

# Drexel's Autism Institute goes mobile

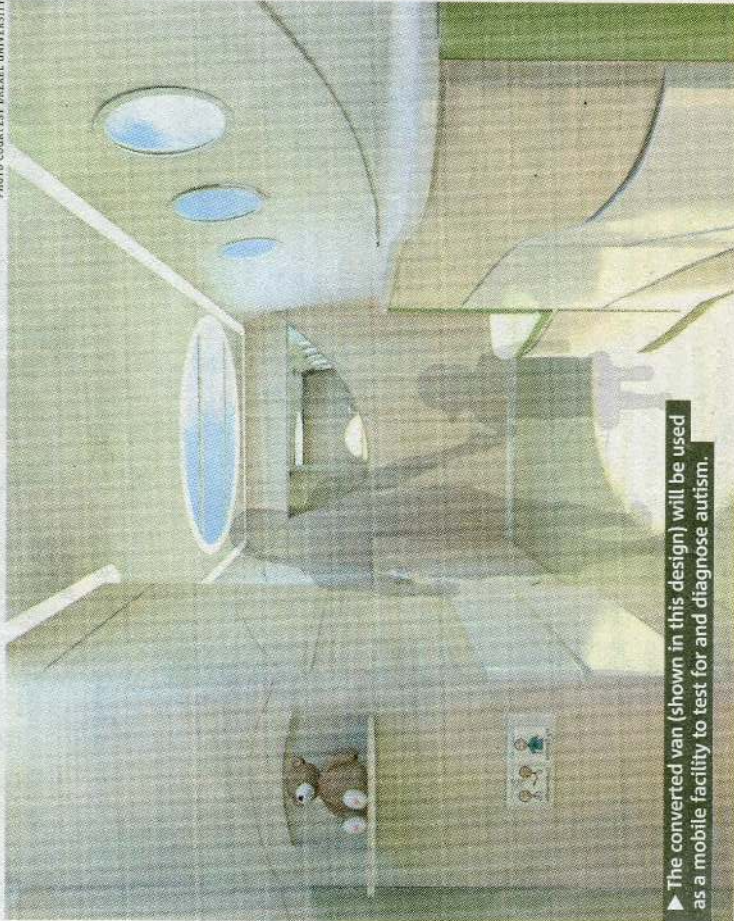


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► The converted van (shown in this design) will be used as a mobile facility to test for and diagnose autism.

► Drexel students design a mobile unit to deliver autism testing to under-served local communities

The newly established A.J. Drexel Autism Institute of Drexel University — the first institute in the country to treat autism as a public health issue — is working on plans to put Philadelphia's first mobile autism unit on the road. The converted van will be used for testing and diagnosis, with the intention of getting help to currently underserved communities.

When it came time to find designers for the van conversion, the institute kept it in the family: They turned to students at the university's Westphal College of Media Arts and Design. D.S. Nicholas, an assistant teaching professor in the Department of Architecture and Interiors, was tapped to teach an interdisciplinary course tasked with coming up with design proposals.

"The students were given a brief listing of all the things the bus needs, articles about autism and a video of an actual assessment happening," Nicholas explains. "In addition, the van manufacturer came to campus, bringing an uncustomized van that the students could measure and photograph."

The students worked in teams of three to develop plans for a van that could be used in a variety of ways, including both one-on-one counseling and as a



PHOTO COURTESY DREXEL UNIVERSITY

► Yoshie Takeo, Grace Lam and Alexis Siriani pose in front of their winning design concept.

## Team 'worked well together'

The winning design was submitted by interior design students Alexis Siriani and Yoshie Takeo and graphic design student Grace Lam.

"We worked well together as a team," Siriani explains,

"since we each have a different expertise."

In Siriani's case, that includes her experience as a pediatric physical therapist for the past 13 years. She has returned to school at Drexel to gain skills in improving accessibility in both public and private spaces for children with special needs.

**"I'm really proud of all of the students. They came up with creative strategies for meeting the institute's needs."**

NICHOLAS



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