The program could thus be adapted to the needs of each community. Some common development principles already established could guide the design of Safe House while leaving opportunities to promote the unique essence of each village.



*Vue de la cour intérieure*