

ADOLESCENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

THEIR PERCEPTIONS AND NEEDS INFLUENCING SUPPORTIVE INTERIOR DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE

Prepared by Diane Kitchell & Victoria Hearn

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is two-fold for readers who are interested in designing or researching architectural spaces that assist youth populations who are experiencing homelessness. First, it will define the nature and select aspects of adolescent (youth) homelessness, necessary so as to better understand their needs and perspectives. Secondly, this report will discuss and offer recommendations for the applied design of these places so that such environments attend to and supportively impact the needs of adolescents. Information here is relevant to the design of diverse building types including emergency shelter, supportive housing, day centers and to a degree, mobile services. Diverse voices are included here that share the points of view of designers, program directors and psychologists, and a project case study illustrates key points.

To understand the needs of young people in terms of housing and related spaces, it is vital to understand the causes, consequences and experiences of youth homelessness. While the needs of youth can vary greatly across and even within various countries, (as can their specific biographies), looking at ideas and responses from an international perspective can enhance new research on potential solutions (Gaetz, 2018). Accordingly, this report is authored by two experts with complementary

backgrounds and knowledge that span the United States and New Zealand, two similarly high socio-economic countries. Diane Kitchell is an interior designer, educator and researcher from Chicago, Illinois who brings to this report her practitioner and researcher experience regarding the design of interiors and related spaces. Victoria Hearn is a social worker and homeless youth advocate. Her front-line experiences assisting youth in New Zealand show the deep thought necessary for planning the unique built spaces serving this population.

It is the intent of this report that the research-supported recommendations offered here assist support organizations, interior designers and architects with tangible ideas they can take to a project's drawing board, while also making apparent the supportive impact interior design elements can have. **Text that describes specific recommended design actions are shown in bold.**

DEFINING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Youth homelessness is a complex social issue that exists world-wide. Oliveira and Burke (2009) define the adolescent period as one of profound biopsychosocial development, embodying “Identity formation, the quest for autonomy and independence, and transformations in family and peer relationships, emerging cognitive abilities, and socioeconomic factors interact and affect the adolescent’s thoughts, feelings, and behavior”. Adolescence is a formative period in one’s life in any normal situation. Being homeless during this period can significantly impact the formation of these essential developmental abilities.

A definition of the homeless population as well as an understanding of how many of these persons are adolescents can help further define this at-risk population. Persons experiencing homelessness are a hidden population, and as such they are difficult to quantify in number. Counts vary, but approximately 553,000 people in the United States have no shelter every night, with half of these in the 50 largest cities around the U.S., primarily California and New York (HUD, 2018). Street youth, also called unaccompanied homeless youth, make up about 36,000 of that population and 89% are between the ages of 18 and 24 who for various reasons are not in a shelter (HUD, 2018). About forty percent of all unaccompanied youth were women

or girls, with 1% identifying as transgender. Nearly half of this population are white, with 33% listed as African American and then mixed races at lesser percentages. Additionally, some youth have their own children to care for. In fact, youth between the ages of 18 and 24 who are parents themselves accounted for 61% of all people in families with children in 2018 (HUD, 2018).

In New Zealand, indigenous peoples are over-represented in the homeless population. Severely housing deprived people ages 15 to 24 numbered over 11,000 nationally in 2019, with close to 6,000 in the city of Auckland alone. Many youths are also “couch surfing,” making it even more difficult to discern just how many are experiencing homelessness at a given moment. In New Zealand, youth homelessness is often referred to as “hidden in plain sight” for this very reason.

Canada’s national survey also identified that indigenous as well as LGBTQ youth are also overrepresented in their homeless population when compared to their average population numbers (Gaetz, 2018). In general, unsheltered youth have diverse characteristics such as suffering from mental illness, have disabilities, or are questioning their sexual identities. They can be victims of circumstances such as physical or sexual violence, substance abuse, or poverty.

Causes & Consequences of Homelessness

Why do adolescents choose homelessness over housing? Evidence suggests that oftentimes it is not a choice at all. An ethnographic study on youth sub-culture found that multiple risk factors are associated with youth homelessness that include family conflict, leaving foster care, running away or being thrown away, or physical or sexual abuse. Family conflict arising from coming out to parents as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning one's sexual identity can lead to youth homelessness as well (Oliveira & Burke, 2009). A fear of adults can also prompt youth to choose living on the street instead of in a shelter.

Dak Kopec, environmental psychology author, designer and educator has experience researching and designing for this population across the U.S. In an interview for this report, Kopec remarked that the behaviors and subsequent needs of youth populations experiencing homelessness vary from region to region, and that the homeless youth often gravitate to places they perceive as having people more like them. In his experience, the sunbelt areas are popular such as Miami, Las Vegas and Los Angeles that can draw them into prostitution to earn money. In Portland and Seattle, drug addiction can be a unifying bond. Kopec notes that young homeless groups often reject normative conventions and gravitate to their own design standards. For example, one group of young people in Oakland, California rejected scenes of nature and preferred graffiti art. Ostensibly, the graffiti is something they could control whereas nature and nature views are seen as the domain of privileged youth.

Advisory Board Member Perspective: Eric Kitchell

Eric Kitchell is an advocate for youth homelessness support and serves as the associate board president for Covenant House Illinois. He has participated in Sleepout in Chicago, spending a cold night in November on the street as a fundraiser to promote awareness to the cause. An interview with Kitchell conveys some of his thoughts on the issue and shows the history and challenges of serving this elusive population.

Q: What is the history of service for this population in your area?

We really strive to improve the services we offer. Chicago was greatly lacking services, with only a few providers in the city limits for a number of years. Covenant House Illinois partners with organizations like Casa Norte and CARA to help eradicate youth homelessness in Chicago.

Q: What causes the youth population you assist to be homeless and what are their stories?

I was surprised to learn that more often than not, youth homelessness is not a choice, it is often placed upon youth due to circumstances beyond their control. The most common cases I've heard from the youth themselves are LTBG awareness/coming out, losing one or both parents, or parental job loss. Sadly, most homeless youth I speak with come from disadvantaged economic backgrounds or broken families or gang infested neighborhoods.

Q: How would you describe their state of mind and behaviors?

Homeless youth generally go unnoticed on the streets of major cities because they are scared and often don't have the 'street smarts' to know where to go to get help. They frequently jump from room to room, house to house, train car to train car every day to escape their situation.

Youth experiencing homelessness can struggle with self-perceptions that can lead to negative choice-making, according to Kopec. The big issues for homeless youth are maintaining positive self-esteem, and conversely the propensity to see themselves in a negative light. Many young people who lack shelter do not understand the value of their body and engage in self-medication with street drugs. This may be a coping mechanism response to depression, feelings of guilt and low self-esteem, or to deal with symptoms related to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from past events. There is evidence that street life for adolescents can be a significant hazard. For example, being homeless for prolonged periods of time can negatively affect the brain and neurochemical and hormonal responses.

Establishing a life after exiting homelessness for an adolescent person is not always easy. For example, a Canadian study showed that young people were often committed to transitioning out of their homeless situation but faced adverse environmental conditions during the first year, such as difficulty integrating into their new community and a decline in their sense of hope (Kidd, Frederick, Karabanow, Hughes, Naylor & Barbic, 2015). For others youth, street life offers them more perceived comfort and care than entering a program that can conclude their homelessness, in part because their former habits and street families offered connections and solace that were difficult to sever. In the words of this study's investigators, "...the street may have been the only positive family unit they trusted, and thus, they were reluctant to leave" (Oliviera & Burke, 2009).

In New Zealand similar conditions exist. Rejection from family members and service organizations, lack of emotional support from family or religious groups and

paperwork application barriers are the reality of homeless youth. Turning 17 in New Zealand is a point where child services end. Some youth have their possessions stolen, living in residential garages, and turn to drugs or survival sex for a way to make money. Generally, once homeless, a youth's housing instability continues, mental health and addictions worsen, and he/she/they are increasingly exposed to trauma-inducing criminal victimization.

The culture of youth homelessness

A study by two nursing researchers followed 19 homeless youth over a period of 18 months to better understand their cultural bonds and practices. Oliviera and Burke (2009) found that the youths developed brands and adopted an identity to fit in with a variety of established categories such as 'freaks', 'grunge', 'taggers', 'Goths', 'punks', 'skinheads', 'hippies', 'wannabe thugs', 'vampires', 'hitchhikers', or 'squatters'. Each group had distinct tastes in music as well as clothing, hair, accessories, and similar features creating a brand identity. Music was one of the most important identifiers of these identity categories.

Designer perspective: Tom Marquardt, Marquardt+

Tom Marquardt is a principal at Marquardt+, a Chicago-based interdisciplinary design practice and branded environments firm. He notes that in order to develop a program and effective design for the youth population, one should start by determining the pain points (those areas that inflict negative reactions) and successes in addition to the functional needs before designing a space. Marquardt has noticed the priority youth place on branding themselves. This psychological journey can be translated into designing program spaces to support social interaction, contemplation, and personalization as expressed through space planning, interior architecture, furniture, materials and color. He notes that service providers need to suspend convention about interior space and open up to what is possible within a space, especially with limited funds. See the reference to the "Youthscape" youth center in the further reading section.

PATHWAYS OUT OF HOMELESSNESS

U.S. adolescent housing experiences

Providing effective pathways that help youth exit a homeless existence depends on a contextual understanding their perspectives that can influence thoughtful architectural program decision-making.

One of the unique and complex factors when designing facilities for young people exiting homelessness is remembering that not only is it a huge transition to go from homeless to housed, but young people are also having to navigate the transition from adolescence to adulthood. This brings with it its own challenges. Kidd, Frederick, Karabanow, Hughes, Naylor, and Barbic (2015) remark that “for many, facing a shift in identity and meaning of life outside of homelessness meant facing the challenges of rebuilding an ability to trust other people and address years of traumatic experience that readily challenged mental health and a sense of wellness and efficacy.”

For some young people, moving from the streets into supportive accommodation may be the first time they have lived in a place independently. An emergency shelter, transitional housing program or permanent supportive housing program must plan for and accommodate youths’ fear factor. In order to earn their trust, this approach must be “...grounded in an authentic human connection focused on genuine caring, mutual respect, enduring patience, and a willingness to work

together to create a safe environment in which to learn from life experiences” (Oliviera & Burke, 2009). Notes the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, “the more a participant feels like their case manager cares about them and works to support their needs and preferences, the more likely the youth will succeed. Hiring staff who can empathize with youth while maintaining professional boundaries is important” (HUD exchange, 2018).

Interior functional space needs vary and emerge from the sponsoring support organization’s programs and policies. Some common program elements include

- **Health care services**
- **Counseling services for mental well-being and related information sharing**
- **Housing location services**
- **Education and training classrooms**
- **Job training classrooms**
- **Food services**
- **Restrooms with showers**
- **Day areas for hanging out**

Literature and research on the programmatic and architectural needs families as well as victims of domestic

violence offer further informative points on policies and rules that relate to adolescents, with architectural ramifications. See Appendices 1 and 2. Rutledge (2015) has noted that

- Setting rigid schedules for laundry, eating, and chores can make life inflexible and even oppressive.
- Staff overseeing discipline of children that overrides parental control can cause conflicts in families. Parenting youth need to have the ability to constantly supervise their children.
- Older children are prone to feeling oppressed or patronized. **Conditions that lack privacy and offer inadequate storage** may be particularly vexing to some.
- Summertime may be a particularly challenging time to assist youths who are attending school because needs such as free breakfast and the availability of needed counseling services.

These points begin to illustrate the complexity of designing both workable policies and accompanying physical environments for persons in crisis. Also complicating this situation is that the availability of facilities and beds that specifically accommodate adolescents are rare in the United States. According to the U.S Housing and Urban Development agency, there were 24,089 beds targeted to unaccompanied youth and families with youth parents across the United States in 2018, 12,000 less than the 36,000 the conservative estimate of need indicates (see Appendix 3). At the time of this writing, HUD is developing a program called Rapid Rehousing of Youth that will help youth secure permanent housing, assist with finance and rental concerns and provide case management to aid youths' need for a sense of community, education and employment needs (HUD exchange, 2018).

New Zealand adolescent housing experiences

Much like the United States, the number of housing and support services available to young people experiencing homelessness is far less than number of young people that need a safe place to stay. It is only in the last five years in Auckland that organisations have started to invest in specific youth accommodation. This accommodation is what would be described as transitional and supportive accommodation where young people can live for a period of time whilst receiving the necessary supports to become independent and finding more permanent places to live. These types of services require referrals and assessments and they are not usually accessible immediately. There is no emergency accommodation or night shelter for those under the age of eighteen.

The New Zealand strategic objectives to end youth homelessness encompass a range of potential solutions along a spectrum of interaction points including access to services, prevention support and identification, leadership, engagement funding and infrastructure, and housing and supports. Housing and supports focuses on emergency, transitional and affordable housing, and associated resources and programs for youth. It is centrally important that those exiting homelessness have safe, stable and affordable accommodation. Having a safe place to live is commonly accepted as one of the foundations needed to be able to attend school or training programmes and gain employment.

In the view of these authors, **there is only one way to truly understand youth homelessness and that is to speak to young people themselves who have**

been there. Only then can potential solutions to the causes of youth homelessness be identified along with opportunities to coordinate pathways out of it. For example, a community collective youth voice group was formed in Auckland that gathered insights from youth focus groups and interviews. The youth voice group shared concerns about the lack of safe, affordable available housing, fear and distrust of services, and lack of options for gender diverse youth. They also identified the lack of both after-hours support and holistic care in general. They also mentioned ideas for changes that included a place to crash someplace warm, get a meal, and wash their clothes. One youth participant noted, “the support I want is to have furniture, like beds, fridge, washing machine and a TV. All the things to get started with at first to settle in like cleaning products and food” (Hearn, 2019). The information gathering process yielded some specific lessons about the New Zealand youth population and their built environment needs.

- Ground floor levels are not as desirable as **upper floors with outside balconies**. This is because residents find it easier to either pretend they’re not home when other street-based youth come around pressuring them to let them in.
- **Security cameras and monitored hallway spaces** provide for safety as well as prevention from illegal activities around the facility.
- **Outdoor balconies** provide a transition from the outside to potentially claustrophobic interior spaces, allowing for a gradual moving indoors, and eventually into a bedroom space.
- **Three-seat sofas are omitted** from lounges as they become an open invitation for others to stay overnight, and make it difficult for the young person to say no (which would breach their tenancy).

- **Communal spaces with access to technology, educational resources as well as staff** help residents from feeling alone.
- **Too big of an individual space can create pressure** for youth residents to keep it clean.

Designer perspective: Lou Raia

Maybe the best design solution for youth experiencing homelessness is not a shelter at all. This is the conclusion of Lou Raia, Chicago architect and educator. Raia senses that asking “can good design really help these kids?” has no easy answer, and that the larger question of “can design solve social issues?” is the better question. This observation points to what is potentially the true objective of built space: to change its users’ experiences and confront their hurdles. Raia observes from his design experience that a lot of homeless youth don’t want to come in at night, as shelters are not secure, and they would have to leave their belongings or pets behind. Others find it difficult to be around other people. In Chicago, there has been a progression of issues that have evolved from a focus on HIV and towards providing access to healthcare to the LGBTQ and the African American populations.

One driver of policies and built environments is acknowledging and planning for the 24-hour cycle street-based youths live their lives around. Drop-in day centers such as The Center on Halsted in Chicago provide food and snacks and an array of services for both seniors and youth. Some youth hang out here as a place they see as safer than their own front porches. Noting that many homeless do not want to exit homelessness, Raia also discussed the success of a mobile 365 night a year, dependable service that offers night ministries run by non-denominational professionals. The service offers assistance with AIDs testing, healthcare, providing referrals to mental health programs and generally filling in the gaps of life on the streets.

Three stages of youth exiting homelessness

Exiting a period of homelessness for a youth is not a simple destination, but rather a process of arriving at an evolved understanding and way of thinking that affects their perspective as well as their resulting choices and actions. Kidd, et al. (2015) identify three stages of youth exiting homelessness, calling them 1) marginal stability, 2) stable but stuck, and 3) gaining momentum. Each stage has different risks to returning to the streets.

1. Marginal stability stage

In this stage, despite some engagement of supports and movement towards stability, youth face both individual barriers and structural hurdles that can readily undermine efforts. For example, continued engagement with street friends present a barrier to success. Obtaining identification and the difficulty in obtaining education and employment information are structural barriers. There are numerous influences drawing a youth back to their familiar street life at this stage.

2. Stable but stuck stage

Youth have obtained a basic level of stability and the risks of homelessness are less immediate. However, young people can feel hopeless and stalled in trying to achieve employment and education. They may be motivated and committed, but still encounter hurdles like limited benefits and archaic, ineffective procedures that complicate their independence.

3. Gaining momentum stage

Youth are experiencing some tangible successes in larger life goals. A sense of hope permeates the individual, and yet challenges relating to their past may continue to accompany them, such as a criminal record and the cumbersome process of having these details expunged from their record.

The Kidd, et al. (2015) study looked at positive ways to prevent youth from cycling back into homelessness. They found that supported housing may provide youth better integration into a positive community, heightened quality of life and enhanced mental health when compared to independent housing. This finding suggests that effective support for exiting homelessness involves built environment, but spaces alone are not the answer. Programs and human support are necessary components as well.

A helpful future research project might identify built environment designs and features that attend to each of Kidd et al.'s three stages. For example, architectural designs that allow for both independence and choices in how to engage would be helpful for clients in the gaining momentum stage. However, there is helpful guidance from fields ancillary to architecture and interior design that can inform applied design ideas generally, discussed below.

DESIGN INSIGHTS FROM ALLIED FIELDS

Information on designing to address the challenges of homelessness is a bit of an orphan sector of knowledge, yet allied fields such as behavioral health design and psychology have much to offer to this topic. It should be acknowledged that the findings generated from behavioral healthcare design research are only in their beginning stages (Shepley & Pasha, 2013). In general, there is much work to be done in confirming the findings of existing research and also engaging in further studies that fill in the many knowledge gaps that exist. Nonetheless, findings and guidelines from some of these fields that offer potential guidance are provided below, organized from general to specific. **Recommendations that describe specific design actions are shown in bold.**

Healthcare Design

The Planetree Model

The Planetree approach to environmental design improves patient experiences in hospital environments and may translate to the kind of healing environment a transitional housing or shelter can offer. This holistic healthcare philosophy focuses on the patient and provides guidance to create a relationship-based environment.

Planetree has identified nine elements of a relationship-based care philosophy, which places the patient at the

center of the relationship. These are

1. human interaction,
2. consumer and patient education
3. healing partnerships with the patient's family and friends,
4. food and nutritional nurturance,
5. spirituality,
6. human touch,
7. healing arts and visual therapy,
8. integration of complementary therapies, and
9. healing environments created in the architecture and design of the healthcare setting (Stichler, 2008).

In the view of this report's authors, the look and culture of the Planetree model has overall benefits for both services and programs offered to clients by the staff of homeless shelters and transitional housing facilities. Planetree also offers specific selected design strategies for the mind, body and spirit that are relevant to the adolescent population (Stichler, 2008):

Healing design elements for the mind include

- **Views to nature** that can reduce stress
- **Interactive art** can offer positive distractions

Healing design elements for the body include

- **Visual access from staff areas** that can enhance protection of the staff from hostile visitors
- **Respite rooms** for both staff and clients that can give someone a moment to step away and breathe
- For residents, common areas with **comfortable lighting, natural materials, and pleasing artwork** that offer welcoming messages and a homelike environment
- **Clear wayfinding** through corridors that reduces disorienting newcomers to the space. Garden-like spaces are restorative
- Healing therapies such as healing touch, aroma therapy, art therapy, and pet therapy
- Nutrition is important. **Providing comfort food** baked by volunteers sends a message of respect and care
- Self-care spaces such as **adequately sized and accessible bathrooms and showers** that promote good hygiene
- **Desk areas** that allow residents to stay connected with technology
- Restful spaces that can promote healing by providing **individual lighting, thermal and noise controls** where possible in individual quarters

Healing design elements for the spirit include spaces to enhance and refresh the mind such as

- Quiet **retreat spaces such as indoor and outdoor gardens.**
- Access to staff as well as **sacred spaces for prayer, meditation, visualization, and rituals.**
- **Calming music** that can affect mood and emotions.

Psychology and Social Work

Trauma-informed care

Trauma-informed care is a therapy movement in psychological and social work that acknowledges the role of strife and adversity as a significant influence in a person's behaviors and perceptions. Unlike past authoritarian treatment approaches that were characterized by top-down directives from authority figures, trauma-informed care prioritizes peer support, personal empowerment and choice, engaging people in their own emergence from crisis (Hopper, Bassuk & Olivet, 2009). Several meta-analyses and research studies have explored the built environment's relationship and potential contribution to the philosophy of trauma-informed care. Below are a selection of these points that may be relevant to youth populations, with applied suggestions inferred by the authors.

- **Keeping the space plan intuitively easy to navigate** may help youth who are highly distracted because of the many survival-level concerns they are dealing with (Mullinaithan & Shafir, 2013). All youth clients will be new to the space as they begin their engagement with a facility. Open space plans can help.
- Minimize the potential for territoriality by existing residents by **keeping corridors wide and avoiding the placement of seating** that allows for obvious people-watching or pinch points. (Burn, 1992).
- Promote transparency and trust by **using reception desk designs that keep staff and residents at eye level with each other.** This reduces the sense of heavy authority (Shepley & Pasha, 2013).
- Offer a **variety of sizes of activity spaces** that

are well-sized to their function. Some spaces with lowered ceilings can help people relax and get to know each other better and are less intimidating (Shepley & Pasha, 2013).

- In public lounge areas, ease the sense of exposure and let clients control the degree of engagement by **offering options such as high-sided chairs, bookcases that break up spaces into smaller-capacity seating areas, or wall niches** that provide a sense of enclosure (Petrovich 2017).

Kopec also recommends features that are aligned with the tenets of trauma-informed care such as supporting positive reflection and self worth. In Kopec's view, youth using shelters are usually not cut out for street life. Nonetheless, it's important to introduce demands on them slowly.

- There is a need for **private territory, including lockable secure spaces**.
- A **hangout café** can provide an opportunity for youth clients to take on responsibilities for its operation, plus centralize the role of food, which street youth highly prize.
- A **clothing resource** can provide youth with items that help preserve their hygiene and comfort.

Technology

Just like housed youth do, youth experiencing homelessness often use social media and maintain a significant presence in the digital world. **Youth have phones that need to be charged, and require access to WIFI, computers, and the internet** to check their SNAP benefits and food stamp balance, for example (FRESHEBT, 2019). Digital media may be the only link that youth have to friends and family to let them know that they are okay.

Psychologist perspective: Dr. Jill A. Miller

A psychologist explains steps she has taken to customize a juvenile detention facility to accommodate her youth clients and an art project that impacted the space's ambience.

From Jill Miller's viewpoint in the Northwest Indiana juvenile facility where she oversees youth detention, her patients are not necessarily voluntarily coming to her. In fact, she feels that she has them for such a short period of time that when they do come in, she needs to provide a healing environment. Her office and therapy room have a sofa, music, a massage chair, and low lighting, (the only low lighting anywhere within the detention center's secure side). She does not use aromatherapy, as smells can trigger unwanted trauma reactions. The staff also uses the therapy space as a respite room. Miller notes that staff also need a space when working within a secure facility. With upholstered furniture, this space is the only area within the detention center that is not plastic, steel or hard surfaces. Most kids she works with have had some type of formal treatment that was forced on them, such as talk therapy and these youths reported it was unusual to have music, art, or drama therapy in their past. Miller has crafted an outpatient office that is non-traditional with creative, donated, and eclectic objects and furniture. Everything here is meaningful in some way, including client-made artwork. She advocates the use of multi-sensory, tactile environments used in a purposeful fashion.

Miller's juvenile detention center office is directly off of a typical bland painted concrete block hallway, illuminated with fluorescent lighting. It is the first space one encounters when entering into the juvenile detention center from the non-secure side. She secured approval from a supportive judge to allow the youth to create a permanent mural consisting of individually painted vinyl records, donated by a friend after a flood rendered them worthless. Once a week she would facilitate art recovery sessions with an invited an artist who would guide each youth to paint a record for the mural. This program uses art to lower defenses, calm anxiety, and teach anger management skills to the youth to help

them process emotions for their future. The youth are generally aware that they would like things to change in their life and they are open to art sessions to assist them with their goals. Miller noted the dramatic change of interior ambience this introduction of color created. One staff member told her “this hallway makes me so happy every time I come to work”.



Juvenile detention center hallway showing vinyl record art projects by the youth (Photo by Jill Miller).

Biology

Biophilia

It common that buildings secured for youth services are often repurposed from a different prior use such as office buildings or warehouses. In such cases, luxuries like windows, skylights or external porches may be scarce.

However, the presence of views and a visual connection to nature may have benefits for both youth clients and staff well-being (Browning, Ryan & Clancy, 2014). Biophilia refers to the human tendency to affiliate oneself with other entities in nature such as plants and animals. The term was coined in 1984 by biologist E.O. Wilson, and the resulting 14 patterns of biophilia have been connected to improving health and well-being in the built environment (See Appendix 4). Biophilia has achieved an established presence in architectural programming standards, and is, for example, represented in the International WELL Building Institute’s WELL Building Standard (IWBI, 2019).

Seminal research on views to nature have been shown to speed up the healing process (Ulrich, 1999). Outdoor spaces can calm, provide enjoyment, be an educational resource, encourage teamwork, and provide pleasant and stimulating experiences for all. Children, in fact, benefit from access to sensory gardens in educational settings (Hussein, 2010). Further, access to daylighting in staff areas is a recognized as a way to improve staff morale and reduce stress.

A number of other biophilia principles are relevant to adolescents and staff environments:

- **Refuge.** Provide a place for withdrawal from environmental conditions or the main flow of activity so that youth are protected from behind and overhead.
- **Prospect.** Consider including unimpeded views over a distance so that youth gain the ability to surveil and preview what is coming.
- **Material and Visual Connection to Nature.** Materials and elements from nature can reflect local ecology or geology and create a distinct sense of

place. A view to elements of nature, living systems and natural processes can be soothing. However, be aware that some street youth associate “nature” with white people and are put off by or not used to positive interactions in nature, according to Kopec. Another architect author has found that offering controlled views of nature, such as a flower garden may be preferential to unbounded, natural landscapes, as the garden can show clients a view of nature that is less threatening than their past street experiences may have provided (Davis, 2004). Input from the local youth population for a specific project may be helpful in determining the level of comfort and benefits of access and views to nature.

- **Biomorphic Forms & Patterns.** Symbolic references to contoured, patterned, and textured arrangements that persist in nature can be referenced for interior features. Life on the streets requires youth to be vigilant and many prefer environments that allow them to observe without being seen. Kopec suggests including **biophilic features that capture the essence of nature such as bunk beds designed to emulate a cave with privacy doors and lockable storage. Having personal space that is owned even on a temporary basis affords control over their body and belongings.** These examples suggest that a biophilic approach to design that is representational as opposed to literal can offer tangible solutions that echo the primal needs of an adolescent population.

Designer Perspective: Jocelyn Stroupe, CannonDesign

Jocelyn Stroupe, director of healthcare design for CANNONDESIGN is an advocate of using biophilia strategies within spaces and offered these suggestions that help reflect natural principles for user benefit.

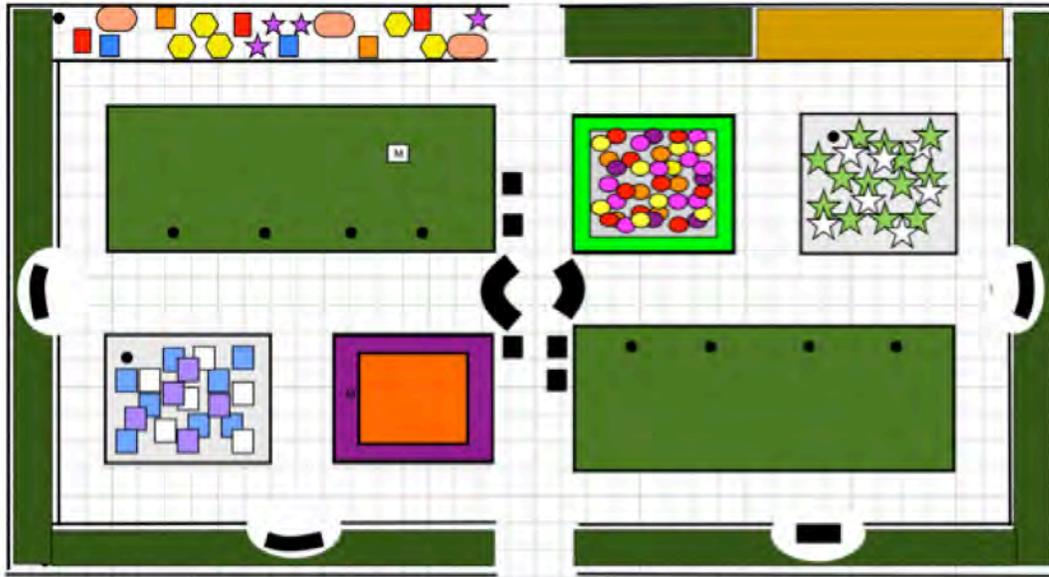
- Youth seek shelter and safety at a personal scale. Biophilia’s embrace of primal instincts such as prospect and refuge (called the ‘savannah concept’) can offer a sense of protection at a subliminal level.

- **Sitting with one’s back against a tree, under a with a lowered element such as canopy of trees** can create a shelter-like refuge with a vista beyond.
- Right angles do not occur in nature, and by harnessing organic forms, these elements can replicate the flow of the natural world.
- Shaping spaces like nature has more to do with form and can be abstract in their expression. **Mimicking natural patterns can be used in textiles, graphics, or even super graphics** and can provide a low-cost way to enhance a space and provide relief from stark walls or urban views.

Case Study

A Detention Center Courtyard

Sometimes it takes a team effort to leverage the impact that access to nature can have for youth. For example, Jill Miller noted that youth in her detention center had visual access from the cafeteria and other spaces to an overgrown, enclosed courtyard, but no access to the area. Through the efforts of the director, permission from a judge and a partnership with a volunteer certified master gardener the courtyard was changed into a functional and therapeutic space. With zero funding, the detention center was able to utilize local jail work release adults from a nearby center to clean up the area. When the courtyard was cleared, the resulting rectangle took on several shapes. Carpenters built moveable stations for youth to pot plants and work. There were benches to sit and reflect and a wildlife garden designed to attract butterflies, facilitating a science project that taught youth to raise larvae and release them into the garden. A ‘wonder area’ brought a sense of surprise to the space.



A floor plan of the juvenile detention center garden showing its benches, garden stations and wildlife areas (Photo by Jill Miller).

Case Study

Hillary Evans, After8toeducate

Hillary Evans is the executive director of the organization After8toeducate, a homeless youth support advocate in Dallas, Texas. Evans' organization serves the Dallas homeless high school youth population. The number of such youth reached a crisis level in 2019, prompting a property search in order to create a mental health services and residential facility. The design team found an unused former grade school located in a poverty-stricken area and with the input of After8toeducate founder and president Jorge Baldor, Evans led the renovation of the school into a day center and residential center that also offers educational services. At the time of this writing the team is working to execute a phased opening strategy.

The team commenced with Phase 1, a renovation of the drop-in center/day center for homeless youth

ages 14 to 21 in April 2018. Renovating an old building required inspections and safety feature upgrades including major utility and plumbing work and the addition of smoke and sprinkler systems. They adopted an **open concept design**, creating an environment that was visually accessible and welcoming with contemporary design and a mural painted by a local artist assisted by local fine arts high school students.

Phase 2 will create residential services that offer 26 emergency youth shelter beds and nine transitional living program beds in fall 2019. Working with service providers, the team decided on dormitory room styles that accommodate residents for 60 day stays in the emergency shelter or up to two years in their other program. Some rooms are individualized pods with a bed, closet and dresser that accommodate clients' needs for privacy, and some are dual occupancy rooms that assist clients who arrive with a sibling.

Dual occupancy areas also house clients who are transitioning their gender and are placed in the plan so that these persons do not feel isolated. Male wing and female wings are separate and youths with babies are also accommodated for short-term stays. The team opted to use the term 'residential services' rather than 'shelter' to avoid the stigma of this term.

The **communal spaces** in the center are intended for youth to hang out together in an organic, unforced way so that they might build community. Homework areas in the drop-in center provide computers and side tables to accommodate clients and academic tutors that offer them educational support. The design of this space includes **areas conducive for learning, study spaces, and quiet lounge areas.** There is a similar space on the residential side.

Other spaces, features and policies include

- A **library space** that is atypical, and specifically designed to accommodate the modern student with **access for listening to music via headphones and charging stations for phones.** This will provide a needed, stable place to rent or lend laptops.
- A commercial kitchen staffed by hired staff serves both the drop-in side and residential side. **Kitchen classes and culinary classes will be offered from this area** and youth will have access to snacks that are monitored by volunteers.
- **Showers and laundry** use are regulated to ensure safety of users, with volunteers helping with laundry use to avoid breakage, track use, and assist clients.



Bird's eye view of the After8 to educate new facility (image used with permission from https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=80&v=lobapaYMa7o).

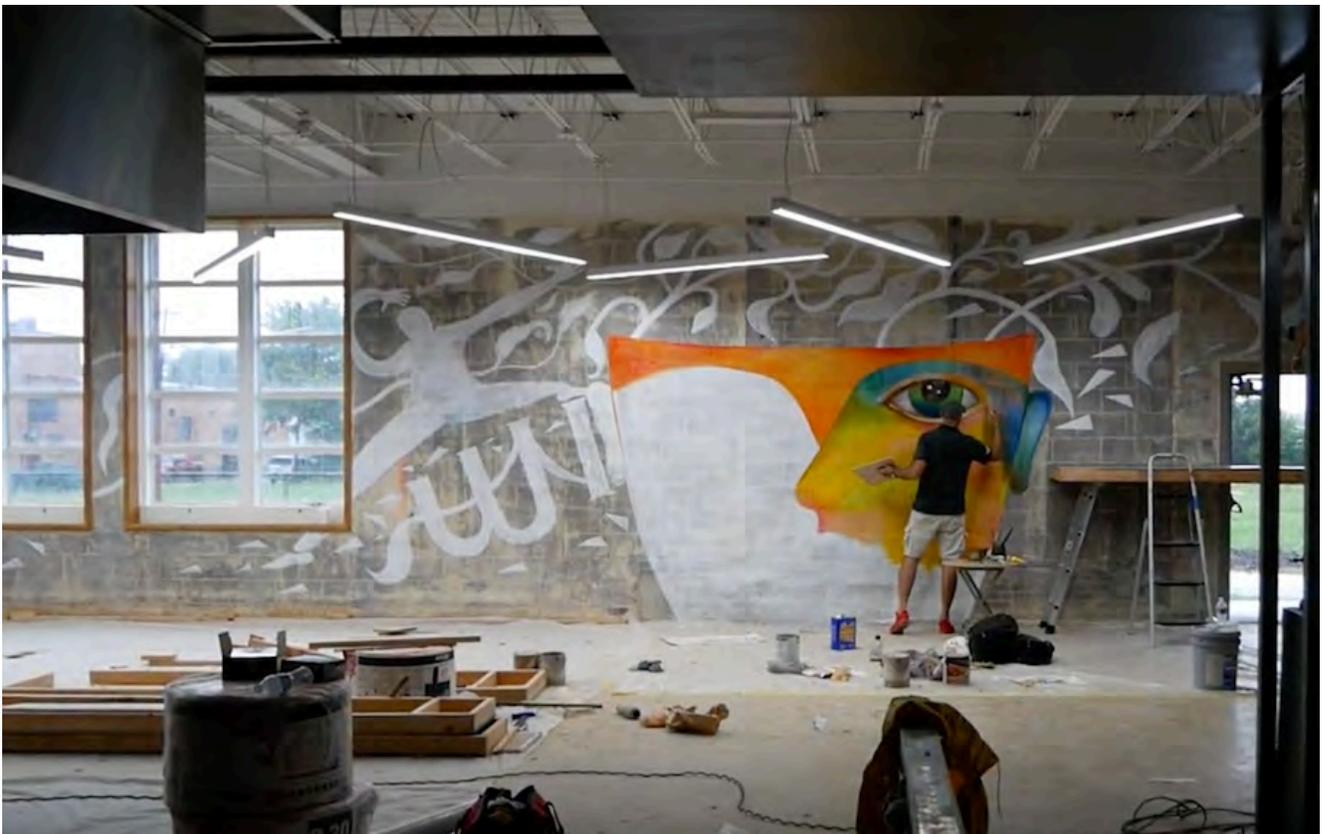
Other priorities are shaping both large and small aspects of the architectural program:

- **Crafting a solution that offers personal control over lighting and temperature** are desired.
- The team wants to salvage **natural light** as much as possible, while monitoring energy efficient considerations.
- The goal is to **move away from institutional looking spaces while embracing neutral calming colors coupled with colorful palettes.**

Importantly, project leaders **sought feedback from youth** to assist with developing the facility's

architectural program. Both residential boarding students as well as day students from a public high school became part of the design thinking program to provide ideas for the dorm rooms and the library and flex space. Evans noted that these teams are currently reaching out for furniture sources. The architects' plans will incorporate the students' ideas where feasible.

Policies geared toward client empowerment and ownership also affect the physical facilities. Specifically, youths living there are responsible for doing routine chores (with staff guidance), which build capability with life skills.



The mural at After8toeducate's new facility takes shape with the participation of artist Rolando Diaz with help from students at Booker T. Washington School for the Performing Arts (image used with permission from https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=80&v=lobapaYMa7o).

CONCLUSION

Designing safe and supportive interior spaces for adolescents exiting homelessness is as complex and multi-dimensional as the youth themselves are. Spaces must meet the basic functional needs of those struggling to transition off of the street and back into society, and look beyond to engage the youth population in their interests in order to reclaim their self-image and empower them to rebuild their lives. Whether a youth's goal is to reflect on their situation, overcome a substance addiction, learn to respect their body, attend school, gain employment, or re-engage with their family, built environment design can support their progress toward a healthier lifestyle path, encouraging healthy interactions and engagement in their own success.

DEFINITIONS

Adolescence. Encyclopaedia Britannica defines Adolescence as “a transitional phase of growth and development between childhood and adulthood. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines an adolescent as any person between ages 10 and 19. This age range falls within WHO’s definition of young people, which refers to individuals between ages 10 and 24.” Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/science/adolescence>

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH). A housing model designed to provide housing assistance (project- and tenant-based) and supportive services on a long-term basis to formerly homeless people. HUD’s Continuum of Care program, authorized by the McKinney-Vento Act, funds PSH and requires that the client have a disability for eligibility (HUD, 2018).

Rapid Rehousing. A housing model designed to provide temporary housing assistance to people experiencing homelessness, moving them quickly out of homelessness and into permanent housing (HUD, 2018).

Transitional Housing Programs (TSH). These provide people experiencing homelessness a place to stay combined with supportive services for up to 24 months (HUD, 2018).

APPENDICES

1 Research on designing for domestic violence victims may have areas of overlap with designing for adolescents (Rutledge, 2015).

Safety/security. This includes elements such as location, access, cameras, and clear secure paths to transportation coming and going, safe outdoor areas, prominent staffed 24/7 check in area, color zoning for wayfinding, lockable storage areas, and gender-separate areas.

Counseling services. Staff areas are best provided with abundant natural lighting and quiet reflective areas. Empathetic design that integrates comfort in diverse sensory ways such as with comfortable chairs and a soothing color palette can encourage reflection and reduce stress. These spaces should also contain acoustical design solutions that minimize noise presence, as well as the travel of sound in and out of the room.

Creating a sense of community. Rutledge recommends providing a variety of seating, including nooks and seating around the edges of community spaces offering a choice in participation level. Flexible seating that can be controlled by users of the space can empower them in social settings. A variety of activities within spaces such as cooking, arts and crafts, libraries, group quiet spaces, game spaces, movie spaces, living, dining, food preparation spaces can build social connections.

Empowerment programs. Interior architecture can help to build residents' identities and empower them through spatial elements such as personalization and display of personal items in bedroom area. Warm and

comfortable decision making and goal setting spaces in staff areas, computer areas, and bedroom spaces are suggested. Minimize rules by offering multiple appliances in kitchen areas, and easy to clean surfaces in bathrooms and all communal spaces.

2 Research on designing for families experiencing homelessness may have areas of overlap with designing for adolescents. These include safety and security, privacy, personalization, and minimizing rules and restrictions (Rutledge, 2015).

Safety and Security. Include a welcoming entrance with active and passive security, clear wayfinding, focal areas with color zoning, security cameras, 24/7 staff, lockable storage areas, and safe indoor and outdoor play spaces nearby others for supervision.

Privacy. Older children and teenagers often need more privacy and space within the shelter environment (Rutledge, 2015). A variety of educational, recreational, private spaces is desirable, scalable to size, from nooks to full rooms to accommodate individual and group privacy. Spaces for socializing, homework and other solitary activities dedicated to adolescents within the rules of supervision for the facility are desired.

Personalization. "Personalizing a space can facilitate empowerment, encourage residents to form an attachment to the place and positively shape their

APPENDICES, CONT.

identity within the shelter (Kopec, 2006; WSCADV & Mahlum, 2012 in Rutledge, 2015). Bed nooks, white boards, frames and tack boards for art work, and pictures help to establish identity and convey “touch of home”.

Minimizing Rules and Restrictions. A variety of spaces for recreational activities can empower residents, encouraging a sense of community and control over personal choices. Overbearing rules limiting use can inhibit the positive impact of those spaces. Making spatial accommodations for multiple users using easy to clean surfaces with sightlines to parents or caregivers can help minimize overbearing rules and restrictions on use of spaces.

3 According to the U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) report there were 896,893 beds in emergency shelters (ES), safe havens (SH), transitional housing (TH), rapid rehousing (RRH), permanent supportive housing (PSH), or other permanent housing (OPH) to serve people experiencing homelessness or formerly homeless people in 2018. Of the 507,271 beds in housing for formerly homeless people, 71 percent were in PSH. However, beds targeting child-only households were rare—only 3,943 beds in total—and were most prevalent in Emergency Shelters projects (74% of child-only beds) (HUD, 2018).

4 Biophilic design was popularized in 1984 by biologist E.O. Wilson, and the resulting 14 patterns of biophilia have been connected to improving health and well-being in the built environment (Browning, Ryan & Clancy, 2014). These include:

1. Visual Connection with Nature. A view to elements of nature, living systems and natural processes.
2. Non-Visual Connection with Nature. Auditory, haptic, olfactory, or gustatory stimuli that engender a deliberate and positive reference to nature, living systems or natural processes.
3. Non-Rhythmic Sensory Stimuli. Stochastic and ephemeral connections with nature that may be analyzed statistically but may not be predicted precisely.
4. Thermal & Airflow Variability. Subtle changes in air temperature, relative humidity, air-flow across the skin, and surface temperatures that mimic natural environments.
5. Presence of Water. A condition that enhances the experience of a place through seeing, hearing or touching water.
6. Dynamic & Diffuse Light. Leverages varying intensities of light and shadow that change over time to create conditions that occur in nature.
7. Connection with Natural Systems. Awareness of

APPENDICES, CONT.

natural processes, especially seasonal and temporal changes characteristic of a healthy ecosystem.

8. Biomorphic Forms & Patterns. Symbolic references to contoured, patterned, textured or numerical arrangements that persist in nature.

9. Material Connection with Nature. Materials and elements from nature that, through minimal processing, reflect the local ecology or geology and create a distinct sense of place.

10. Complexity & Order. Rich sensory information that adheres to a spatial hierarchy similar to those encountered in nature.

11. Prospect. An unimpeded view over a distance for surveillance and planning.

12. Refuge. A place for withdrawal from environmental conditions or the main flow of activity, in which the individual is protected from behind and overhead.

13. Mystery. The promise of more information, achieved through partially obscured views or other sensory devices that entice the individual to travel deeper into the environment.

14. Risk/Peril. An identifiable threat coupled with a reliable safeguard.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Dr. Diane Kitchell is an adjunct professor at Boston Architectural College. She was educated in interior design principles at Harrington College of Design. She explored research paradigms with her doctorate of Education and leadership approaches during her Masters in Business Administration from Argosy University. Diane specializes in sustainable design and is LEED, AP ID+C, EDAC accredited, and CAPS certified. She is an NCIDQ certificate holder, and a registered Interior Designer in Illinois and Indiana. She is a Disney Institute Leadership Excellence Alumni.

Her professional work spans corporate, healthcare, educational, recreational, residential and renovation projects. She is a multi-media artist at her core, creating handcrafted objects resulting in beautiful, functional art pieces. Her business, Heartfully Chosen, LLC is an extension of her interior design business, DK Interior Concepts, where she continues her work as a designer, educator and researcher. She uses a Facebook page, Design Bridge, to connect design and academia as a way of sharing research.

As an interior design educator, Diane has taught emerging designers for over twenty years and enjoys seeing past students successful in our industry. She believes in the power of interior design to positively influence our experiences in the world as well as our quality of life, at all of its various stages. Her research focus is about empowering designers using evidence-based design research. She knows that designers are thirsty for information that they can analyze to synthesize into design solutions. She lives in the upper mid-west with her husband and pets.

Diane enjoyed the collaboration with Jill and Victoria from lovely New Zealand on this important subject and thanks those willing to share their knowledge for this article.

Victoria Hearn is a Senior Advisor for Housing New Zealand, a Crown agent that provides housing services for people in need. She specialises in designing housing and support services for people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. A qualified Social Worker, she graduated with Honours from the University of Auckland in 2013 and is currently completing her Masters in Social and Community Leadership. In 2017 she received the Vodafone Foundations 'World of Difference' award.

She has worked in a number of roles in the not-for-profit sector starting as a frontline social worker providing crisis support and outreach services to people experiencing homelessness. With a heart for young people, she was integral in establishing Lifewise's first youth housing service for young people experiencing homelessness. She has seen firsthand how the design and set-up of housing services can impact on a person's well-being. As the Service and Design Lead for this service she made a commitment to ensuring that young people's voices were heard when it came to understanding their experiences and needs.

She hopes that this report will supplement the incredible work that people and organisations are doing around the world in their journey to end youth homelessness.

She credits Jill for the important work that she has done in establishing Design Resources for Homelessness and for connecting the worlds of homelessness support services and the design environment. She would also like to thank Diane, an insightful and knowledgeable designer who she has learned so much from.



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Design Resources for Homelessness

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www.designresourcesforhomelessness.org

designforhomelessness@gmail.com

3551 Blairstone Road Suite 128/233

Tallahassee FL 32301

850-228-2888

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