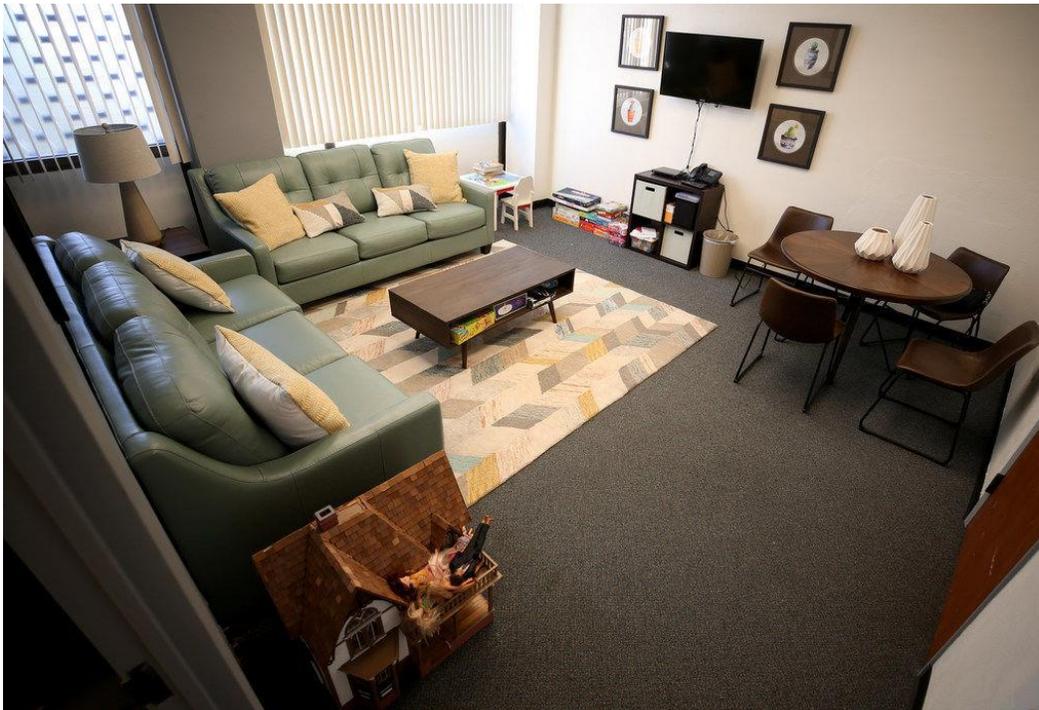


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Crime victims now have serene space to retreat to at Pima County Superior Court

By Jessica Blackburn For the Arizona Daily Star Nov 8, 2017 Updated 16 hrs ago



The remodeled respite room at the Pima County Superior Court building has new chairs, tables and couches. Kelly Presnell / Arizona Daily Star

Pima County Superior Court recently received an upgrade to its old respite room, giving crime victims a more relaxing place to go during times of stress.

“The respite room here in the superior court is for victims and survivors who are attending court hearings, trials and going through the criminal justice system,” said Vanessa Helms, the newly appointed director of the Pima County Attorney’s Office Victim Services Division. “It’s a place for them to talk in private with an advocate, or whoever, so they don’t have to meet in the hallway and they’re not forced to go outside.”

The former respite room didn’t have “a very relaxing feel,” she said.

The project to remodel the room started thanks to a survivor who spent a year using the respite room himself.

“It was an absolutely fine room before, but it was just a little bit dated and had random furniture stuffed in there,” Helms said. “People didn’t mind, but the survivor had an eye for design.”

He also had some connections with Sam Levitz and everything from then on fell into place, according to Helms.

Because the county attorney’s office isn’t able to accept donations, Homicide Survivors, Inc., a nonprofit that helps families of murder victims and works closely with Victim Services, was able to accept the donation.

“(Homicide Survivors) worked with the county attorney’s office to collaborate with the ... facilities department to get access to renovate the room,” Helms said.

Krisanne LoGalbo, a superior court spokeswoman, said she was impressed with the changes made, noting the atmosphere of the room had improved.

Helms recalled that the process seemed almost impossible in the beginning.

“I wish I could show you a before,” she said. “At first we were kind of like, ‘oh this isn’t going to happen,’ but then the doors just opened and everybody was so accommodating.”

Sam Levitz gave a set of furniture from one of its showrooms, which consisted of chairs, tables and couches with a blue-green and white theme, and some of their partnered contractors donated the art, consisting of desert flora.

Helms attributed the successful remodel to the collaboration between Homicide Survivors and the county attorney’s office.

“It’s just a room, so it doesn’t seem like a big deal,” she said. “But when people are utilizing the room, they’re going through what is likely the most traumatizing experience in their life.”

She added that color, texture and scent make a difference, even if it’s subconscious, and they can be triggers for people who are experiencing trauma.

“We want to be able to provide some elements of peace and calm in what otherwise is a very traumatic, highly emotional and stressful situation,” she said. “This is why it’s so important to have the room match that. It’s like a piece of home in this foreign environment that is the courthouse, which can be sterile and stressful.”