

MONITOR

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COREY ANTHONY PHOTOGRAPHY

TEENAGE GETAWAY

HCA HealthONE Rocky Mountain Children's renovates vacant space into a welcoming retreat for teens and young adults

Lounge seating, gaming systems, and gathering zones accommodate various activities and patients' needs at the hospital's new teen lounge.



JUNE/JULY 2026 15



ABOVE: A custom bar-height activity table anchors the kitchenette and promotes inclusive use for teens with varying mobility needs. BELOW: The lounge's quiet zone features modular seating and side tables. The circular seating wall nook includes a plexiglass backing so volunteers and supervisors can maintain sightlines.

WHEN THE CHILD life team at HCA HealthONE Rocky Mountain Children's hospital in Denver evaluated its patient amenities, they identified a distinct gap in their offerings for a specific demographic: teenagers. "The hospital was geared toward infants and little children," says Cathy Sandoval, executive director and CEO at Rocky Mountain Children's Health Foundation (RMCHF; Arvada, Colo.), which supports special projects at the facility. While the hospital featured toddler-appropriate activities, waiting areas, and cartoon animal décor, Sandoval notes that "there wasn't anything to meet the needs of a teenager."

Although a teen lounge had long been a dream project for the hospital's child life team, a lack of available square footage stalled the initiative. That changed when a nonprofit organization vacated a space on the third floor. Seeing an opportunity, RMCHF began meeting with donors to share its vision. Shea's Village, a Cheyenne, Wyo.-based nonprofit that aids organizations caring for families battling critical childhood illnesses, stepped in to fund the project.

Renovation work kicked off in spring 2024. The hospital worked with architecture firm MCG Architecture (Denver) and interior design firm Re.dzine (Denver) to deliver the 759-square-foot teen lounge, which opened in March.

Before the renovation, the existing space lacked warmth, character, or a sense of comfort, says Heidi Mendoza, founder of Re.dzine. "The design intent was to reimagine it as a place within the hospital that didn't feel clinical," she says. To ensure the project successfully met the needs of adolescents, the child life team gathered input from patients. The resulting comprehensive wish list included a space for movie nights, gaming stations, a community table, and a dedicated Zen area for quiet time.

The project team then had to balance these desires with the hospital's safety requirements. For example, the lounge required a check-in desk to accommodate an adult volunteer, who needed to always be present in the room, alongside furnishings and materials that met the hospital's infection control standards.

MORE ONLINE: For the full article and additional images of the project, visit hcdmagazine.com/projects/rocky-mountain-childrens-teen-lounge.

16 JUNE/JULY 2026

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MONITOR

2 / 3

To address these operational needs, the volunteer desk is strategically located at the front of the lounge along the side wall, seamlessly blending in with its blue hue and curved frame. Healthcare-rated furniture, natural oak luxury vinyl tile flooring, and seating with plush pillows further reinforce the welcoming environment.

To support social connection and independence, the project team outfitted the multiuse lounge with modular seating, a pull-down wall screen for movies, and a kitchenette with snacks. Mendoza adds that it was important that the environment allowed for unobtrusive supervision of the teens. Cabinets near the kitchen space were replaced with a peninsula that demarcates the area without obscuring sightlines. Furthermore, biophilic design principles—such as a color palette of muted blues and greens and organic, curved forms—work to limit overstimulation, making the space more comfortable for neurodivergent patients.

Family and patient feedback on the new lounge has been positive since opening, Sandoval says, providing a much-needed haven for adolescents at the hospital. "This age group is often overlooked. They've outgrown the children's spaces," Mendoza adds. "They need independence and also supervision, but they don't want to feel like they're being supervised."

—Carrie Whitney, freelance writer



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