

PROJECT PROFILE

(Please limit answers to the space available on these pages)

Project Name Casa Rita
 Location E. 151st St., Bronx, New York
 Owner Women In Need, Inc.
 Project Use(s) Temporary residence for homeless women and children
 Project Size 54 beds (15 mothers Total Development Cost \$550,000.00
39 children)
 Application submitted by:
 Name Rita Zimmer
 Title Executive Director
 Organization Women In Need, Inc. (W.I.N.)
 Address 410 West 40th St., New York, NY 10018
 Telephone (212) 695-7330
 Signature Rita Zimmer

Organization	Key person*	Telephone
Public agencies <u>New York St. Div. of Social Services</u>	<u>Nancy Travers</u> Asst. Commissioner	<u>(212)433-2951</u>
Developer <u>Women In Need, Inc.</u>	<u>Rita Zimmer, Exec.</u> Dir.	<u>(212)695-7330</u>
Professional consultants		
Architect <u>Conrad Levenson, Architects and Planners</u>	<u>Conrad Levenson</u>	<u>(212)839-5100</u>
Landscape architect <u>City College School of Arch.</u>	<u>M. Paul Friedbury</u>	<u>(212)690-4113</u>
Urban designer <u>City College Arch. Center</u>	<u>Jonathan Ochshorn</u>	<u>(212)690-6751</u>
Planner <u>N.A.</u>		
Lawyer <u>Council of N.Y. Law Associates</u>	<u>Barbara Schatz</u>	<u>(212)219-1800</u>
Other <u>Interior Decorator</u>	<u>Virginia Frankel</u>	<u>(212)249-8474</u>
	<u>Fund Raiser</u>	<u>Annabel Nichols</u> <u>(212)695-7330</u>
Community group(s) <u>South Bronx Development Organiz.</u>	<u>Carolyn Gould</u>	<u>(212)402-1300</u>
Sponsor <u>Same as Developer</u>		

*Please attach an additional sheet, if necessary, to identify others who should be credited as having been instrumental in the development of this project.

1. Describe the characteristics of this project: the important aspects of the project's design, development, and public approval process. Indicate why these are exemplary.

Casa Rita is a transitional residence for homeless mothers and children who need shelter for an average of 6 to 8 months before securing permanent housing. Most of the over 4500 homeless families in New York City are female heads of household with an average of 3.7 children. Casa Rita was designed for the largest group of mothers between 18-25 years old with children under 6 years of age. Public and community leaders were valuable in identifying this need in the community and helpful in gaining a wider base of community and neighborhood support. When others who propose shelters meet local resistance it is almost always because the community leaders and constituents were not part of the process. Small family residences that meet a community need and fit into the scale of the neighborhood are welcomed and supported.

The design of the facility took into account the following: the young age of the mothers; the high number of infants and toddlers; the fact that many of the mothers had little experience living independently and were unaccustomed or unfamiliar with using community resources and referrals. Some of the ways we addressed these issues were: to develop as much common space as possible to facilitate networking, self-help, sharing similar tasks (i.e., laundry or cooking); cooperative child care; group problem solving and general communication during a day. The kitchen was designed to encourage learning or sharing cooking; swapping ideas of preparing food, etc.

The sleeping accommodations were designed to encourage the mothers to experiment with decorating, learning housekeeping skills, and identifying with their own space.

2. What were the significant dates of the project's development and when was it completed?

February 14, 1985 was one of the most significant dates in the project's development; it was the kick-off of a year long fund raising drive for Casa Rita. W.I.N. had no previous major fund raising experience and we were fortunate to have the support of a diversity of people from the theater industry to a Riverside Church Sunday school class that donated seeds for a garden patch.

We found the site in November 1984; were awarded a \$159,000 Homeless Housing Assistance Grant from New York State Department of Social Services in July 1985, which is also when construction began. On May 13, 1986 Matilda Cuomo presided over our open house festivities. On September 1, 1986 we received our Certificate of Occupancy and families started moving in. The most special day though was when the first baby was born December 24, 1986--to a previously homeless teenager who was welcomed home by 14 other moms and their kids.

3. What urban issues did this project address? Were there important associated issues that this project did not address?

The major urban issue this project addressed is the enormous lack of suitable emergency housing for homeless families. We've also shown that working with neighborhood groups, community boards and organizations to deal with the homelessness issue can produce successful results.

This project provides emergency shelter, not permanent housing. However we hope our visibility and activity in the community will lead to a wider discussion of the fact that affordable decent housing for poor people is not available.

4. Describe the financing for the project. Was there something particularly unique or innovative about it?

We believe the funding for Casa Rita was indeed unique. This was W.I.N.'s first major fund raising effort; it lasted over 2 years and involved all the members of the Board of Directors, theater industry and volunteers, staff, and homeless families. Money was raised from a wide variety of sources and events ranging from raffling Torneau watches; theater benefits; foundation grants, individual gifts; neighborhood bazaars; corporate contributions; and public grants to donated appliances, rugs, and floor tiling.

We believe the combination of public and private sectors pulling together to create a community family center is unique. It was especially helpful because the private funding made it possible to get construction underway despite the fact that the public money didn't arrive until construction was nearly complete.

5. What were the goals of this project? How well were they met?

The goals of this project were:

- To demonstrate that a small grass-roots not-for-profit organization could plan, design, fund and operate a community based shelter.
- To open a family center for 16 homeless families in a South Bronx neighborhood.
- To develop a design model for a small shelter that could be financially supported and could be replicated reasonably.
- To establish a program of supportive and referral services geared to empowering women and children, promoting emotional strength and economic independence.

W.I.N. believes the first 3 have been met already--many groups interested in operating shelters, visit Casa Rita to look at its design; talk and train with our staff; discuss our financing and operational plan. We hope the 4th goal is an ongoing one and is evidenced by the number of mothers back in school, children in enrolled day care and families located in permanent housing.

6. Why does this project merit The Rudy Bruner Award for Excellence in the Urban Environment?

It is a very exciting project. Inside it is bright, cheerfully painted and decorated, warm and convenient. Outside, the project has contributed to general improvement in the neighborhood. Casa Rita meets the desperate need of the more than 4500 homeless families in New York City for a safe, decent place to stay until they find a permanent apartment.

Casa Rita was designed with the community in mind, meets a neighborhood need and provides hope for the individual family. In two words--It Works.

AWARD USE

If this project were selected for the award, describe how the recipients would use the award money. Propose a rough budget and describe how this will further your goals. Include in your description, if you wish, how the presentation of the award will be incorporated into the event or project that you propose. While this information will not be a criterion in the selection process and will not be shared with the Selection Committee, it will help inform the Foundation about the continuing interest of the project team in promoting urban excellence.

The award money would be used in the following ways at Casa Rita - the site submitted for the Rudy Bruner award by Women In Need, Inc. (WIN):

Students from CCNY School of Landscape Architecture competed in designing the backyard. The winner selected by a panel of expert judges is willing to supervise construction this summer. The estimated costs are \$15,000 which includes construction and equipment. The award money would go to build the playground. We have an average of 38 children (1 mo. to 16 years of age) and 16 mothers. The playground was designed with this versatility in mind and would be easily used for family picnics, barbecues and baseball games. Included are gardening and flower spots where families or individuals can relax or read or chat.

The second use of the award money would be to build a partition in the counseling office. The staff who use the office have no privacy which makes it more difficult for counseling or private meetings or just simple relaxation during the working day.

Both of these uses of the award money would enhance and expand the use of the space at Casa Rita - both for the families and the staff. Both of these areas were designed into the space at the initial stages of planning, however, were not included when the costs became prohibitive and funds were needed elsewhere in the building.

I can imagine having a presentation ceremony in the playground with hopefully some flowers blooming and perhaps a barbecue in the planning. Families, friends, neighbors and supporters of WIN would be part of the presentation and the celebration.

Proposed Budget: (rough)

Playground: \$15,000 estimated Fall 1986 -

Includes digging up and replanting, or blacktopping an area approximately 200' x 45'. The plans call for multiple small play or rest areas for various age children or adults. It includes a barbecue area and gardening and flower spaces. The construction would be supervised by the CCNY Landscape student who won the design competition on the space.

Partition: \$4,000 to \$5,000 -

We would build 1 full (floor to ceiling) and 2 cubicle type partitions 5 or 6' high. Estimated \$4,000 to \$5,000. Includes some electrical work, plastering and painting.

Project Name Casa Rita

Location 284 East 151st Street, Bronx, New York 10451

Applicant Name Women In Need, Inc. (WIN)