

Trauma-Informed Design

How the Physical Environment Supports Recovery from Homelessness

What is Trauma?

- Individual trauma results from an EVENT, series of events, or set of circumstances that is EXPERIENCED by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse EFFECTS on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.

~SAMHSA's Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative, July 2014

What is Trauma-Informed Care?

- A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed **realizes** the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; **recognizes** the signs and symptoms in clients, families, staff, and others involved with system; and **responds** by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, practices, and seeks to actively **resist re-traumatization**.

~SAMHSA's Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative, July 2014

Six Principles of Trauma-Informed Care

- Safety
 - Trustworthiness and Transparency
 - Peer Support
 - Collaboration and Mutuality
 - Empowerment, Voice and Choice
 - Cultural, Historical and Gender Issues

~SAMHSA's Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative, July 2014

Physical Environment of the Organization

- How does the physical environment promote a sense of safety, calming, and de-escalation for clients and staff?
- In what ways do staff members recognize and address aspects of the physical environment that may be re-traumatizing, and work with people on developing strategies to deal with this?
- How has the agency provided space that both staff and people receiving services can use to practice self-care?
- How has the agency developed mechanisms to address gender-related physical and emotional safety concerns (e.g., gender-specific spaces and activities).

~SAMHSA's Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative, July 2014

What is Trauma-Informed Design?

- The term “trauma-informed design” is a concept that is beginning to gain momentum as architects and interior designers work to integrate the principles of trauma-informed care into their practices.
- **Trauma-informed design** explores ideas for built environments that support the tenets of **trauma-informed care**.
- A goal to create spaces that are welcoming, demonstrate a safe environment, and provide some degree of privacy, while at the same time not interfering with staff's need to monitor residents' behavior.

What is Trauma-Informed Design?

- **Realizing** how the physical environment effects an individual's sense of identity, worth, dignity, and empowerment.
- **Recognizing** that the physical environment has an impact on attitude, mood, and behavior, and that there is a strong link between our physiological state, our emotional state, and the physical environment.
- **Responding** by designing and maintaining supportive and healing environments for trauma-experienced residents or clients to **resist re-traumatization**.

What is Trauma-Informed Design?



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Principles of Trauma-Informed Design

- Reduce or remove known adverse stimuli
- Reduce or remove environmental stressors
- Engage the individual actively in a dynamic, multi-sensory environment
- Provide ways for the individual to exhibit their self-reliance (ability to do things for himself or herself)
- Provide and promote connectedness to the natural world
- Separate the individual from others who may be in distress
- Reinforce the individual's sense of personal identity
- Promote the opportunity for choice while balancing program needs and the safety/comfort of the majority

Design Guidelines and Recommendations: Aesthetics

- Facilities need to be aesthetically pleasing – not institutionally sparse – but visual complexity should be kept to a minimum
- Visual complexity reduces a service environment's attractiveness. Visual complexity was determined by factors such as the irregularity, detail, dissimilarity, and quantity of objects; the asymmetry and irregularity of their arrangement; and the variations in color and contrast.
- Research has shown that an agency that was perceived as pleasant, beautiful, well kept, above average, neat, calming, efficient, etc., was considered more professional, believable, and offering a higher level of customer service in handling a customer complaint than one which was perceived as disorganized, unpleasant, etc.
- Staff and volunteers should avoid clutter, piles of paperwork or other stacks of boxes or supplies that may prove distracting or irritating to residents or clients.

Design Guidelines and Recommendations: Art

- Adds visual interest
- Can create a visual distraction that alleviates stress, improves mood, comfort, and customer satisfaction.
- Landscape paintings are all associated with increased positive affect and comfort, and doubles as a natural view.
- Attention should be paid so that the art does not convey meaning or symbolic significance that would generate or arouse negative feelings.

Design Guidelines and Recommendations: Color

- Avoid deeply hued warm colors (i.e. **red**, **orange**, **yellow**) that may arouse negative emotions.
- Cool colors (i.e. **blue**, **green**, **purple**) have a calming effect.
- Lighter-colored rooms are perceived as more open, less crowded (“spatially available”), and thus safer and more calming.
- Avoid the use of arousing colors in confined spaces to help reduce feelings of crowdedness.
- Avoid stark white walls.

Design Guidelines and Recommendations: Furniture

- Durable and easy to clean
- Arrangement of furniture needs to be considered for how it affects residents' sense of safety, perceived crowdedness, and relationship to staff (e.g., communicative or authoritative).
- Sitting face-to-face across a desk or table may be perceived as confrontational, whereas sitting corner to corner invites conversation and interaction.
- In waiting or common areas, orient seating so users are facing out from sheltering walls.

Design Guidelines and Recommendations: Furniture

- Seating can be arranged to increase socialization, which can be a challenge for homeless individuals but is mentioned in research as an important benefit of being in a shelter, and a means of developing social networks to support transitioning into more permanent housing.
- Allowing residents to rearrange a chair or other small pieces of furniture enhances their sense of control and independence.
- Natural materials and colors increase connection to nature and a sense of calm.

Design Guidelines and Recommendations: Lighting/Daylighting

- Rooms with more natural light appear less crowded.
- Rooms with window space (even if blinds are closed) can make a space appear less crowded and more spatially available.
- Quality of light, i.e. color temperature and CRI, impacts mood and behavior.
- Lower levels of illumination also can mitigate perceived crowding and the resulting sense of stress and discomfort.
- Lighting should not buzz, hum, or flicker.
- Giving residents control over task lighting, such as a reading lamp, enhances their sense of independence and autonomy.

Design Guidelines and Recommendations: Plants

- Are decorative and beneficial to guests and staff.
- Research shows that settings that include vegetation reduce stress, promote peace, tranquility, enhanced self-esteem, and a sense of mastery of the environment.
- Plants perform an important biophilic function by connecting occupants to the natural world, which has been found to reduce stress and pain, and to improve mood.
- Views of nature and landscape paintings, as well as indoor plants, are all associated with increased positive affect and comfort.

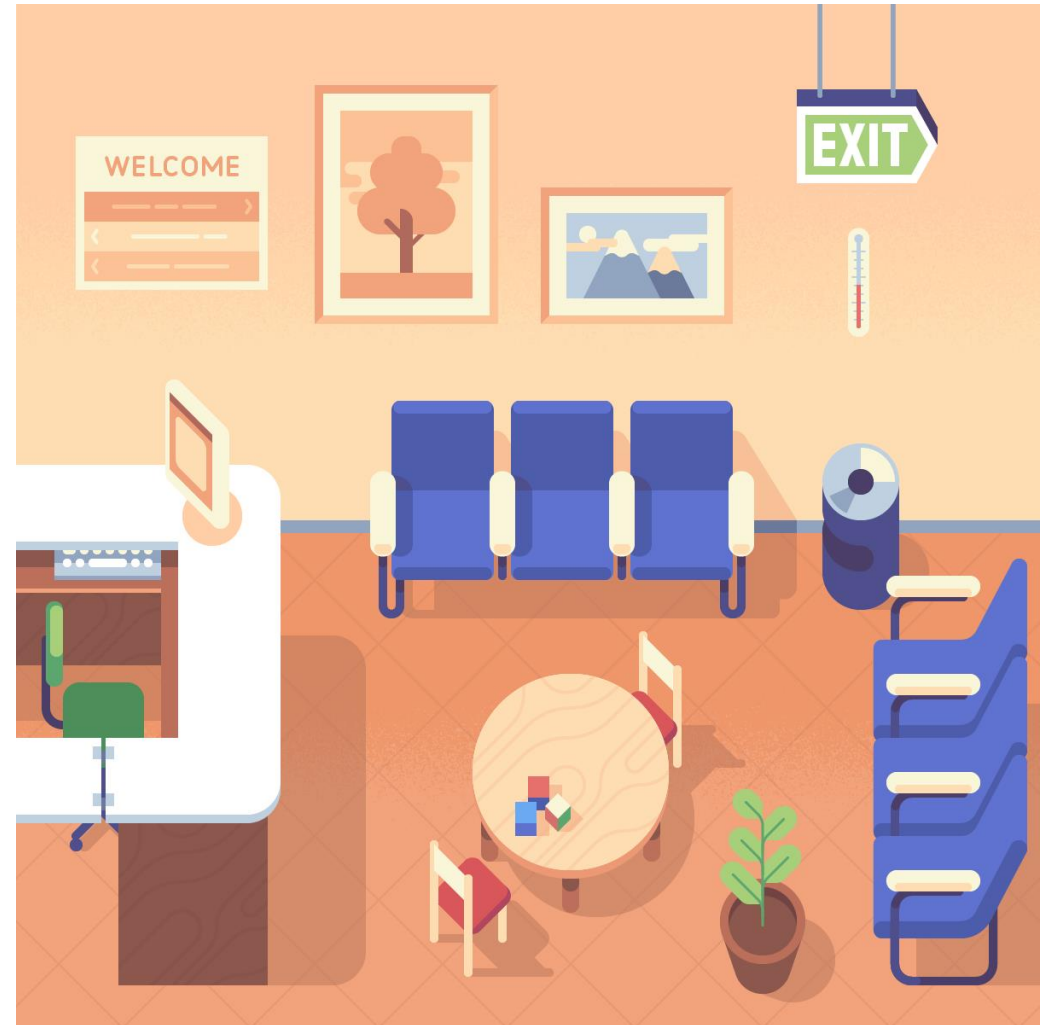
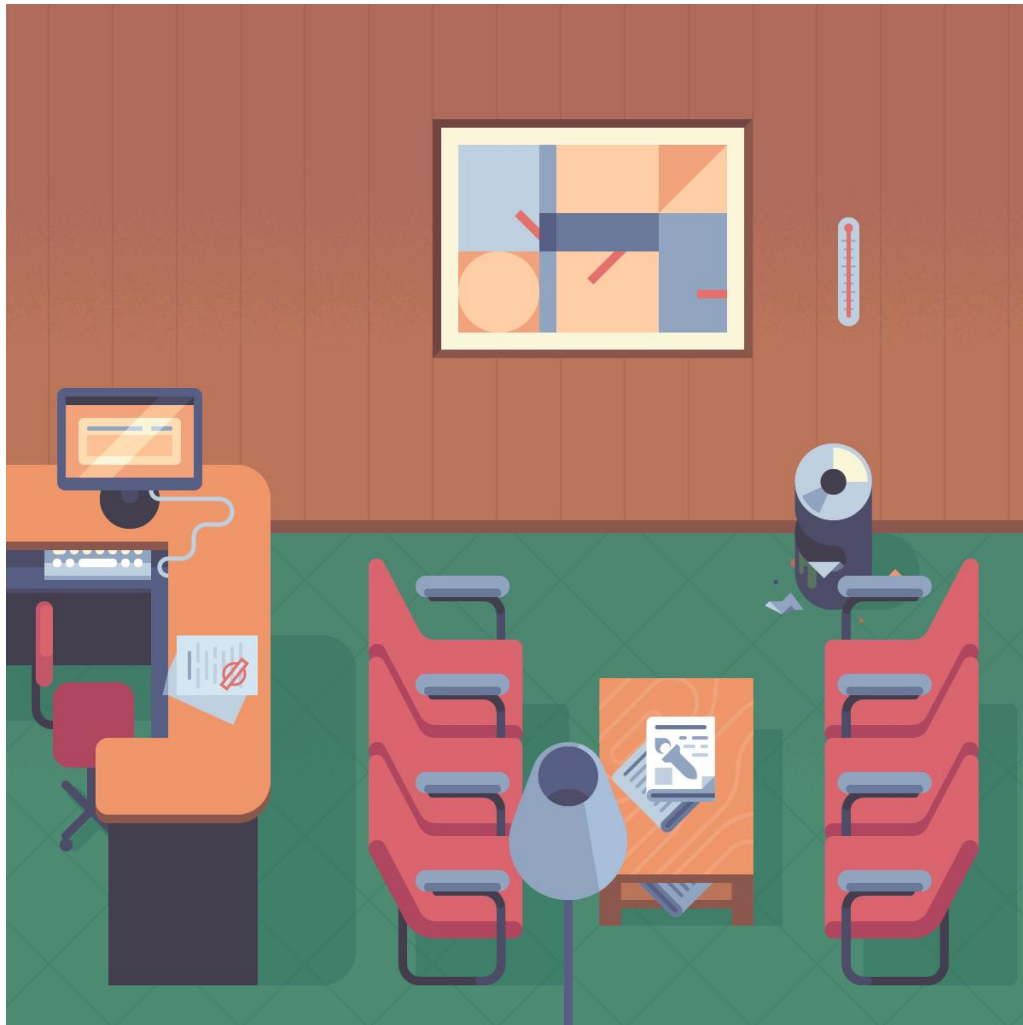
Design Guidelines and Recommendations: Spatial Layout

- Social density is measurable. Crowding is an emotional response to density.
- How space is laid out can have a significant impact on individuals' perception of space, and have a profound impact on mood and behavior.
- If space is perceived as open, with clear sightlines and few barriers, it will increase the sense of safety as well as that of "spatial availability," which mitigates perceived sense of crowding.
- Simple, linear and easy to navigate space is calming.
- Emphasis on personal space, i.e. individual chairs with arms, choices in where/with whom to sit, quiet areas vs. engaged areas, etc.

Design Guidelines and Recommendations: Visual Interest

- Regularity, detail, similarity, an appropriate quantity of objects, the symmetry and regularity of their arrangement, and coherent variations in color and contrast.
- Can serve as a distraction from perceived crowding and stress.
- A land or waterscape painting that can serve as a connection to nature is calming.
- Sight lines should be unobstructed as much as possible to reduce perceived crowded and stress.
- Too much visual complexity can increase stress and anxiety.

Pop Quiz



*The physical environment
is the program
as much as routines, goals,
and staff
are the program.*