

# **A Women's Place**

**The Design of a Transitional Housing Community for Women and Children**

by

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A thesis

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## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## **ABSTRACT**

Transition homes are critical sources of support for women and children fleeing domestic violence or facing difficulties with housing and poverty. More than just a safe place to stay, transition homes offer residents access to a variety of services that will help them to better their lives. The increasing rate of single women heading households and the rise of homeless women and children are recent social developments that reflect the need for transition homes. Changes in family lifestyle require a redefinition of the traditional housing model to involve sharing and providing services within a larger community. Studies of alternative housing indicate that some women would prefer to live in women-only housing with moderate design alterations that address safety concerns. This is particularly relevant to women who frequently wind up homeless due to problems with career opportunities or managing households on their own. A communal support structure can assist women with making new lives for themselves and their families in a transition home and afterwards.

Furthermore, characteristics of the built environment influence personal wellbeing, social interaction, relationships with staff, and the impression on the surrounding community. This thesis explores the design of a transition home that integrates social programs and outreach services to help improve the lives of women and children in need. Through deliberate design choices, architects can offer an appropriate solution to women's housing issues that foster independence, provide safety and give hope for a brighter future.

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## **DEDICATION**

To my family. Eye of the tiger.

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## INTRODUCTION

Initially, I was apprehensive about entering Martha's House when I first got there. Media portrayals and preconceived notions were filling my mind with visions of what I might encounter inside. Martha's House is an emergency shelter dedicated to assisting women and children who are fleeing abuse. It is one of four Violence Against Women Shelters in Hamilton. This facility is located in the city's downtown core; an area prone to crime, drug abuse and prostitution. The building itself is a former Victorian estate home which has seen its share of haphazard renovations and additions.

I built up the courage, ascended the uncovered porch, rang the buzzer and then waited. I could hear muffled voices and feet scuffling from behind the door. The blinds parted in the adjacent window and closed again once I identified myself through the crackling intercom system. The door opened and I was warmly greeted by a female case worker. She immediately escorted me through a maze of locked doors to a small over-furnished room to await the facility coordinator. Nearly fifteen minutes passed before the coordinator arrived, explaining that she had been tied up in an important phone call. She proceeded to give a brief orientation of the shelter's programs, a quick tour of the facility, and then I was dropped off in the dining room as the coordinator went to see about another matter.

I sat in the middle of the dining room at a table all to myself. I was surrounded by plastic furniture, bare walls and locks on every door and cabinet. The environment balanced somewhere between a day care centre and a prison. I watched as staff busily went about their business and residents lingered from one room to another in search of some form of activity.

Prior to arriving at Martha's House that day, I was involved with a local architecture firm that was in the process of designing a new transition home for women and children escaping violent homes in Hamilton. My objective was to discuss con-



**Fig. 0.1 CHANGING FACES** Women residing in transition homes are not a homogeneous group.

cerns regarding the current facility with staff and residents and to observe their daily activities. This exercise was to assist with the design and programmatic layout of the new building.

Curiosity eventually brought three of the residents to my table. They were of various ages and races, and told different stories of what brought them to Martha's House. One woman explained that she had been living in and out of area shelters for the past fifteen years. She was allotted subsidized housing several times but was never able to manage raising her children, working, and running a home on her own. She now resided at Martha's House while her teenage sons lived in an adolescent group home.

A younger woman talked about having recently emigrated from Ethiopia with her husband. When she made the decision to leave their abusive relationship, she was referred to Martha's House since she did not know of anyone else to turn to.

I recognized the third lady from a public town hall meeting for the project that was held a few weeks before. The design team, municipal figures, neighbourhood groups, and the not-for-profit organization had presented an overall review of the new women's transitional housing facility to the surrounding community. This woman had continually interrupted all invited speakers as a means to bring attention to all the homeless women, like herself, who were being denied the use of social service programs in the area.

These stories are similar to the approximate 1,600 women that stay at one of Hamilton's Violence Against Women shelters annually.<sup>1</sup> Among the residents, eight out of ten are fleeing abusive environments. Domestic violence is the primary reason women and children seek protection in an emergency shelter.<sup>2</sup>

Where do women go once they leave an emergency shelter? In Hamilton, the maximum length of time an individual or family may stay in an emergency shelter is forty-two consecutive nights. This is a short period of time to establish a new and safe residence outside of the shelter community. The number of women and children that are living below the poverty line, without decent affordable housing or any form of support, has increased in Hamilton over recent years. The need for long-term housing and affordable accommodations is an ongoing challenge for shelter programs across Canada.<sup>3</sup> The availability of subsidized housing is quite limited and the waiting list can range from weeks to years. The lack of affordable housing is one of the main reasons women continue to live with abusive partners.<sup>4</sup>

Women and children are amongst the fastest rising group experiencing homelessness in the area. Many women find themselves homeless because of poverty, domestic violence or family breakup. Not having a place to call home restricts access to necessities such as adequate shelter, security, nutritious foods, education and outreach programs. Furthermore, many women and families are not physically, financially or emotionally prepared for independent living and seek more support than what is available through subsidized housing. The majority of single mothers require social assistance in order to meet their daily needs. One's vision of self-worth may begin to erode due to fears, uncertainties, isolation or limited opportunities and cause

them to identify with failure and helplessness.<sup>5</sup>

Affordable housing alone cannot alleviate the problems domestic violence, substance abuse or poverty inflict on the lives of women and children. Many require counselling services, job training, childcare or are in search of an accepting community. Transition homes provide essential programs that support women and children when they leave emergency shelters or are referred from other agencies. These facilities are an intermediate step between emergency crisis shelter and permanent housing. Transition homes are intended to be a safe and supportive environment where residents can overcome trauma and begin to rebuild their lives. The programs are geared towards helping residents become self-sufficient prior to assisting them with locating permanent accommodations. The term of residency is temporary, but this period may fall anywhere from two months to two years. A sense of stabilization is required in order for women to independently manage a home and obtain permanent housing. Through living within a community of shared and similar experiences, women and families are regularly exposed to positive models for confronting potential challenges.

Housing a transitional community involves various social, political and economical issues. It is also a design problem that requires the service of an architect to help create a supportive and therapeutic environment. This thesis explores design principle that can be used to situate a suitable transition home within an urban location and create a therapeutic environment. A design proposal strives to integrate communal living, public programs, and outreach services to help improve the lives of women and children in need. Through deliberate design choices, architects can offer an appropriate solution to women's housing issues that foster independence, provide safety and give hope for a brighter future.

The increasing rate of single women heading households and the rise of homeless women and children are recent social developments that are in direct correlation to the high demand for transition housing projects.<sup>6</sup> Basic shelter alone cannot provide the needed stability in the lives of women and children using this service. Changes in family lifestyle require a redefinition of the traditional housing model to involve sharing and providing services within a larger community. Studies of alternative housing indicate that some women would prefer to live in women-only housing with moderate design alterations that address safety concerns.<sup>7</sup> This is particularly relevant to women who frequently wind up homeless due to stress of seeking career opportunities and managing a household on their own. A communal support structure can assist women with making a new life for themselves and their families in a transition home and afterwards. Furthermore, characteristics of the built environment influence personal wellbeing, social interaction, relationships with staff, and the impression on the surrounding community.

## METHODOLOGY AND STRUCTURE

This thesis has been divided into four chapters that outline the research and arguments to support the proposal for a new transition home for women and children fleeing abuse in Hamilton. The issues and arguments presented throughout the thesis have been assembled from a variety of sources including books, reports, newspaper articles and the internet. The design and content has also been influenced by personal experience working on the design of a women's shelter in Hamilton and by conversations with architects, facility managers and shelter residents.

The first chapter, Women and Housing, provides background information on those who are housed in transition homes. Statistics show that women, as a select group, are at particular risk of poverty. This inequity is true for any indicator of age, income, family status or ethnicity. In order to understand the complexities of poverty in Hamilton and develop an effective response, this chapter examines how poverty impacts men and women differently. Analytical reports from Statistics Canada and YWCA Canada outline key factors and information to support a transition home project. The lack of affordable housing and female poverty are common factors in the demand for additional emergency housing projects across the country. The reports also provide detailed accounts of the challenges existing facilities face when providing affordable housing for a specific segment of the population. The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton produced the reports "On Any Given Night" and "Women and Poverty". These help to understanding the most prevalent issues in regards to women and housing in Hamilton.

I was fortunate to have met with individuals involved with facilitating existing transition homes in our communities. Anne Babcock, the Vice President of Plan-

ning and Operations at WoodGreen Community Services, discussed the success and challenges of implementing non-profit transitional housing for women and children. Homeward Bound, a transition home in Toronto managed by WoodGreen Community and designed by Levitt Goodman Architects, was a precedent for design and program decisions in this thesis. Alan Whittle, Director of Community Relations and Planning for Good Shepherd Services in Hamilton, openly shared resource and statistical information that influences their decisions on what type of services are required in the city.

In October of 2008, I participated in a conference on awareness of abuse against women that was sponsored by the Catholic Family Services of Toronto. This was an open discussion to address family violence which included former shelter residents, social workers, community activist and church leaders. Workshops centered on specific topics such as children witnessing domestic violence or how to help the men that abuse. The presentation from Deborah Sinclair, a social worker and social activist, was important in understanding how violence against women is portrayed and tolerated in our society.

*More than Housing: Lifeboats for Women and Children*, written by Joan Forrester Sprague, provides insight on the influence traditional women's roles have on modern housing structures. The author promotes communal living as a means to counter women's poverty issues in modern society.

The second chapter, Site Considerations, highlights the importance and affect of location on the success and image of a transition home. Prevalent information regarding site selection is presented in *Shelters for Battered Women* (Shotack), *More than Housing: Lifeboats for Women and Children* (Forrester Sprague), and the article "Second Stage Shelters: Closing the Gap" prepared by the Council of Women's Shelters. I also met with directors of transition homes in Hamilton and Toronto who addressed their concerns on site selection. Initial planning must take into account the proximity to public transportation, availability of local amenities and ways to address NIMBY concerns. The site for the project was determined after compiling profiles of existing women shelters in Hamilton and studying their relationship to the city and neighbouring vicinity.

The final three chapters evaluate aspects and characteristics of the built environment that can affect human well-being. The statements regarding human behaviour or our attitudes toward the built environment are based on empirical research within the field of environmental psychology. The architectural program was developed through various sources including literature, online material and conversations with architects, facility managers, and shelter staff and residents.

*Hospital interior architecture: Creating healing environments for special patient populations* (Malkin), *Designing Places for people: A handbook of human behaviour for Architects, Designers, and Facility Managers* (Deasy) and *Housing as if people mattered: Site design guidelines for medium-density family housing* (Marcus Cooper) outline design principles that contribute towards creating a therapeutic environment in either a residential or a healthcare setting.



*Biophilic design : The theory, science, and practice of bringing buildings to life*, edited by Kellert, Heerwagen, and Mador, presents the necessity of maintaining, enhancing and restoring the experience of nature in the built environment. The publication is a collection of articles written by architects, behavioural scientists and healthcare professionals for the use of natural elements in the built environment and their effects on human behaviour. Roger Ulrich's chapter, "Biophilic Theory and Research for health-care Design" provides an introduction to the underlying concepts of Biophilic design. "Architectural lessons from environmental psychology: the case for Biophilic Architecture" (Joye) and "When buildings don't work: The role of architecture in Human Health" (Evans and McCoy) are additional resources from the field of environmental psychology that influenced the design decisions in this thesis.

## Notes

- 1 City of Hamilton and Planning and Research Council. 2007. *On Any Given Night: Measuring Homelessness in Hamilton*.
- 2 Leslie M. Tutty, PhD. *Effective Practices in Sheltering Women Leaving Violence in Intimate Relationships*. Toronto, ON: YWCA Canada, 2006.
- 3 Andrea Taylor-Butts, "Canada's Shelters for Abused Women, 2003/04" *Statistics Canada* - Catalogue no. 85-002-XiE, Vol. 25, No.3, (2005)
- 4 Leslie M. Tutty, PhD. *Effective Practices in Sheltering Women Leaving Violence in Intimate Relationships*. Toronto, ON: YWCA Canada, 2006.
- 5 Joan Forrester Sprague. 1991. *More than housing : Lifeboats for women and children*. Boston ; Toronto: Butterworth Architecture.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 Sylvia Novac. 1996. *Borderlands of homelessness : Women's views on alternative housing*. Toronto, Ont.: Women's Services Network.

Homelessness can be defined as the lack of safe, affordable, adequate and secure housing. A range of experiences exist which can be described as homelessness and affects all segments of the population.

**Living on the street** refers to individuals or families who, because of a lack of secured housing, live on the street.

**Short term or crisis sheltered** refers to individuals or families staying temporarily in emergency and/or transitional housing. This category also includes the episodically sheltered sub-population. Episodically sheltered refers to the families and individuals who access shelters multiple times through the year, seeking assistance, but who are not necessarily able to move to housing stability.

**Hidden homeless refers** to individuals or families living in locations not intended for human habitation (e.g. abandoned buildings) and/or continuously moving among temporary housing arrangements provided by strangers, friends or family.

**Those at-risk of becoming homeless** include individuals or families who are at imminent risk of eviction from their current housing, who pay too high a proportion of their income for housing or who live in unacceptable housing. Also included are those who will be discharged from the criminal justice system, those who are leaving a health facility after an extended stay, as well as youth exiting the child welfare system, and who do not have suitable housing in place prior to their discharge.

**Fig. 1.1 Defining Homelessness**

# 01

## WOMEN AND HOUSING

The topic of the “homeless” in Canada once referred to a relatively small number of transient single men living in flop houses in Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver. Today, homelessness in Canada is recognized as a crisis that is both rural and urban. The mayors of Canada’s ten largest cities have declared homelessness as a national disaster.<sup>1</sup>

Hamilton, like other Canadian cities, faces a range of serious social issues which interact to create homelessness. Homeless people are not a homogenous group. The homeless population consists of many single men and women, families, youth, visible minorities, Aboriginal people, and some people with severe mental illnesses and other serious health problems.<sup>2</sup> The lack of adequate income and the lack of affordable housing are major contributing factors to homelessness. In Hamilton alone, nearly 4,000 men, women and children depend on emergency shelters for accommodations each year.<sup>3</sup>

Women and children are amongst the fastest rising group experiencing homelessness in Canada. Many wind up homeless because of poverty, domestic violence or family break-ups. The lack of affordable housing and pay inequity further contributes to high poverty rates amongst women.<sup>4</sup> Approximately one in four people living on the streets of Hamilton are women. However, those visibly living on the streets are not a true representation of women’s experience with homelessness.<sup>5</sup> The susceptibility to violence and sexual assault or child apprehension into government care make living literally on the street nearly impossible for the majority of homeless women.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, women at risk of becoming homeless may endure constant threats or domestic violence in order to avoid losing the roof over their heads.

Statistics show that women’s housing problems are in direct correlation with the disproportionate number of women living in poverty across the country. This inequity is applicable to all women in spite of age, income, family status or ethnicity.<sup>7</sup>

<b>Total women admitted due to abuse</b>	<b>2,496</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Age Group</b>		
15-24	454	18
25-34	886	35
35-44	668	27
45-54	261	10
55+	114	5
Age Unknown	113	5
<b>Parental Status</b>		
Admitted with child(ren)	1,313	53
Admitted without child(ren)	533	21
Admitted who have no children	518	21
Parental status unknown	132	5
<b>Disabilities</b>		
Physical	102	4
Visual disabilities	33	1
Hearing disabilities	14	1
Other disabilities	24	---
<b>Relationship to Abuser</b>		
Spouse	706	28
Common Law Partner	944	38
Former Spouse or Partner	323	13
Dating	122	5
Relative	156	6
Other	108	4
Relationship Unknown	137	5

**FIG. 1.2 RESIDENT DEMOGRAPHICS**



**75%** of women  
residing in shelters are there  
for reasons of abuse

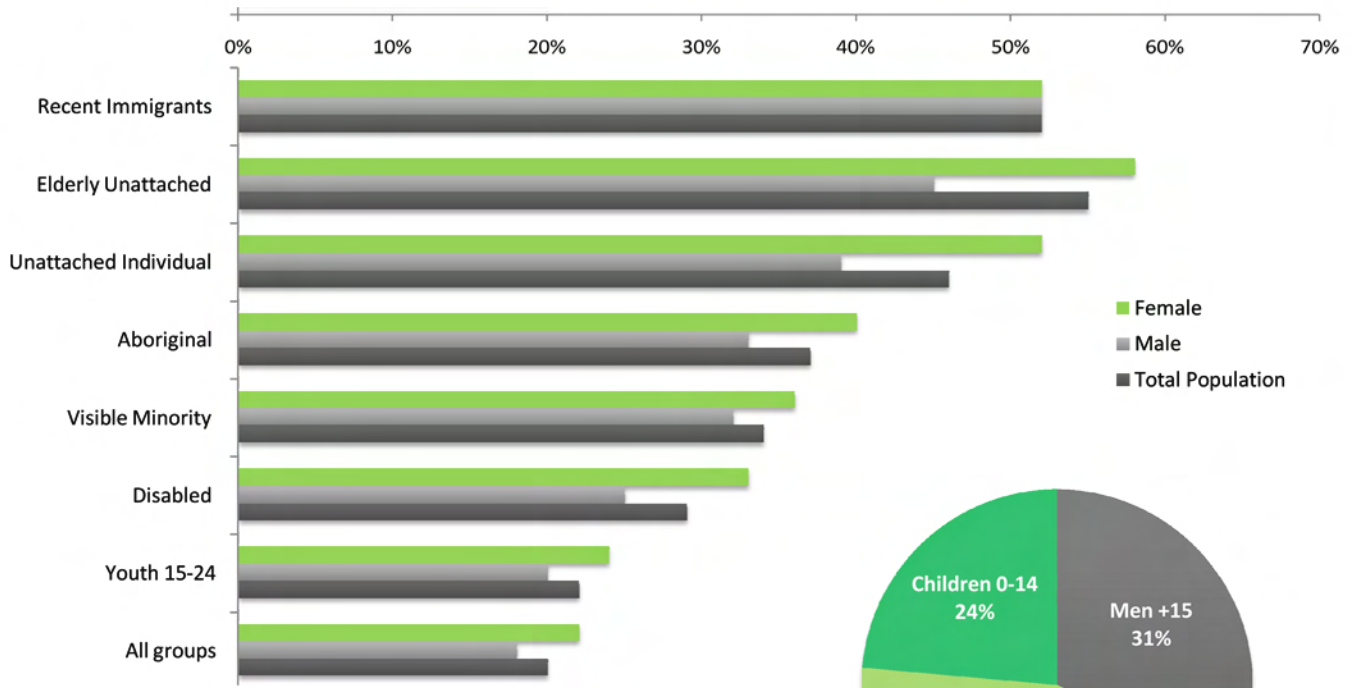


Fig. 1.3 BREAKDOWN OF POVERTY RATES

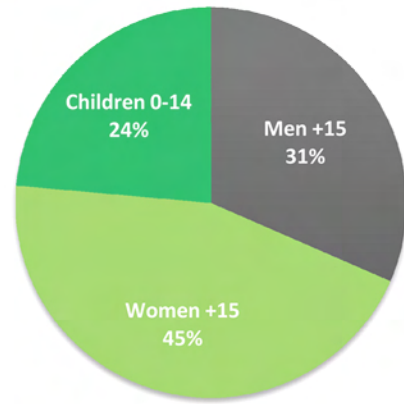


Fig. 1.4 POVERTY IN HAMILTON

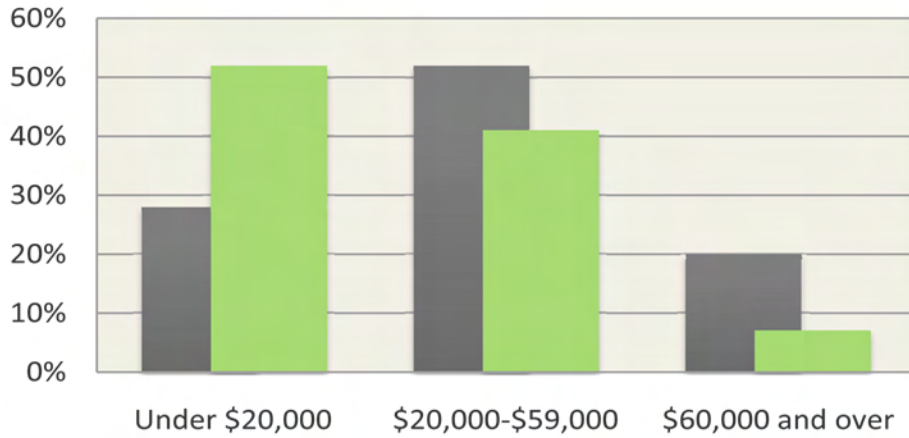


Fig. 1.5 INCOME BY GENDER

Twenty percent of Hamilton's residents are living on low income. However, women are far more likely to live in poverty than men. In Hamilton, women consist of 52 percent of the adult population but they account for nearly 60 percent of those living in poverty.<sup>8</sup> This number rises when other factors are taken into consideration, such as race, parental status, ability and age. These conclusions are confirmed by existing shelter surveys that indicate a significant increase in the number of single women, women with children, and particularly Aboriginal and black women who have had to rely on emergency shelters for housing.<sup>9</sup>

Pay inequities must also be considered when comparing the poverty levels of men and women. Canada has the fifth largest wage gap between women and men out of 29 developed countries.<sup>10</sup> Although more and more women are entering the work force, equity in wages continues to be an uphill battle. Similar to the national trend, women in Hamilton earn lower incomes than men. Full time employment, type of work, age or education has little impact in reducing the wage gap.

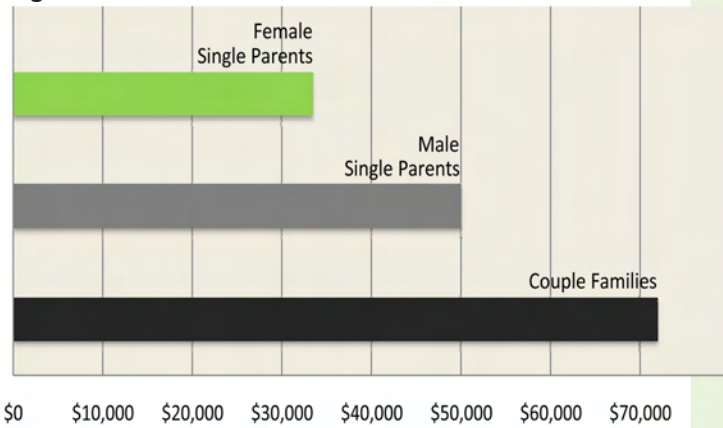
### **1.1 Single Mothers**

Census figures indicate that approximately a quarter of all households with children in Canada are headed by single women.<sup>11</sup> Over the past few decades, there has been a steady increase in the amount of women managing the home and raising a family on their own. Historically, the proportion of single-parent households in Canada was high at the beginning of the 20th century. During this time, there was a greater possibility of becoming widowed due to less developed medical technology, poor health conditions, or through war. The number of single-parent households was very low during the baby-boom period, from 1946 to 1965. This was a time when families were more often comprised of married couples and children. Legalizing divorce in 1968 was a significant factor in the growth of single parent households.<sup>12</sup>

Single parenthood is temporary for some women while for others it may simply be preferred or a fact of life. Today, there are more single parents that have never been married as opposed to widowed. This is partially attributed to a greater social acceptance in having children outside of marriage or in common-law relationships.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, more middle class and educated women are intentionally changing the conventional family structure through raising children on their own.<sup>14</sup> However, these single mothers are likely to be self-sufficient, have a career and other networks of support.

Single-parent households are often thought of as having high rates of poverty. In actuality, it is single parent families headed by women that have significantly high rates of poverty. Eighty per cent of single parent households are comprised of women and their children. In Canada, poverty rates among single mothers are higher than any other family type or group. Statistics Canada reported that an essential aspect of women's poverty is the presence of children. This factor had more relevance than age, marital status, race or education. Women continue to be the primary caregivers as

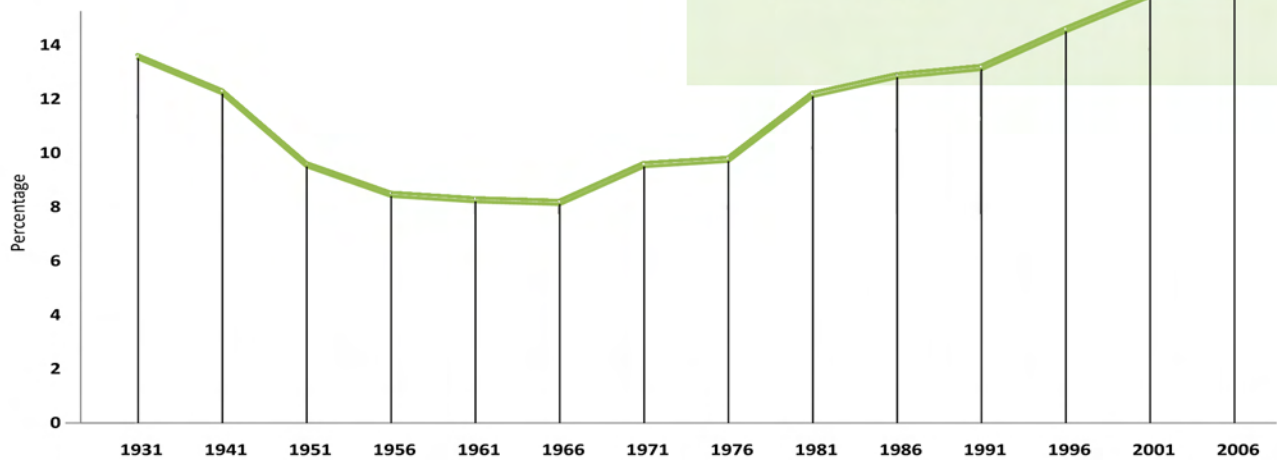
**Fig. 1.6 INCOME GAP BY FAMILY TYPE**



**Fig. 1.7 PROFILE OF SINGLE PARENTS IN HAMILTON**

**18,600 Mother led families**  
**7,935 mother led families live in poverty**  
**29,000 children living in mother led homes**  
**81% with children under age of 6 live in poverty**  
**80% of all lone parent families are headed by single moms**  
**57% of single moms are in the workforce**  
**53% of single moms are separated or divorced**  
**21% of single moms are recent immigrants**  
**13% of single moms are visible minorities**  
**10% of single moms are under 25 years of age**

**Fig. 1.8 PERCENTAGE OF SINGLE PARENT HOUSEHOLDS IN CANADA**



most children live with their mothers in two-parent or single-parent households. The responsibility of child rearing, lower income levels, lack of adequate childcare and financial responsibilities are elements that contribute to women's poverty.<sup>15</sup>

## 1.2 Housing Policies

Not having a place to call home restricts access to necessities such as suitable shelter, security, nutritious foods, education and outreach programs. It can also affect the overall well-being of an individual and might increase stress, lower self-esteem and isolate people from the community.<sup>16</sup>

Over the past few decades, a number of key Criminal Code amendments have been put in place to improve the criminal justice and legal framework for addressing family violence and housing in Canada. These efforts were largely brought forward by women's groups and grassroots movements and reflected an increased awareness of domestic violence and the issues that abused women face.<sup>17</sup> The implementation of spousal abuse charging and mandatory prosecution policies stemmed from the legal efforts to combat domestic violence.

The shelter and safe house movement in Canada began in the early 1970s. Raising social awareness about the serious nature of domestic violence was a difficult task.<sup>18</sup> Members of the women's movement were among the first to recognize the large volume of women that were experiencing physical and sexual abuse from their intimate partner. These groups were instrumental in the development of drop in centres, health service facilities and further activism on behalf of victimized women.

Victims of domestic abuse, community figures and political leaders all worked together and determined that the absence of alternative housing was one of the most critical issues facing women who leave an abusive environment. Protective housing facilities started to appear across Canada in the 1970s once legislative changes were formed to protect women's rights and provide emergency shelters for secure refuge. The first facilities in Canada were Interval House in Toronto and Vancouver's Transition House.

Over the following decade, social awareness continued to grow of the challenges and problems rooted in domestic violence. Joint efforts and partnerships amongst the federal and provincial governments and community organizations resulted in the development of an extensive network of transition homes and emergency shelters across the country. The fundamental cause of this shift during the 1980s was how the justice system responded to domestic violence: it was no longer treated as a private matter.<sup>19</sup> Each province and territory has charging and prosecution directives or policies in place to ensure that spousal violence cases are treated as criminal offences. Moreover, these policies also aim to ensure the safety and security of victims, promote victim reporting to police and increase the system's capacity to handle domestic issues. Mandatory prosecution policies require that charges be laid where there are reasonable and probable grounds to do so, regardless of the victim's



wishes. Therefore, the victim is relieved of the burden of determining whether or not to press or drop charges.

In the 1990s, initiatives undertaken in the United States and Great Britain influenced provincial governments across Canada to adopt legislation that offered a civil remedy for victims of violence by their cohabitants. This type of initiative was generally represented as an effort to be more responsive to the needs of victims by providing more immediate and accessible options for safety than what was available under criminal law. Components of the protective order may be to remove the abuser from the home or to prohibit the abuser from communicating with the victim. Saskatchewan was the first province in Canada to implement such legislation in 1995. The Victims of Domestic Violence Act has since served as a model for similar legislation in many other provinces.

### **1.3 The Housing Continuum**

Women's emergency shelters and transition homes are an important aspect of the Homeless-Housing Continuum. This consists of a range of housing forms that vary depending on support services and on the occupant's ability to pay. The Homeless-Housing Continuum is in recognition of housing needs as well as the vulnerabilities of those at risk of becoming homeless. Housing with support services provides vulnerable individuals and families with the necessary support to live a stable and independent life.<sup>20</sup> Homeless shelters are at one end of the spectrum and home ownership is at the other. Understandably, moving through the continuum is not always a linear progression as individuals and families may move back and forth depending on their circumstances. The project described in this thesis was based on the assumption that the housing is largely transitional and clients would move through a continuum of housing with ever decreasing levels of support.

The occupancy rates of emergency shelters for men, women, youth and families have increased across Hamilton. Based on available data, the number of people accessing the city's emergency shelter services has more than doubled since 1995.<sup>21</sup> Currently, there are 509 emergency shelter beds in Hamilton serving all sectors of the population. The majority of emergency shelter beds are for single men. The second largest group of beds is for women and children staying in Violence Against Women shelters. Approximately 1,600 women are admitted into one of the VAW shelters each year. Nearly three-quarters of these women are accompanied by children.

The majority of women's shelter beds are for women who experience violence, the major cause of homelessness for women in Hamilton. There are four types of emergency services programs for women in the city that offer temporary accommodations. They are emergency shelters, Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters, transition homes and seasonal programs such as Out of the Cold. The VAW shelters and transition homes are the only facilities that will accept mothers accompanied by young children.

Fig. 1.9 HOUSING CONTINUUM OF CARE

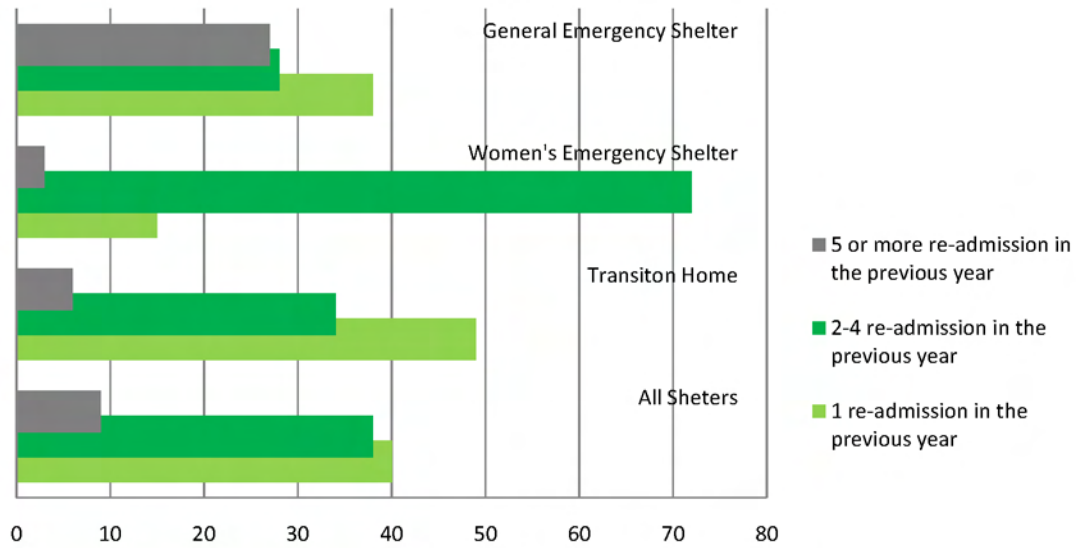
Emergency Shelter	Transition Home	Social & Subsidized Housing	Private Market Rental	Affordable Homeownership
Not exclusive to abused women as some facilities might provide accommodations for men or individuals that were recently evicted. Other than residential services, these shelters offer few additional resources.	Secure housing with support and referral services designed to assist women while they search for permanent housing.	Rent-geared-to-income apartments or houses that is available to all sectors of the population. Extensive waiting lists usually apply.	Privately developed housing not owned by the occupant.	Affordable ownership for low-to-moderate income households and first-time home buyers by virtue of its relatively modest costs or through government programs.
<b>Length of Stay</b>				
Short-term (1-3 days)	Long-term (3-24 months)	Long-term	Permanent	Permanent

Fig. 1.10 MOST COMMON PROBLEMS FACING WOMEN SHELTERS

- Shelters are constantly at maximum capacity**
- Creating / implementing follow up programs**
- Dealing with mental health issues**
- Education, exposure and awareness within the community**
- Securing adequate legal services for residents**



**Fig. 1.11 RATE OF READMISSION**



**FIG. 1.12 SUBSIDIZED HOUSING AVAILABILITY IN HAMILTON (2006)**

Number of social housing units **14,692**  
 Number of social housing units where tenants pay rent geared to income **10,000**  
 Number of active applications on the social housing waiting list **3,817**  
 Number of new applicants per month **271**  
 Average number of people housed per month **124**  
 Number of people who have homeless status on the waiting list **355**



Some shelters have limits on how long a woman can stay, while others do not. The longer a woman is allowed to stay, the more time she has to gather the resources that she will need to look after herself. However, the longer the women stay, the fewer women who are in crisis can be housed. Shelters that do not limit the length of stay, find that most women will return home or make alternate living arrangements once the crisis has passed.<sup>22</sup> However, finding new accommodations may be limited by the shortage of available housing. Other shelters limit the length of a resident's stay, or reach individual length-of-stay agreements with residents based on their needs and how quickly they anticipate finding a place to live. Some shelters are able to combine temporary shelter with transitional housing option. Women stay in the temporary shelter, then move to longer-term transitional housing where they may stay for a year or two until they find permanent housing.

#### **1.4 Affordable Housing**

In the 1950s, the federal government played a leading role in the development of assisted rental housing. In 1993 the federal government froze federal contributions to social housing. The federal cutbacks were followed by significant provincial cutbacks. Ontario adopted policies that shifted the responsibility of housing and social programs onto municipal governments. A weaker municipal tax base was unable to keep up with demand for affordable rental accommodation or the maintenance of existing buildings.<sup>23</sup> The extensive waiting list for social housing shows the need for more subsidized housing in Hamilton.

There are approximately 4,000 people on the waiting list for social housing in Hamilton. Despite recognition of abused women as “special priorities”, there is no accurate way of determining the number of women on the social housing wait lists.<sup>24</sup> Provincial Coroner's Inquests have recommended that access to housing for women fleeing violence be improved and expedited. However, the “special priority” status definition for access to social housing has recently been broadened to include all forms of violence committed within any individual's home. Due to lack of affordable housing, vulnerable women and families are forced to compete for basic shelter needs.<sup>25</sup> This may result in more women becoming homeless or others returning to abusive homes, and quite possibly to their deaths.<sup>26</sup>

Over 300,000 households in Ontario still pay more than half their income on rent.<sup>27</sup> Vacancy rates are high in the upper end of the rental market, which largely consists of condominium units. While most women are unable to afford these rents, they may be forced into these expensive units due to the lack of alternatives. Women often face a chronic struggle of living beyond their means with minimal resources for food and clothing for themselves or families.

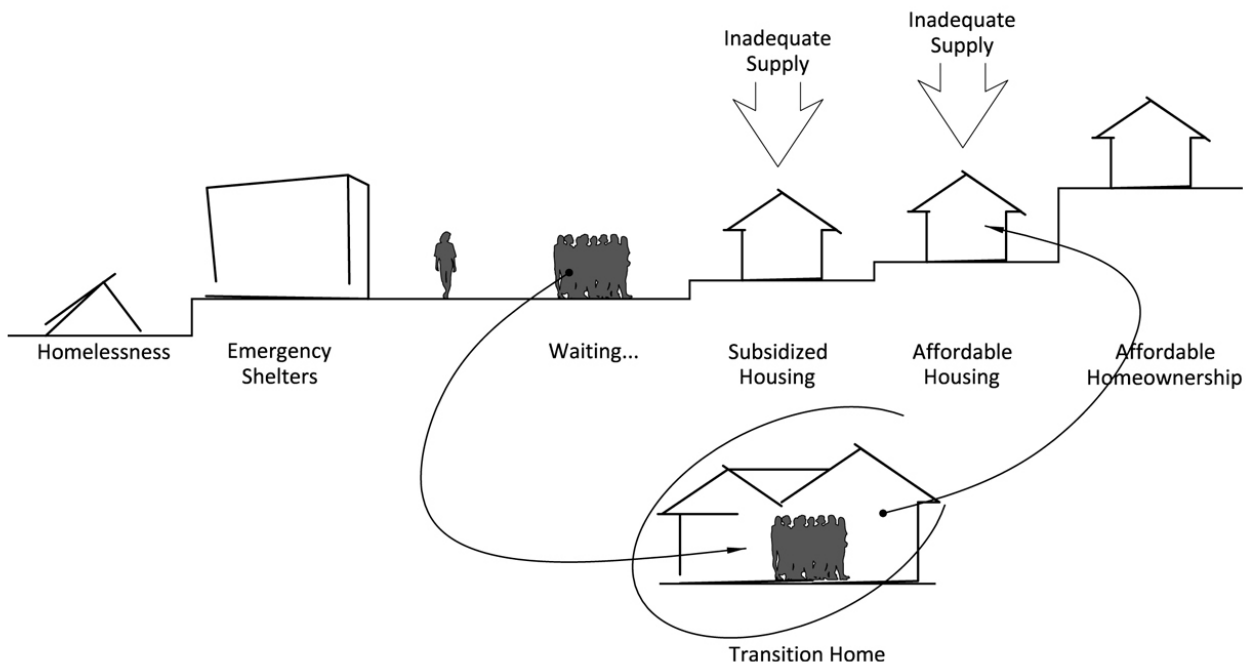
Other barriers to women obtaining decent, secure and affordable housing are due to the physical and social needs that distinguish women from men.<sup>28</sup> Women are often the primary caregivers to all generations of family and therefore require housing

within close proximity to schools, hospitals, and community programs.

Emergency shelter workers report that women who have used the rent supplement programs in privately owned housing are vulnerable to unscrupulous landlords who have access to personal and financial information. They may be subject to threats and sexual harassment because they are dependent on the subsidy to afford the rent.<sup>29</sup>

Studies of alternative housing have shown that some women have a preference for women-only housing. The women preferred other women as neighbours to avoid exposure to sexual harassment or threats of violence. Design alterations are required to address safety concerns due to the amount of women fleeing abusive environments.<sup>30</sup>

Transition homes for women and children can deliver essential programs that support women and children when they leave emergency shelters or are referred from other agencies. These facilities are also referred to as second stage shelters or bridge housing.<sup>31</sup> Transition homes help many women and families steer clear of a life of abuse or homelessness. They give a woman the necessary time to heal from the trauma of an abusive relationship, to pursue careers or educational opportunities and a new home for her family.



**Fig. 1.13 THE HOUSING CONTINUUM**

1.5 Design Precedents

**Robertson House Crisis Care Centre**  
Taylor Hariri Pontarini Architects, 1995  
Toronto, ON

Robertson House is a temporary shelter for women and their children located along Sherbourne Street in Downtown Toronto. It is a two-storey, L-shaped addition that wraps around Victorian estates and forms a large courtyard. The courtyard is central to the design as the principal program spaces open directly onto it. The courtyard is the focal point for the shelters internal community and conveys a sense of protection. Common areas provide opportunities for residents to interact and share their experiences. This justified the architects' decision to make the bedrooms smaller than conventional practices. Smaller rooms discouraged too much introversion and encourage residents to participate community-based activities.

- Awards**
- 2003 Ontario Association of Architects Award – Architecture of Excellence**
- 2001 Wood Design Awards – Citation Award – Residential Category**
- 2000 Toronto Architecture & Urban Awards**
- 1995 Canadian Architects Awards – Award of Excellence**

Fig. 1.14 ROBERTSON HOUSE

Fig. 1.15 LES JARDINS DU Y DES FEMMES



A



B



C



A

### **Les jardins du Y des femmes**

Atelier Big City - Howard Davis Architects  
Montreal

Les jardins du Y des femmes is a transition home for women located downtown Montreal. The courtyard is also a key element of the design. The bright green siding is really vibrant compared the dark stone exterior which helps to animate the courtyard. Social interaction amongst residents is encouraged through balconies that look over this communal space.

The building was recognized by the Ordre des architectes du Québec as a finalist for the Awards of Excellence in the category of Multi-Unit Residential Project.



B



C

**Centre des femmes de Montréal**  
Nomade - Lauzon Pelland Architects  
Montreal, QC

The mission of the *Centre des femmes de Montréal* is to provide services to help women help themselves. To accomplish its mission, the Centre offers educational and vocational training, information, counselling and referral services.

This non-profit organization communicates women's concerns to the public and acts as a catalyst for change regarding women's issues.

I have reviewed the therapeutic and educational programs that the facility provides and wish to incorporate them into the project. A difference between the *Centre des femmes de Montréal* and the design project is that there will be a place for women to live as well as learn.

The addition to the building by Nomade - Lauzon Pelland architects was recognized by the *Ordre des architectes du Québec* as a finalist for the Awards of Excellence in the category of Institutional Projects.



A



B

**Fig. 1.16 CENTRE DES FEMMES DE MONTREAL**  
**Fig. 1.17 HUBERTUS HOUSE FRO UNWED MOTHERS**

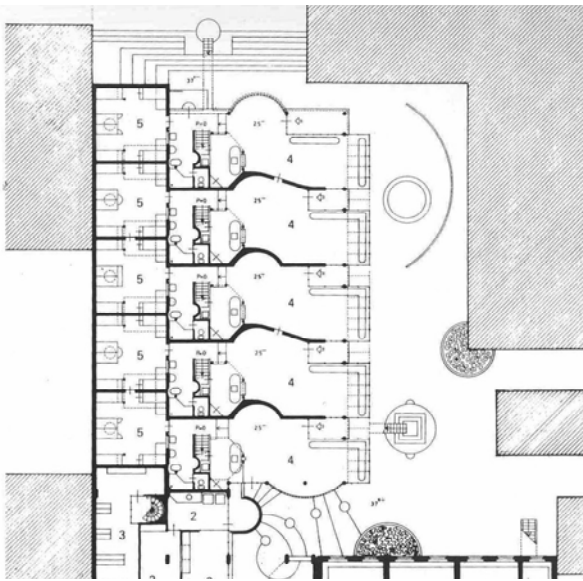




A

**Hubertus House for Unwed Mothers, Aldo van Eyck, 1973-8  
Amsterdam**

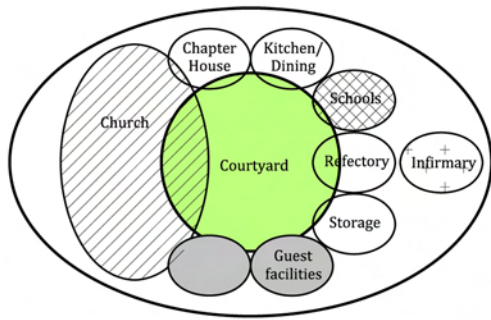
This is a cheerful multicoloured place for single women and children. Two of the building previously existed prior to van Eyck's colourful contribution. Transparent elements and vibrant colours are applied throughout the building to help animate the relationship between exterior and interior space.



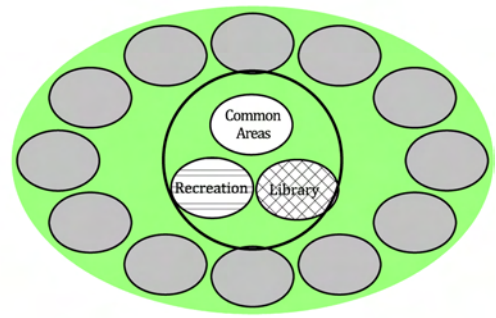
B



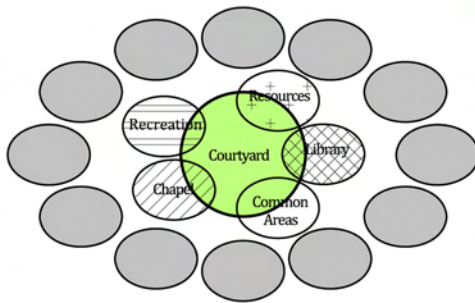
C



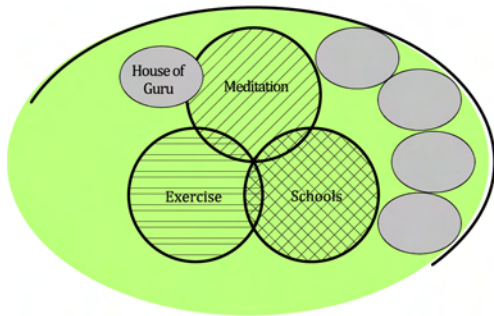
**Monasteries**



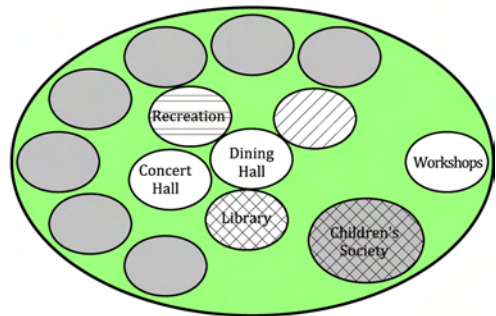
**Cohousing**



**Transition Home**



**Ashrams**



**Kibbutzim**

**Fig. 1.18 RELATIONAL DIAGRAMS OF INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES**

## 1.6 Intentional Communities

Women who have experienced domestic violence, who are recovering from living on the streets, or who are struggling to raise a family, can benefit from close peer support and sharing.<sup>32</sup> Communal living offers opportunities for informal social interactions and encourages spontaneous cooperation with childcare or preparing meals, which allows more time for personal development.

Many people choose to live in a community because it offers a way of life which is different, in various ways, from that of the rest of society. An intentional community is a general term that represents a wide variety of living alternatives. Thousands exist today and there is enormous diversity among them. Most communities share land or housing, but more importantly, their members share a common vision and work actively to carry out their common purpose. Intentional communities include housing cooperatives, kibbutzim, ashrams, and monasteries.

The purpose of intentional communities may vary, but they account for shared resources, egalitarian values or self-reliance. Similar programmatic elements can influence and reinforce the physical design of a transition home for women and children. Courtyards and access to nature is important to the various groups for spiritual healing and physical recreation. Spiritual centres, education, childrearing and dining are communal activities that are emphasised in these communities.

The degree of privacy and autonomy in communities varies as widely as the kinds of communities themselves. In some communities individual families own their land and house, their degree of privacy and autonomy is similar to the rest of society. In communities with specific religious or spiritual lifestyles, such as monasteries or some meditation retreats, privacy and autonomy are typically more limited, a part of the reason for which the community was organized.

## Cohousing

One of the fastest growing forms of intentional communities is cohousing. Cohousing is a type of collaborative housing in which residents actively participate in the design and operation of their own neighbourhoods. The concept originated in Denmark, and was brought to North America the early 1980s. The Danish concept of “living community” has spread to hundreds of cohousing communities around the world.

Cohousing residents are consciously committed to living as a community. The physical design encourages both social contact and individual space. Private homes contain all the features of conventional homes but are often found clustered around a common house. Residents have access to extensive common facilities such as open space, courtyards, a playground and a common house. The common house is the social center of a community.<sup>33</sup> It contains a large dining room and kitchen, lounge, recreational facilities, children’s spaces, and frequently a guest room, workshop and laundry room. Communities usually serve optional group meals in the common house various times throughout the week.

Cohousing residents participate in the planning, design, ongoing management and maintenance of their community and meet frequently to address each of these processes. Cohousing neighbourhoods tend to offer environmentally sensitive design with a pedestrian orientation. They are typically designed as attached or single-family homes along one or more pedestrian streets or clustered around a courtyard. They typically range from 10-35 households emphasizing a multi-generational mix singles, couples, and families with children, and elders. Cohousing provides personal privacy combined with the benefits of living in a community where people know and interact with their neighbours.

## Monasteries

A monastery is the place of prayer, worship, and residence of a religious community whose members are bound by religious vows that separate them from the world and its distractions. They are economically independent. The dominant feature of Western monasticism was its communal character. The size of individual communities varied according to their financial endowments and prestige. Some monasteries had only two or three members while others consisted of nearly a thousand members.

The origins of the typical monastic plan are obscure. The intent is that it is inward-looking, with the intention of seclusion. The cloister was often central to the monastery plan. The word cloister derived from the Latin word *claustrum*, “a shut-in place.”

Monastic life circulated around the cloister as all buildings typically used by the residents opened off of it. This included the church, the chapter house for community meetings, the dormitory, the refectory, and storage facilities. The infirmary was usually kept quite a distance away from the cloister and the surrounding buildings. Separate quarters were created for the community’s leader, the abbot or prior.

Many monasteries also maintained external schools for children. Within the complex there were usually accommodations for guests separate from the dormitories. Optional facilities might include a chapel for the use of visitors as they were not permitted in the church used by the monks or nuns. Gatehouses and elaborate kitchens were occasionally built within a monastic complex.

The church was always the most imposing feature within a monastery and gave some indication of the wealth and prosperity of the monastery.<sup>34</sup> The plan of a monastic church reflects the nature of the community. Most have large naves because public preaching and teaching were extremely important.

## Ashrams

Ashrams are a part of an ancient Indian tradition that dates back thousands of years. The word ashram is derived from the Sanskrit term “aashraya”, which means protection. Traditional ashrams were a secluded place for a community of Hindus leading a life of peace and simplicity through religious meditation. They are considered as the house of where a true Guru is living and teaching God-seekers seeking spiritual advice and help. The purpose of Guru is to provide the environment for a spiritual retreat to offer the best possible environment in preparation to achieve oneness with God.<sup>35</sup> Most ashrams outside of India are headed by religious leaders or Gurus of Indian decent. However, ashrams are now guided by persons of any gender, race, religion or cultural background. Ashrams around the world no longer tend to focus on a particular religion and are open to everyone.

Ashrams have come to be recognized as intentional communities that offer spiritual guidance for its members. Traditionally, most ashrams accommodate only the Guru while some offer visitors somewhere to stay. The length of stay varies from months to years to permanent residency which is similar to the tradition in Christian Monasteries. It is customary for ashrams to not charge for their services and to serve on a basis of free donations in order to make spiritual services available to the less fortunate.

Some Ashrams are marked with a red flag to be recognized by pilgrims on their spiritual journey. The goal of a pilgrimage to the ashram may be for tranquility or to receive instruction in an art form or a trade. Ashrams were traditionally located in secluded environments that were far from human habitation. They were often situated in forests, mountainous regions, or natural surroundings favourable for spiritual instruction and meditation. Ashrams range in size from a small cave to as large as a temple or monastery. Residents of an ashram regularly perform spiritual and physical exercises, such as the various forms of Yoga. Many ashrams also served as residential schools for children.

## **Kibbutzim**

The first kibbutz was formed in 1909 by a group of young Jewish settlers from Eastern Europe that came to Israel to reclaim the soil of their ancient homeland and to create a new way of life.<sup>37</sup> They built their new home on the principle of common ownership of all assets and on responsibility of one for all and all for one. All members were entitled to housing, furniture, food, clothing, medical services, cultural activities, and education for themselves and their children. In return, they were expected to work in the kibbutz according to his or her ability.

The size of a kibbutz can vary from less than a hundred members to over a thousand. Every kibbutz had a communal dining hall, cultural centre, library, offices, and children's house. Some communities provided recreational facilities through swimming pools, basketball courts, tennis courts, concert halls and playing fields. The buildings were often set in traffic-free landscaped public gardens. Any workshops, garages, or factories were positioned to the side and out of sight.

In the 1920s kibbutzim began the practice of raising children communally away from their parents in special communities called Children Societies. Trained nurses and teachers were considered more suitable to raise children than their busy or inexperienced parents. It was believed that children and parents would have better relationships since parents would not have to act as disciplinarians. The Children's Society was intended to liberate women from their maternal responsibilities and they were free to work or enjoy leisure activities.

Egalitarian beliefs were expressed in housing through uniformity, regardless of individual needs. In the traditional kibbutz, the members' living quarters were built according to static patterns with identical exterior appearances. There was often no consideration in the planning for topographical differences within the landscape, solar orientation or views of the landscape. What was meant in good faith to create outward equality could contribute to inequality between the members' quality of life. Disputes within several kibbutzes have been attributed to the disregard of the environmental context in the initial planning.<sup>38</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Sylvia Novac, 1996. *Borderlands of homelessness : Women's views on alternative housing*. Toronto, Ont.: Women's Services Network.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 City of Hamilton and Planning and Research Council. 2007. *On Any Given Night: Measuring Homelessness in Hamilton*.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 Sylvia Novac, *op. cit.*
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 City of Hamilton and Planning and Research Council. 2006. *Women and Poverty in Hamilton*.
- 8 City of Hamilton and Planning and Research Council. 2006. *Women and Poverty in Hamilton*.
- 9 Sylvia Novac, *op. cit.*
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 Taylor-Butts, Andrea. "Canada's Shelters for Abused Women, 2003/04" *Statistics Canada* - Catalogue no. 85-002-XiE, Vol. 25, No.3, (2005).
- 12 Stats Canada – family structure
- 13 Stats Canada – family structure
- 14 Joan Forrester Sprague. 1991. *More than housing : Lifeboats for women and children*. Boston ; Toronto: Butterworth Architecture.
- 15 City of Hamilton and Planning and Research Council. 2006. *Women and Poverty in Hamilton*.
- 16 Cathy Davis. *Housing associations: Re-housing Women Leaving Domestic Violence: New Challenges and Good Practice*.
- 17 Andrea Taylor-Butts, "Canada's Shelters for Abused Women, 2003/04" *Statistics Canada* - Catalogue no. 85-002-XiE, Vol. 25, No.3, (2005)
- 18 Leslie M. Tutty, PhD. *Effective Practices in Sheltering Women Leaving Violence in Intimate Relationships*. Toronto, ON: YWCA Canada, 2006.
- 19 Andrea Taylor-Butts, *op.cit.*
- 20 City of Hamilton and Planning and Research Council. 2007. *On Any Given Night: Measuring Homelessness in Hamilton*.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 Leslie M. Tutty, *op.cit.*
- 23 Joan Forrester Sprague, *op.cit.*



- 24 Joan Forrester Sprague, *op.cit.*
- 25 Sylvia Novac, 1996. *Borderlands of homelessness : Women's views on alternative housing*. Toronto, Ont.: Women's Services Network.
- 26 Coroner's inquest
- 27 Sylvia Novac, 1996. *Borderlands of homelessness : Women's views on alternative housing*. Toronto, Ont.: Women's Services Network.
- 28 Sylvia Novac, *op.cit.*
- 29 Joan Forrester Sprague, *op.cit.*
- 30 Sylvia Novac, *op.cit.*
- 31 Joan Forrester Sprague, *op.cit.*
- 32 Joan Forrester Sprague, *op.cit.*
- 33 "About Cohousing" *Canadian Cohousing Network* (2005), [www.cohousing.ca](http://www.cohousing.ca) (accessed July 12, 2008).
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 "Ashram's Architecture" Anandmurti Gurumaa Ashram (2004), [www.gurumaa.com/ashram\\_architecture.asp](http://www.gurumaa.com/ashram_architecture.asp) accessed July, 2008).
- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 Gavron, Daniel. *Holy land mosaic: stories of cooperation and coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008.
- 38 *Ibid.*



# 02

## SITE CONSIDERATIONS

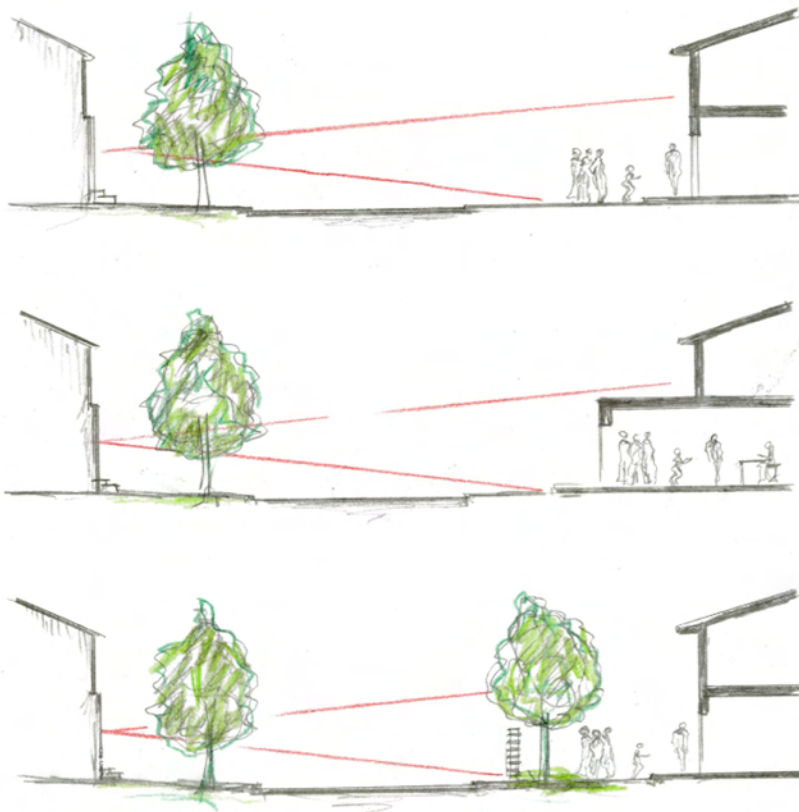
A transition home for women and children deserves the best possible location. The relationship between the indoor and outdoor environments is important to the occupants and surrounding neighbourhood. Therefore, architectural services should begin with site selection to evaluate the conditions of a property and how it could limit or enhance a program. This is not always possible as some projects must make do with donated land or an allotted section within an existing building.

Local zoning rules and procedures must be consulted before choosing a site for a transition home. Current zoning regulations may prohibit multiple families residing in a single house or further limit the number of unrelated persons that can occupy these houses. Furthermore, historical districts may not allow the conversion of one of their older buildings into a supportive housing facility. Multi-family dwellings or group residences may be restricted in residential areas, and therefore limited to commercial locations or to places where buildings are dilapidated or abandoned. A new shelter might consider moving into a facility that had previously been approved for multi-family use, such as a boarding house or inn. Permits may be granted as of right if the new use is similar to the existing use of a building. If this is not the case, or if new construction is planned, a public hearing may be required for a special permit or variance. Any unfavourable decisions can be appealed but this may risk attracting any unwanted attention to the project.

### 2.1 NIMBY

A new shelter development for women and children may frighten some of the neighbours. When that happens, some local residents will claim that the development is unsuitable or unwanted in their area. Some residents will agree the shelter is

NOT IN MY BACK YARD  
**NIMBY** is a collective opposition taken against proposed physical and social change to the local environment. NIMBY objections are based on the belief that change will have a negative effect on the character, socioeconomic status, or quality of life in a neighbourhood. This includes fears of property values dropping, on-street parking problems or that shelters might attract violent individuals into the area.



**Fig. 2.1 ENTRANCE BUFFERS.** Large vestibules or courtyards can screen neighbour's view of residents entering the transition home and allot a level of privacy.

necessary, but would prefer if it were located somewhere else. This challenge is sometimes called the Not in My Backyard Syndrome, or NIMBY.

NIMBY is a collective opposition taken against proposed physical and social change to the local environment. NIMBY objections are based on the belief that change will have a negative effect on the character, socioeconomic status, or quality of life in a neighbourhood.<sup>1</sup> This includes fears of property values dropping, on-street parking problems or that shelters might attract violent individuals into the area. Neighbourhood concerns partially stem from identifying women and children with public housing, which is associated with crime and deterioration due to poor design and management.<sup>2</sup>

NIMBY fears need to be addressed openly. To prepare for the challenge, program developers and the design teams have organized public meetings to explain why shelters for abused women and children should not be banished to the hidden corners of the community. Residents need information to help them make better decisions about issues that affect housing in their community. Acceptance by the immediate neighbourhood is very important since unsupportive neighbours are more likely to oppose a shelter project before the zoning board can cause negative media attention. One of the most common complaints expressed by citizens with NIMBY attitudes is that they were not sufficiently informed about proposed changes.

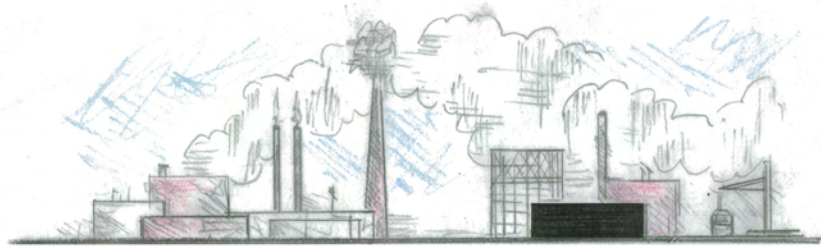
While working on the new transition home for women and children in Hamilton, a series of community meetings were held well in advance of any final design decisions. These were opportunities for the client, architect, municipal officials and neighbourhood groups to present the project and address any concerns raised by the general public.

This particular project was not well received by the neighbouring community. I could understand some of the negative reactions the neighbours had to the proposed design of the transition home. The initial scale of the project was massive in comparison to the surrounding context. However, many of the other oppositional remarks were based on misconceptions. During the public meeting for Martha's House, one man complained that the new facility would block his view of church that was a mile away from his house. Another woman was paranoid about being robbed or attacked by the supposed vagrants that a transition home for women and children would attract. The most common comment at these community meetings was simply that the neighbourhood did not want "those people" to live amongst them.

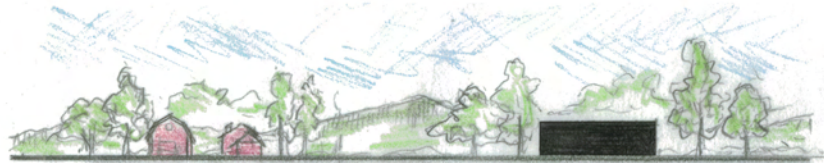
## 2.2 Location within the Community

A transition home for women and children needs to be integrated into the community in a manner that is sensitive to the unique obstacles that the residents face. Facilities located on government property may avoid zoning disputes or complaining neighbours. Levels of security are likely high as government areas tend to be well guarded. However, this separation from society might result with immediate neighbours being a mental health hospital, drug program, or jail. This is not an appropriate environment for a transition home since it indirectly associates mental health problems, drug abuse and crime with the victims of domestic violence who are required to stay there.<sup>3</sup> High-crime areas within a city or places where residents are harassed on their way to and from the building are also poor locations for a secured housing program. Pathways to and from the facility should be easily viewed by neighbours around the clock.

Approximately forty percent of the individuals admitted to women's shelters across Canada are children.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the availability of schools and proximity to parks are important considerations when choosing a location. Access to public transportation permits residents to meet their outside commitments and to keep in touch with people who are important to them. They often rely on public transportation to go to work, to find new accommodations or to visit relatives and friends. It is helpful if there are retail stores and services within the surrounding vicinity. Otherwise, a shelter may have to provide transportation to shops and appointments for those without their own cars. Stores should supply everyday needs and be stocked with enough ethnic foods to assure a sense of home for residents with diverse cultural backgrounds.<sup>5</sup>



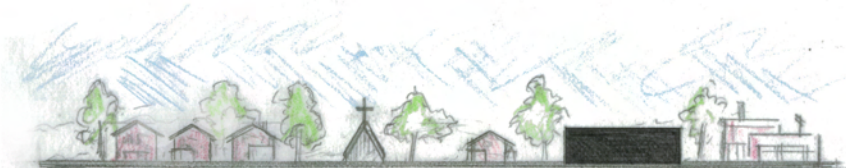
Industrial zones are isolated from social programs and services.



It is difficult to access public transportation and social programs from rural areas.



It is difficult to acquire a lot of outdoor recreational space in built-up areas.



Residential neighbourhoods are often in close proximity to schools, stores and required amenities.

**Fig. 2.2 LOCATIONS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY**



**Incidence of Low Income**  
(the percentage of families and individuals living below the poverty line)

<p><b>Women's Emergency Centre</b> 1. Mary's Place</p> <p><b>Violence Against Women Shelters</b> 2. Interval House 3. Inasmuch House 4. Martha's House 5. Women's Native Centre</p> <p><b>Female Youth Centres</b> 6. Notre Dame's House</p>	<p><b>Women and Children Transition Homes</b> 7. Good Shepherd's Women's Centre 8. Good Shepherd's Family</p> <p><b>Women's Mental Health</b> 9. Summerville House</p>	<p>40 to 75 20 to 40 10 to 20 0 to 10</p>
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**Fig. 2.3 EXISTING SHELTER SERVICES IN HAMILTON**



## 2.3 Existing Facilities in Hamilton

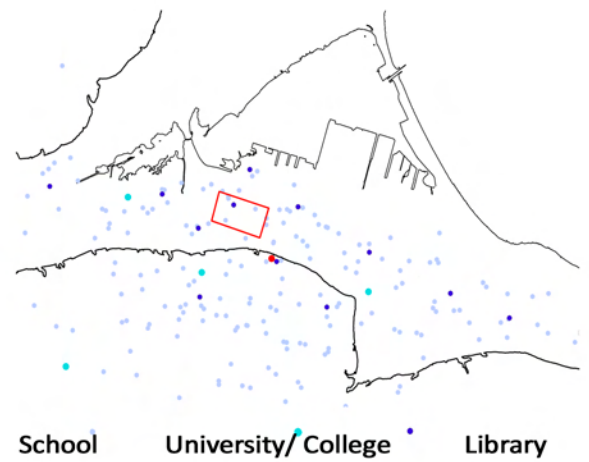
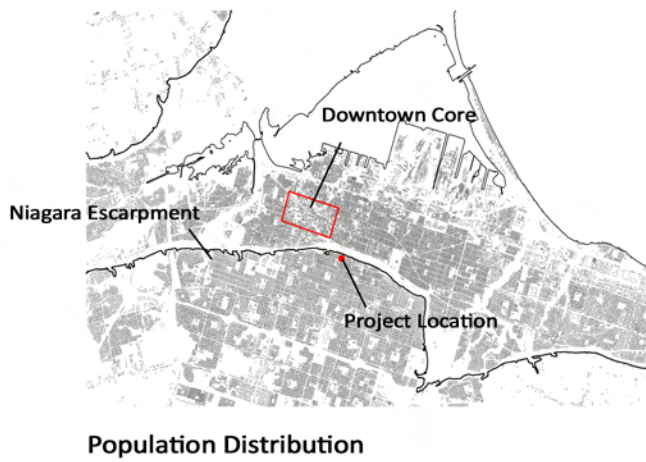
Hamilton, like many Canadian cities, faces a range of serious social issues which interact to create homelessness. It is widely reported that 20 percent or 95,000 Hamiltonians are living in low income. Less understood, however, is that poverty is not gender neutral. Poverty in Hamilton has a female face that often goes unreported. Women are far more likely to live in poverty than are men. In Hamilton, women make up 52 percent of the adult population but they represent almost 60 percent of those living in poverty.

Many of the existing shelter programs for women in Hamilton tend to be concentrated in low-income neighbourhoods. The cost of the land must be considerably cheaper for the non-profit organizations that initiate these projects. This is evident in the amount of emergency shelters for men, food banks, and other social service agencies are located in the downtown core where there is a lower property value.

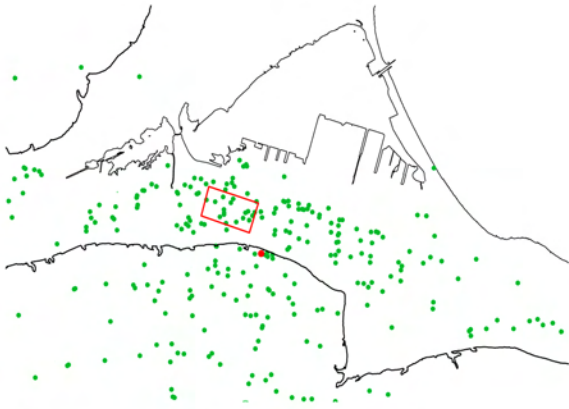
Historian Bill Freeman writes about the deterioration of Hamilton's city centre. Hamilton has a strong economy in manufacturing and health sciences and continually experiences large population growth. However, this growth is rarely experienced in the core where buildings are constantly being vacated or torn down as new and improved infrastructure appears in other sections of the city. Visitors to downtown Hamilton are continually confronted with abandoned buildings, vacant store fronts and vast parking lots along the main streets. There are several factors that contribute to the deterioration of this area. The numerous one-way thorough streets expedite traffic and lend to a hostile environment for pedestrians.<sup>6</sup> This has caused many retail and commercial businesses to relocate to power centres and suburban shopping malls in other parts of the city.

Furthermore, the natural geography of the Niagara Escarpment physically and socially divides the city. The recent development of the Lincoln Alexander Expressway and the Red Valley Hill Parkway allows residents to completely bypass the downtown area when needing to access neighbouring cities.

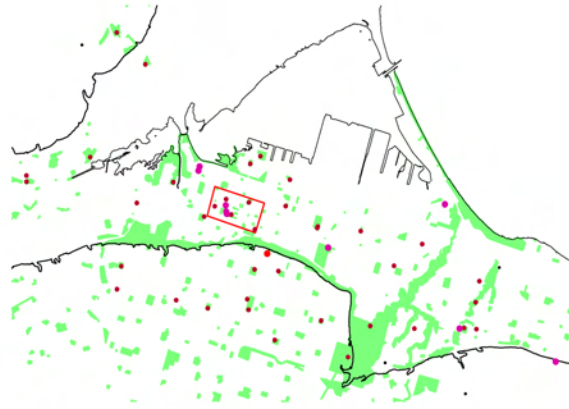
There are several existing facilities for women in Hamilton; most of them are located in low income neighbourhoods near the downtown core. The location and proximity to services are discussed in the following pages.



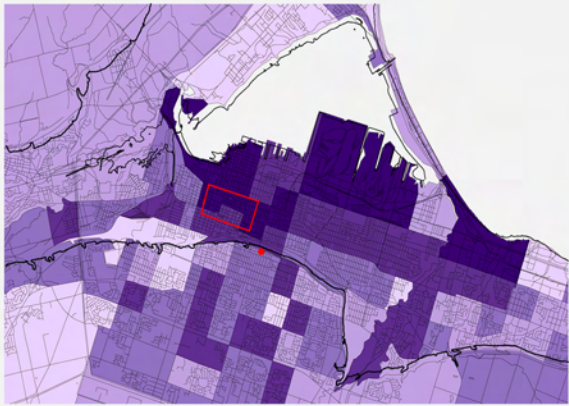
**Fig. 2.4 AMENITIES AND SERVICES IN HAMILTON**  
 The population and most services are distributed evenly across the city. However, food banks and residential care facilities remain concentrated in areas of low income or with a high unemployment rate.



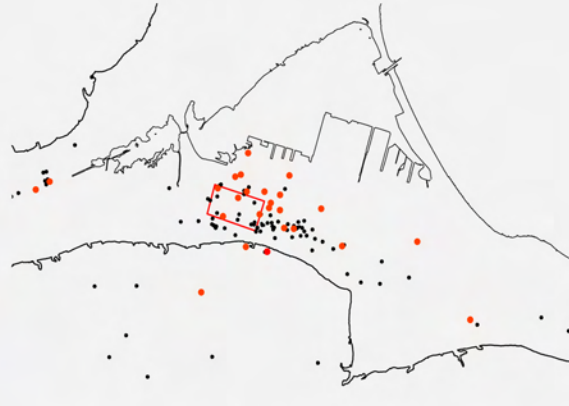
Places of Worship



Parks      Recreation Centres      Galleries



Unemployment Rate



Residential Care Facilities      Food Banks

### Interval House of Hamilton Wentworth

Interval House is transition home and offers services specifically for abused women, with or without children. In addition to meals, clothing and shelter, the facility offers counselling and advocacy to current and former residents. There are several advantages to where the program is located. It sits directly on a bus route, close to an elementary school, adjacent to a residential neighbourhood and there is ample outdoor space available within the area. Unfortunately the site is located directly across the street of a large hospital complex. This may indirectly imply to the residents and the surrounding community that that there must be something wrong with those who are required to stay there.<sup>7</sup>



Aerial View

A



Amenities

B



Traffic Volume

C

Amenities: ▲ School ● Place of Worship □ Library

■ Hospital ■ Park Lands ■ Commercial Area

■ Industrial Area — Public Transportation

Fig. 2.5 INTERVAL HOUSE



Aerial View

A



Amenities

B



Traffic Volume

C

### Inasmuch House – Mission Services

This is a 37 bed emergency shelter for women and children in crisis due to abuse and homelessness for up to six weeks. Individual and group counselling is provided along with courses and educational programs geared towards women, youth and children. It is located on the edge of a residential community downtown Hamilton and overlooks a recessed train yard. The site is in walking distance of one of the city's largest parks. There are a few houses on the street, which reduces foot traffic and passive surveillance by neighbours. Access to public transportation and retail stores is quite a distance away which might leave some residents uncomfortable walking home late at night.



D

Traffic Volume (24hr): 0-500 1,000-2,500 5,000-10,000

Fig. 2.6 INASMUCH HOUSE

15,000-20,000 + 25,000

## Martha House – The Good Shepherd Women’s Centre

Martha House is a secure 28-bed transition residence dedicated to assisting women and children who have been victims of domestic violence or abuse. It is a former Victorian estate home that has been cut and pieced into a shelter. It is located in an area of Hamilton prone to crime and prostitution. There is no secure outdoor area for children to play on the property or within the surrounding vicinity. The most disturbing aspect of its location is that its immediate neighbour is a half-way home for men experiencing homelessness. Both facilities are run by the same non-profit group. During my brief stay at Martha’s House, residents talked about being extremely terrified to walk to the facility at night, fearing unwanted encounters.



Aerial View

A



Amenities

B



Traffic Volume

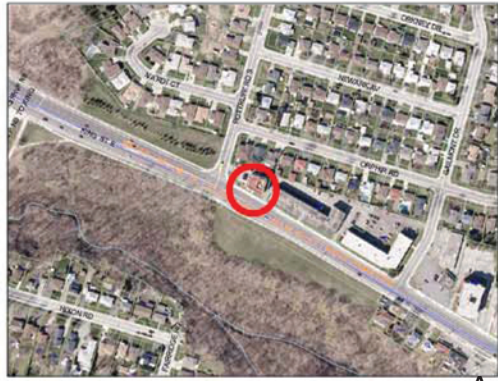
C

Amenities: ▲ School ● Place of Worship □ Library

■ Hospital ■ Park Lands ■ Commercial Area

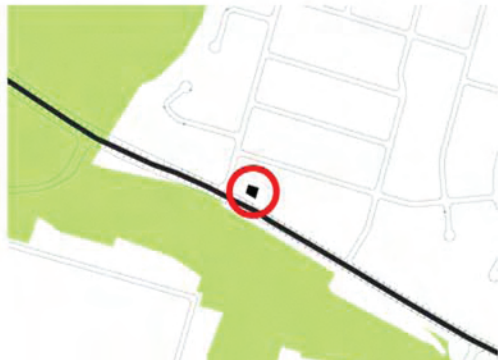
■ Industrial Area — Public Transportation

Fig. 2.7 MARTHA HOUSE



Aerial View

A



Amenities

B



Traffic Volume

C

Traffic Volume (24hr):

0-500

1,000-2,500

5,000-10,000

15,000-20,000

+ 25,000

Fig. 2.8 NATIVE WOMEN'S CENTRE

### Native Women's Centre

The Native Women's Centre provides safe, emergency shelter for all women with or without children who are experiencing violence, homelessness or conflict with the law. Services are offered to all women regardless of age, ancestry, or race. They provide access to Native Traditional methods of healing, but remain sensitive to other cultural backgrounds. The shelter is located along a bus route, adjacent to a residential neighbourhood and faces a large park. A very busy street separates the facility from the park which might prove hazardous for children to play.



D



### Good Shepherd Family Centre

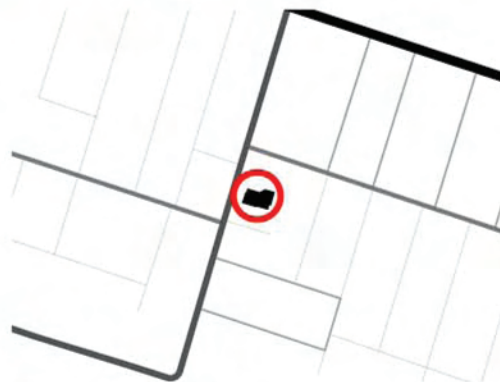
Good Shepherd Family Centre provides temporary accommodations for families experiencing homelessness. Their goal is to assist families in developing effective short and long term strategies for re-establishing housing and integrating into the community. The building's former tenant was the Children's Aid Society of Hamilton. The building was converted into the main headquarters of Good Shepherd services with rent-to-geared apartments on the upper floors. The parking requirements of the previous tenants have resulted in small play yard for outdoor recreation.



Aerial View A



Ameneties B



Traffic Volume C

Ameneties: ▲ School ● Place of Worship □ Library

■ Hospital ■ Park Lands ■ Commercial Area

■ Industrial Area — Public Transportation

Fig. 2.9 FAMILY CENTRE





Aerial View

A



Amenities

B



Traffic Volume

C

### Good Shepherd's Women's Service Centre

This is the proposed 51,000 sq. ft. facility that I once had the pleasure of working on. It is to be located in a mature neighbourhood along with three other subsidized apartments. It is in an ideal location close to shops, transportation and outdoor parks. The project has received a lot of opposition from concerned community groups for various reasons. A controversial aspect of the program is that it is too accommodate a transition home for mothers and children along with a women's emergency shelter within the same building. These two groups have many similarities but also may differ-ences. Putting them all under one roof may only compound the programs.



D

Traffic Volume (24hr): 0-500 1,000-2,500 5,000-10,000

Fig. 2.10 WOMEN'S SERVICE CENTRE

15,000-20,000 + 25,000

## 2.4 Concession Street

Finding the ideal location for a transition home is a very important task. Building a new transition home near or beside an existing women's emergency shelter may be a logical choice. Locating these programs within close proximity of each other has the advantage of sharing resources, monitoring security, and managing the administrative duties.

On the other hand, some transition home executive directors have recommended that the new facility be located a fair distance from the emergency shelter. Their view is that overall administration and the sharing of resources is still possible. They observed that the women and children made a much easier transition, with less reliance on shelter staff, when they physically left the emergency shelter to move into a more independent environment that a transition home provides.<sup>8</sup>

I chose to locate the design project on Concession Street. This is the most northern street on Hamilton Mountain and runs parallel with the edge of the Niagara escarpment. Concession Street is home to Henderson hospital, the Juravinski Cancer Centre and a variety of professional medical and health care services. The surrounding housing consist of a mix of apartment complexes, single family homes and million dollar estates. It is one of the oldest commercial districts in the city even though many small businesses have disappeared from the area over the years. The street is currently lined with vacant store fronts, junior retailers and discount outlets. The site for the project is currently a walk-in medical clinic and a large parking lot. The lot size is suitable for the required program and also faces three streets.

Domestic violence does not discriminate and effects women of all ethnic

and socioeconomic backgrounds. Middle-class women may not feel comfortable or fear stigmatization residing in a shelter located in a poor neighbourhood. If a shelter plans to serve all segments of the population, its neighbourhood must be safe, clean and accessible. Some victims of violence shun a shelter located among warehouses or abandoned houses. Women who are subject to hostile glares from neighbours are likely to leave after a short stay. A pleasant neighbourhood and community acceptance are essential aspects of a supportive environment. Concession Street is not prone to crime or an area where residents would be harassed on their way to and from the building.

Safety is a major consideration when locating a transition home for victims escaping their abusers.<sup>9</sup> Concession Street has a moderate level of traffic that will provide additional protection for women and their children by means of passive surveillance. There are numerous shopping, eating and entertainment venues in this area. The local stores are a benefit for residents to buy personal items, access specialty grocers or get their hair done. Otherwise, a shelter may have to provide transportation to shops for those without their own cars. The area is easily accessible by public transportation as many residents have to go to school, meet medical appointments or visit relatives and friends. The availability of buses permits residents to meet their outside commitments and to keep in touch with people who are important to them.<sup>10</sup> There are two elementary schools within walking distance of the site. Secondary schools or adult continuing education programs are accessible through public transportation for older children and women.



Fig. 2.11 CONCESSION STREET AMENITIES



Public Library



Cancer Research Centre



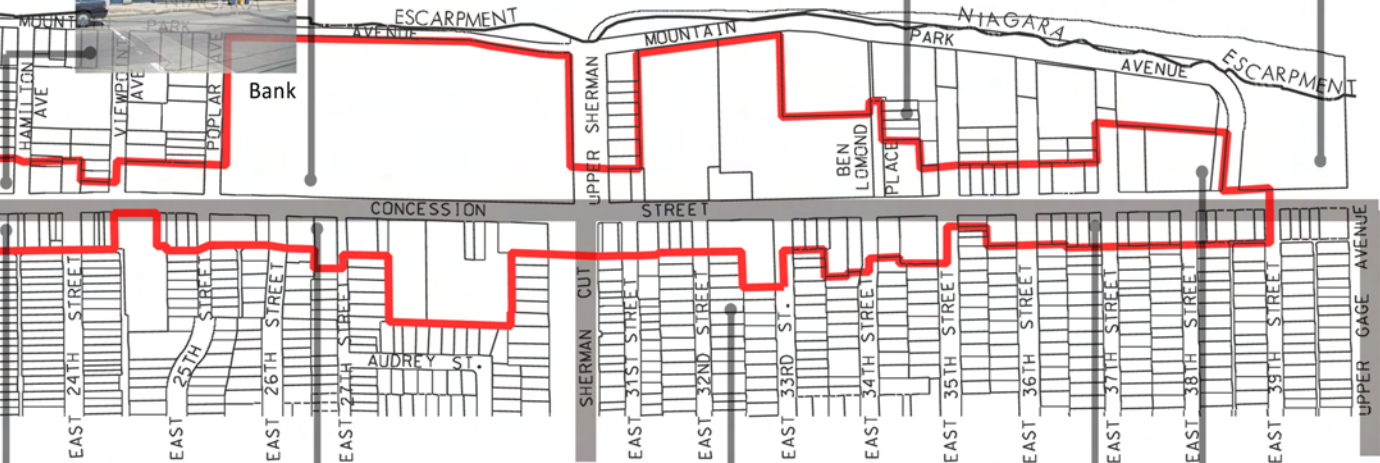
Apartments



Playground



Bank



Places of Worship



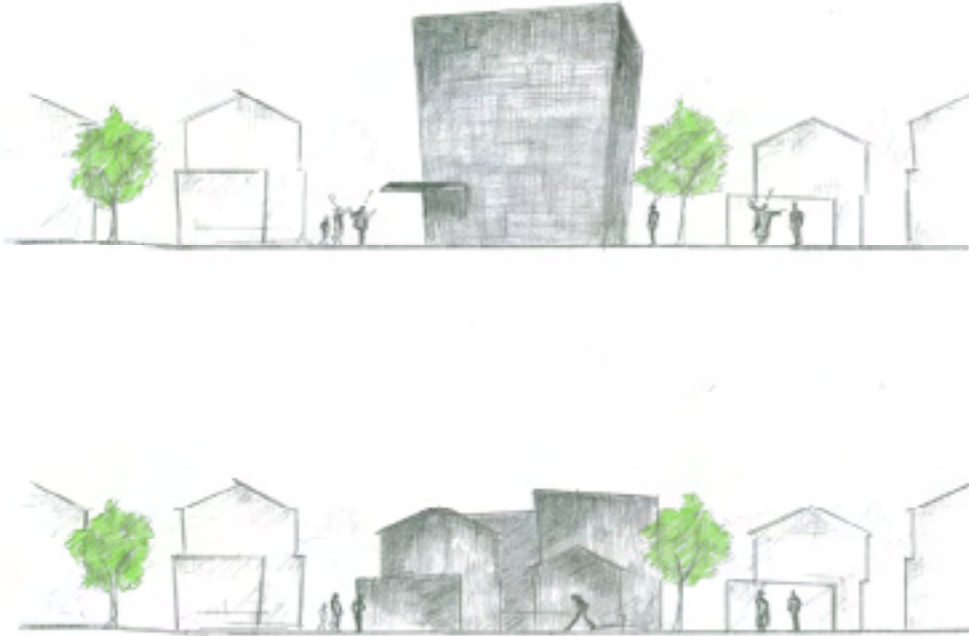
Single Family Homes



Grocery Stores



Rental Units



**Fig. 2.12 BUILDING SCALE** The exterior appearance should be indistinguishable from the surrounding community.

## 2.5 Physical Layout

The physical layout of transition homes vary amongst communities, and between urban and rural locations. Some transition homes are designed as apartment complexes, while others are more similar to row housing or duplexes. The specific program requirements of the transitional housing community will determine the size of the lot. The lot should be large enough to provide space for outdoor recreation, parking and service areas. The actual size of transition homes vary depending on the characteristics of the services provided. I sought advice on the number of residents to accommodate for this project from Alan Whittle, Director of Community Relations and Planning for Good Shepherd Services in Hamilton. The Good Shepherd manages several emergency shelters for men, women and youth across the city. They have determined that forty residents form an ideal community and it also meets governmental regulations for funding. The capacity of a shelter also depends on the variations in the characteristics of the residents.

The transition home community in this thesis consists of four townhomes and a larger building for outreach services and public programs encircling a secured courtyard. Previous design schemes included apartment style housing, but I felt that it did not complement the surrounding Victorian homes.



**Fig. 2.13 BUILDING LAYOUT** The required program can adapt to any of the following forms on the site.

Architectural design decisions can also help communities overcome their reluctance to have an emergency shelter or transition home for women and children built in their neighbourhood. The scale, height and character of surrounding buildings or houses must be taken into consideration. Larger facilities appear too institutional or impersonal. Smaller buildings tend to feel more residential and welcoming. Most residents prefer that new projects to maintain the same scale and appearance of the surrounding context. Neighbours are likely to perceive a smaller project as having less impact on the area than would large complexes.<sup>11</sup>

Design of affordable housing should be indistinguishable from nearby housing so that the residents will not be stigmatized and will feel a part of the surrounding community. The design of by Taylor Hariri Pontarini Architects made use of existing building façade for the design of Robertson House Crisis Care Centre in Toronto. Elaborate colour schemes and ornamentation may not be suitable for the design of transition homes. Aldo Van Eyck's design of Hubertus House, a home for unwed mothers in Amsterdam, garnishes too much attention. Staff are constantly bombarded with people requesting tours of the facility which makes the residents feel uncomfortable.<sup>12</sup>

## 2.6 Security Measures

A sense of security is an integral to the design of a transition home. Specifically, it means protection from the streets as well as protection from intruders. Women and children must initially feel safe prior to participating in any therapeutic activities. Enraged and irrational batterers pose a constant threat. Batterers have used threats and violence against victims and staff members in attempts to gain access to their partners or children. Although no protective housing facility can completely guarantee the safety of its residents or staff, many precautions can be taken to help ensure the security of those who live and work there.

Security measures pose dilemmas which require architects to balance a set of conflicting goals. A transition home must be impregnable, but not seem forbidding or out of place in residential neighbourhoods. Alarms, locks, high fences and other security devices spoil a welcoming or homelike atmosphere. Concern for personal safety extends beyond the transition home. It includes the safe use of outdoor spaces and a safe route to and from the building. Children are often confined to the property and not permitted to play with friends in any outdoor activity.

The locations of many emergency centres or transition homes for women are kept secret or are difficult to locate through a telephone directory or online. Transition homes might choose to avoid posting exterior signage that identifies the facilities' purpose. Many emergency centres for women do not admit visitors in fear of them disclosing their location, inflicting physical or emotional harm on a resident, or recognizing unrelated residents who wish to keep their status confidential. Friends and relatives are usually discouraged from entering the premise and must meet residents at a separate location.

It is nearly impossible to keep a shelter's address confidential for very long. Neighbours and local retailers become aware of a shelter's location due to the number

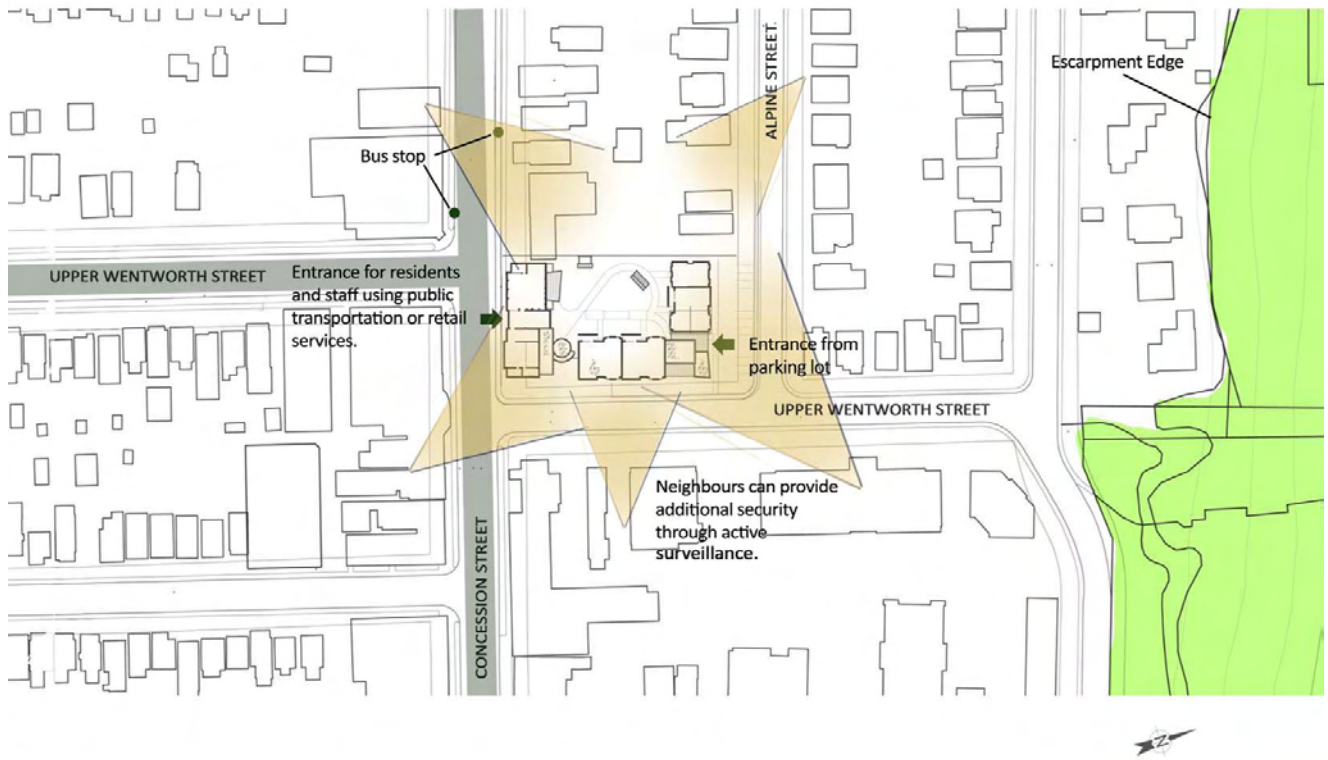


of women and children that passing through there on a regular basis. Sympathetic neighbours tend to keep an eye out for lurking intruders and alert the shelter or police if necessary.<sup>13</sup>

Apart from the impracticality of concealment, secrecy is not necessary for the protection of its residents. Studies in Canada and the United States have found that domestic violence usually occurs in private, and batterers are rarely violent outside the home. Therefore, a publically identified location would deflect a batterer's anger that would otherwise be intensified by a long search for his partner.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, batterers are irrational individuals which make it difficult to assume how they will react to a situation.

Nevertheless, publically identified protective housing raises awareness on women issues and help to expand community support for protective and educational programs.<sup>15</sup> A woman should not be ashamed of needing help or be forced to hide away in an undisclosed location. Domestic violence, homelessness and poverty are societal problems that require a community of committed individuals to resolve.

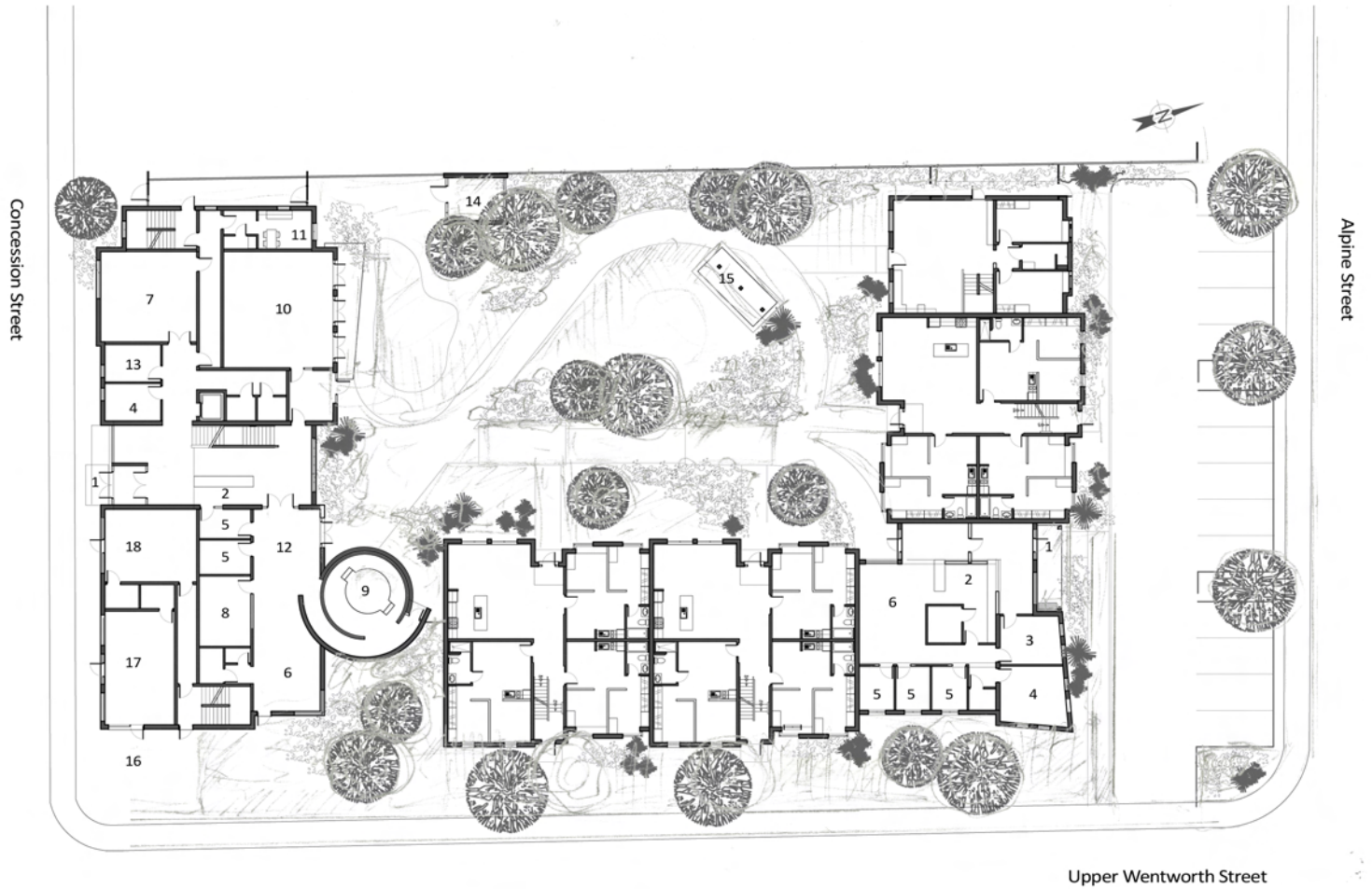
Active surveillance or Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) is a security technique that can be imposed through the design of the facility. The form and layout of the building can encourage residents and staff to take an active role in policing the grounds.<sup>16</sup> This is a crime prevention strategy used by planners, architects, police services, security professionals and all users of space. The proper design and effective use of the built environment can lead to a reduction in the incidence and fear of crime. Emphasis is placed on the physical environment, productive use of space, and behaviour of people to create safe environments. In these spaces, environmental cues that create opportunities for crime are reduced.



**Fig. 2.14 SITE AMENITIES**

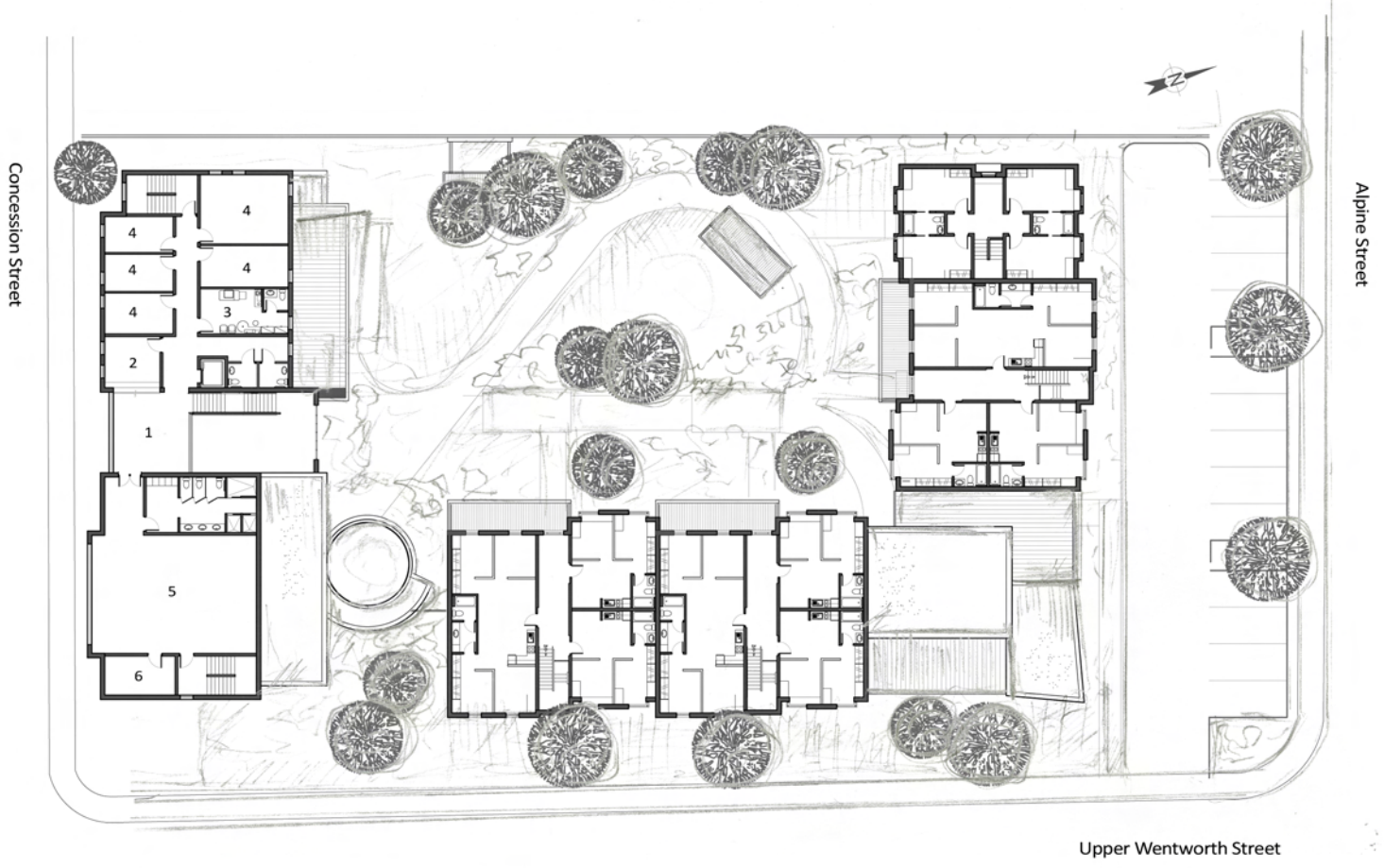


Fig. 2.15 AERIAL VIEW



- |    |                |     |                   |
|----|----------------|-----|-------------------|
| 1. | Entrance       | 10. | Childcare Centre  |
| 2. | Reception      | 11. | Staff Lounge      |
| 3. | Intake Room    | 12. | Computer Stations |
| 4. | Meeting Room   | 13. | Kitchen           |
| 5. | Office         | 14. | Outdoor Storage   |
| 6. | Common Lounge  | 15. | Covered Porch     |
| 7. | Community Room | 16. | Patio             |
| 8. | Donation Room  | 17. | Coffee Shop       |
| 9. | Chapel         | 18. | Salon             |

**Fig. 2.16 GROUND FLOOR PLAN**



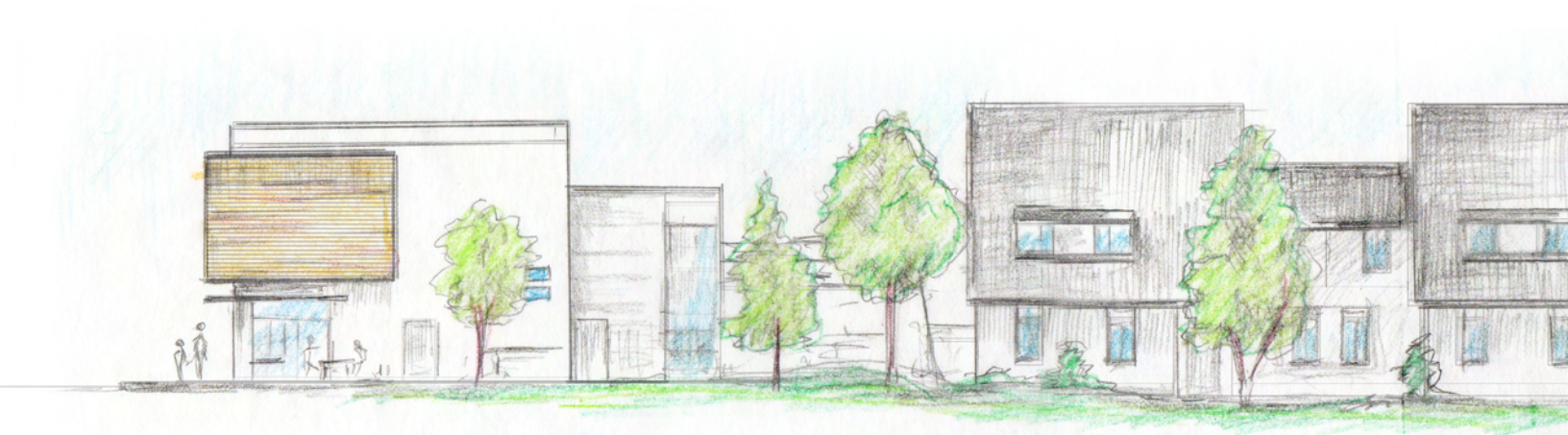
- 1. Waiting Area
- 2. Reception
- 3. Clinic
- 4. Outreach Services
- 5. Studio
- 6. Storage

**Fig. 2.17 SECOND FLOOR PLAN**



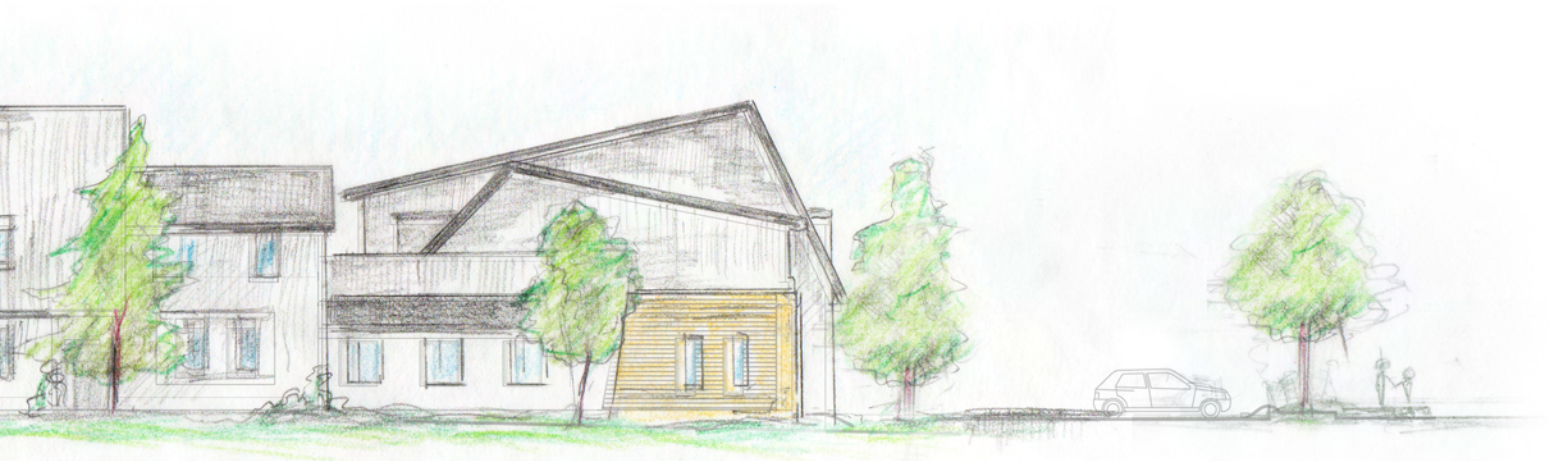
**Fig. 2.18 CONCESSION STREET NORTH ELEVATION**

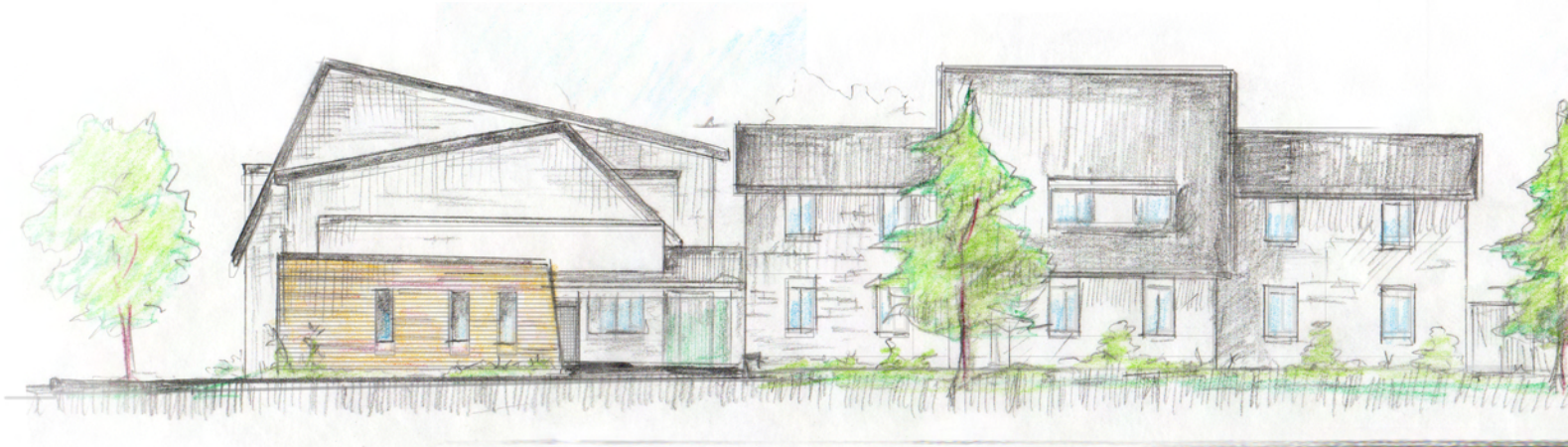




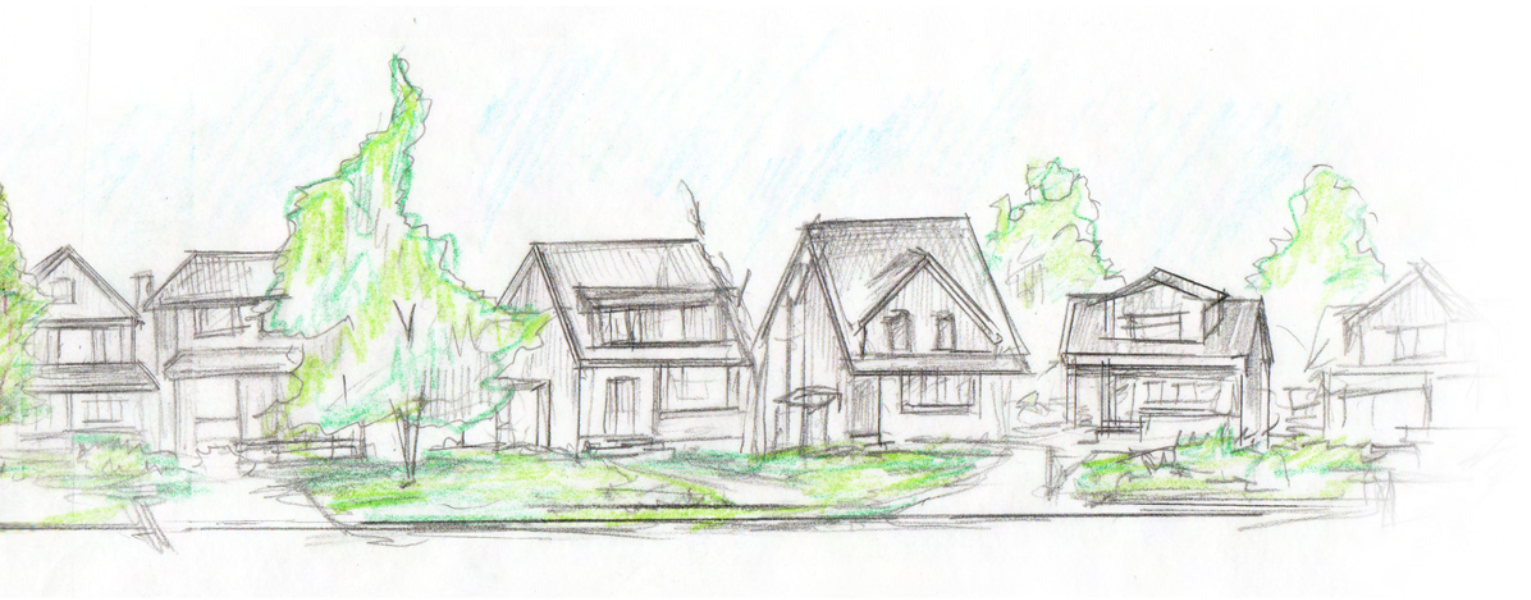
**Fig. 2.19 UPPER WENTWORTH STREET WEST ELEVATION**

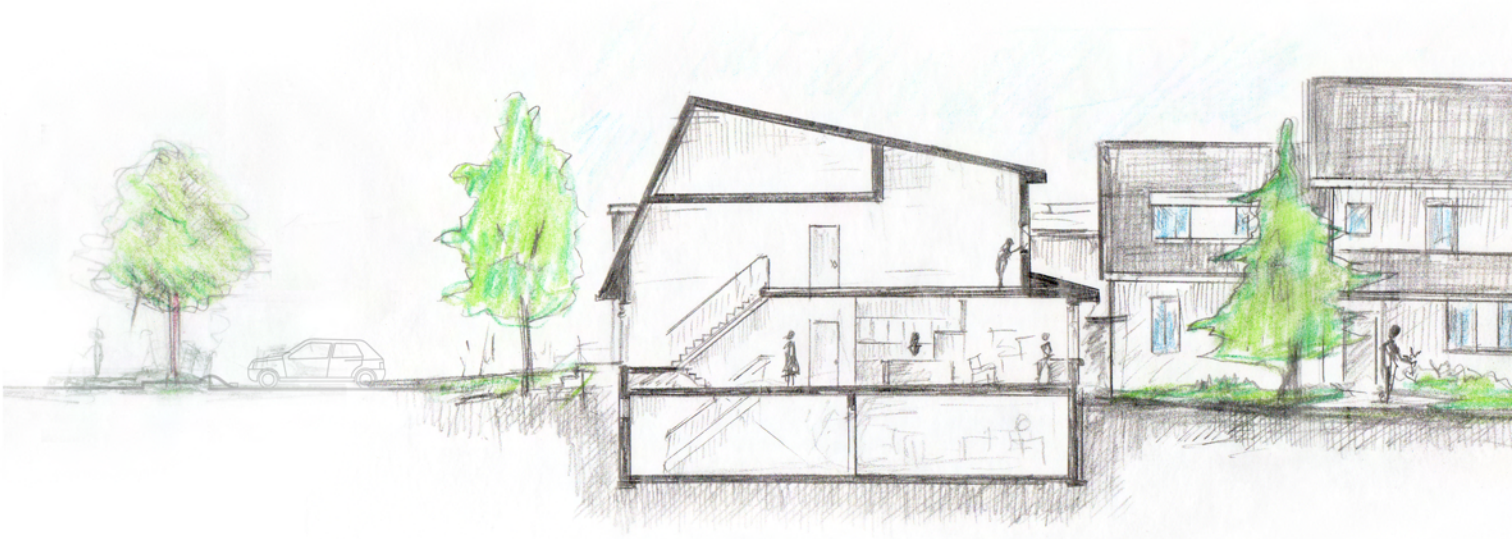




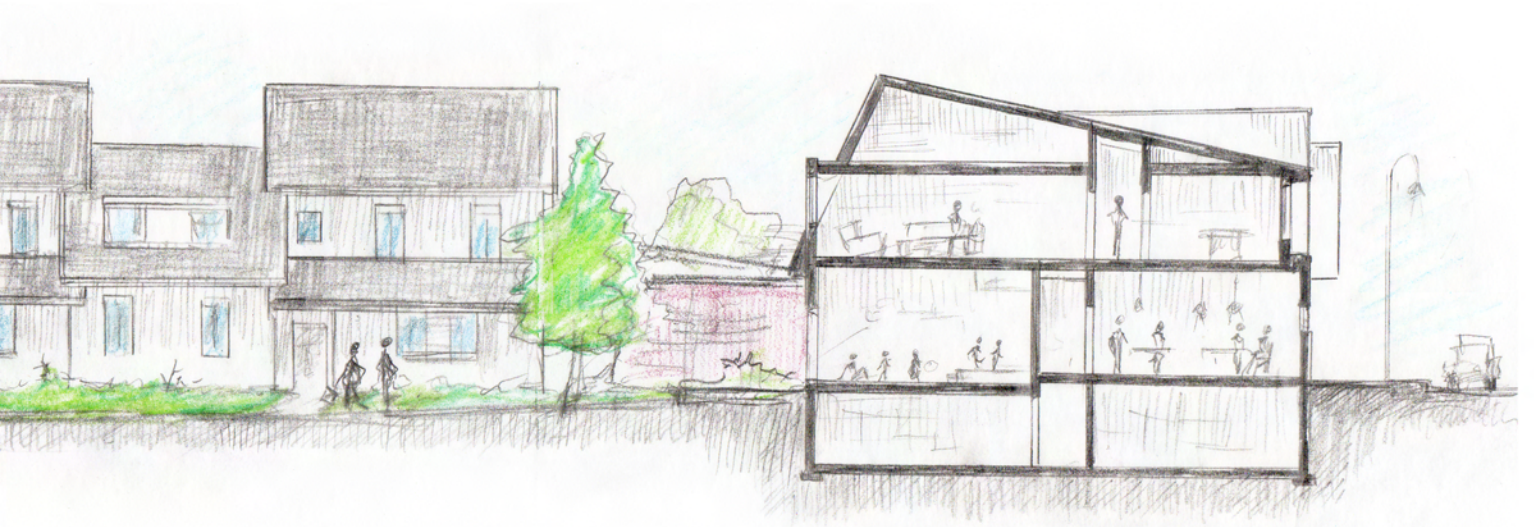


**Fig. 2.20 ALPINE STREET SOUTH ELEVATION**





**Fig. 2.21 COURTYARD SECTION**



## Notes

- 1 Sylvia Novac, 1996. *Borderlands of homelessness : Women's views on alternative housing*. Toronto, Ont.: Women's Services Network.
- 2 Joan Forrester Sprague. 1991. *More than housing : Lifeboats for women and children*. Boston ; Toronto: Butterworth Architecture.
- 3 Albert L. Shostack. *Shelters for battered women and their children: a comprehensive guide to planning and operating safe and caring residential programs*. (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C Thomas Publisher, Ltd., 2001).
- 4 Andrea Taylor-Butts. "Canada's Shelters for Abused Women, 2003/04" *Statistics Canada* - Catalogue no. 85-002-XiE, Vol. 25, No.3, (2005).
- 5 Joan Forrester Sprague, *op. cit.*
- 6 City of Hamilton and Planning and Research Council. 2007. *On Any Given Night: Measuring Homelessness in Hamilton*.
- 7
- 8 Kate Woodman, PhD. *Second Stage Shelters: Closing the Gap*. Edmonton, AL: Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, 2008.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 Albert L. Shostack, *op. cit.*
- 11 Sam Davis. *Designing for the Homeless: Architecture that Works*. (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2004).
- 12 Works of Aldo Van Eyck
- 13 Albert L. Shostack. *op. cit.*
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 Kate Woodman, PhD. *op. cit.*

# 03

## PROVIDE POSITIVE DISTRACTIONS

A sizable body of research suggests that the design of a physical setting impacts the wellbeing of both residents and staff.<sup>1</sup> It is clear that housing and space play a role in the quality of life of individuals and communities. What makes some spaces comfortable and while others remain threatening? What key elements can be applied to the design of a supportive housing program that can further contribute to the health and care of its residents?

Psychologists and other behavioural scientists have studied how people respond to colour, light, room sizes, seating arrangements, and other components of architecture or interior design. Science involves testing theories according to certain rules of evidence and these studies are often performed under controlled laboratory conditions. This approach may not be entirely useful when dealing with architecture since the findings collected in basic research are hard to apply in real-life situations and human testing of subjects is often necessary.<sup>2</sup>

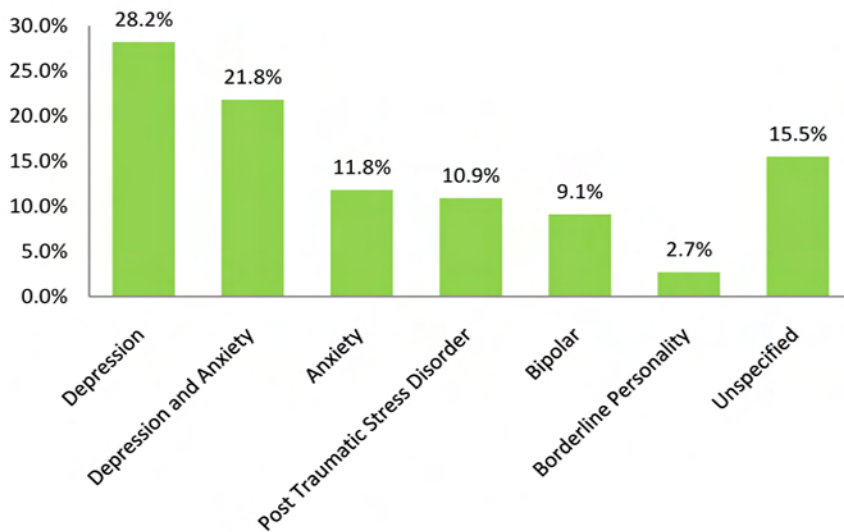
The field of Environmental Psychology bridges the gap between scientific researchers and design professionals.<sup>3</sup> It studies the relationship between environments and human behaviour as well as how they affect one other. Humans react both consciously and unconsciously to the area in which they live and work. Both natural and manmade environments have a profound effect on feelings, behaviours, general health issues, and productivity.<sup>4</sup>

Many sources of personal stress are beyond the influence of the built environment. Even so, an understanding of the stress sources that are subject to design influence can help various design professionals, such as architects, interior designers, and urban planners, have a better understanding of human behaviour. This, in turn, improves the design process and the resulting occupant experience of the built work.

**Fig. 3.2 TYPE OF ABUSE EXPERIENCED BY SHELTER RESIDENTS**

Emotionally abused 52.2%  
 Sexually abused 43.2%  
 Witnessed violence between parents 42.7%  
 Physically abused 41.8%  
 Neglected as a child 32.1%

**Fig. 3.3 MENTAL HEALTH / EMOTIONAL ISSUES OF SHELTER RESIDENTS**



**Fig. 3.1 SOURCES OF STRESS**

Many factors contribute to a stressful environment.

Common Stress Factors
Fear for safety
Lack of information
Loss of independence
Loss of control
Unfamiliarity of surroundings
Restricted visits from friends or family

Environmental Stressors
Loud noises
Lack of privacy
Obstructed views outdoors
Poor lighting
Room temperature
Limited social interaction

Sources of Stress for Staff
High demands
Low sense of control
Break rooms offer no respite

Behavioural Effect of Stress
Verbal outbursts
Social withdrawal
Sleepiness
Failure to take medication



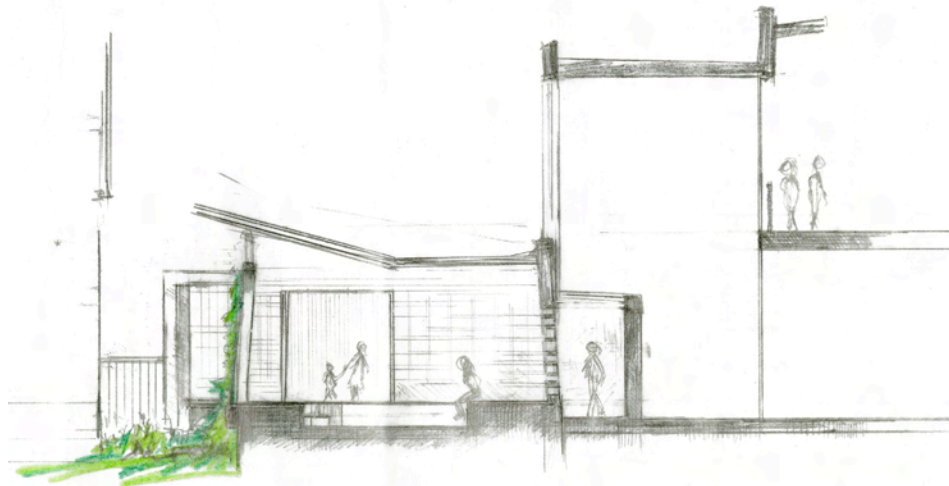
Restorative qualities are the potential of design elements to function therapeutically, reducing cognitive fatigue and other sources of stress. Positive distractions provide resources that can allow design to function as a coping resource and help building occupants ease stress. Certain types of settings within the transition home, such as the chapel and the courtyard, are included with restorative intent. Such environments can help to uplift the human spirit and reduce stress. Individual stress levels can be reduced through appropriate programmatic layout, noise isolation or lighting design. Positive distractions or diversions can help to focus resident's minds away from the trauma that brought them to the facility. Architectural diversions include views and access to nature, mediation rooms and areas for art and exercise.

### **3.1 Noise Isolation**

In a transition home, the sound of people talking, children playing or loud paging systems can be the route of intense stress for residents. Excessive or unpredictable noise can cause blood pressures to rise along with irritability, tension and headaches.<sup>5</sup> High levels of background noise can impair the ability to concentrate and impede the completion of complex assignments. Noise pollution can have a negative effect on sleep quality and the care residents receive. It can also damage group dynamics, as people in a noisy environment tend to become more irritable and less willing to help one-another.<sup>6</sup>

Solutions to unwanted noise include acoustical separations of staff rooms, offices and corridors beside resident rooms. This is a necessary step to prevent private discussions among residents or staff from being overheard by others. Distancing residential quarters away from louder common areas will improve the quality of sleep throughout the facility. The level of noise within a common area can be reduced through the use of separate rooms for meetings and for children's play. Designated quiet rooms are essential for activities that require more concentration.

The chapel was included in the architectural program to accommodate residents seeking a quiet place for prayer, meditation and solitary reflection. Religious services can be organized for larger groups for those not prepared to attend a service outside of the transition home. Small concerts can also be performed inside of the chapel. Music therapy can help to distract people from their pain and encourage them to make plans for their future.<sup>7</sup> Music has been used to treat depression, to reach autistic children, and to relax agitated psychiatric patients.



**Fig. 3.4 THE CHAPEL**

### **3.2 Access to Nature**

Cultural and societal influences tend to leave people with a positive impression of gardens and other natural environments.<sup>8</sup> Urban areas are associated with work, loud noises, and high pollution levels. Vacations and retreats from the city often take place in rural or natural settings. Behavioural scientist, Roger Ulrich, concluded through various scientific studies that our preference for nature is rooted in human evolution and it was essential to the survival and wellbeing of early humans.<sup>9</sup> Evolutionary theory proposes that modern humans have a partly genetic predisposition to natural environments. Therefore, we are more likely to pay attention to, affiliate with or respond positively to nature.<sup>10</sup>

The life of prehistoric man was compounded with demanding and stressful threats and risks. The capability for fast recovery from stress following demanding and threatening situations was critical for enhancing chances of survival. This would occur in a savannah-like setting that was open and presented little risks. Therefore, evolutionary theory explains why views of natural content such as vegetation, water, or sunlight; should have stress-reducing and beneficial influences.<sup>11</sup>

Women and children living in transition homes are often fearful and uncertain about their safety, their future, and their isolation from normal social relationships.<sup>12</sup> The complex environment of a shared residence also contributes to the stressful situation. Stress can cause a person's physical, mental and emotional condition to weaken and affect the healing or recovery process.<sup>13</sup> Data from homeless shelters, assaulted women's shelters, supportive housing and drop-ins show that a high percentage of women experience on-going living difficulties as a result of trauma, and that they require support to maintain their housing.<sup>14</sup>

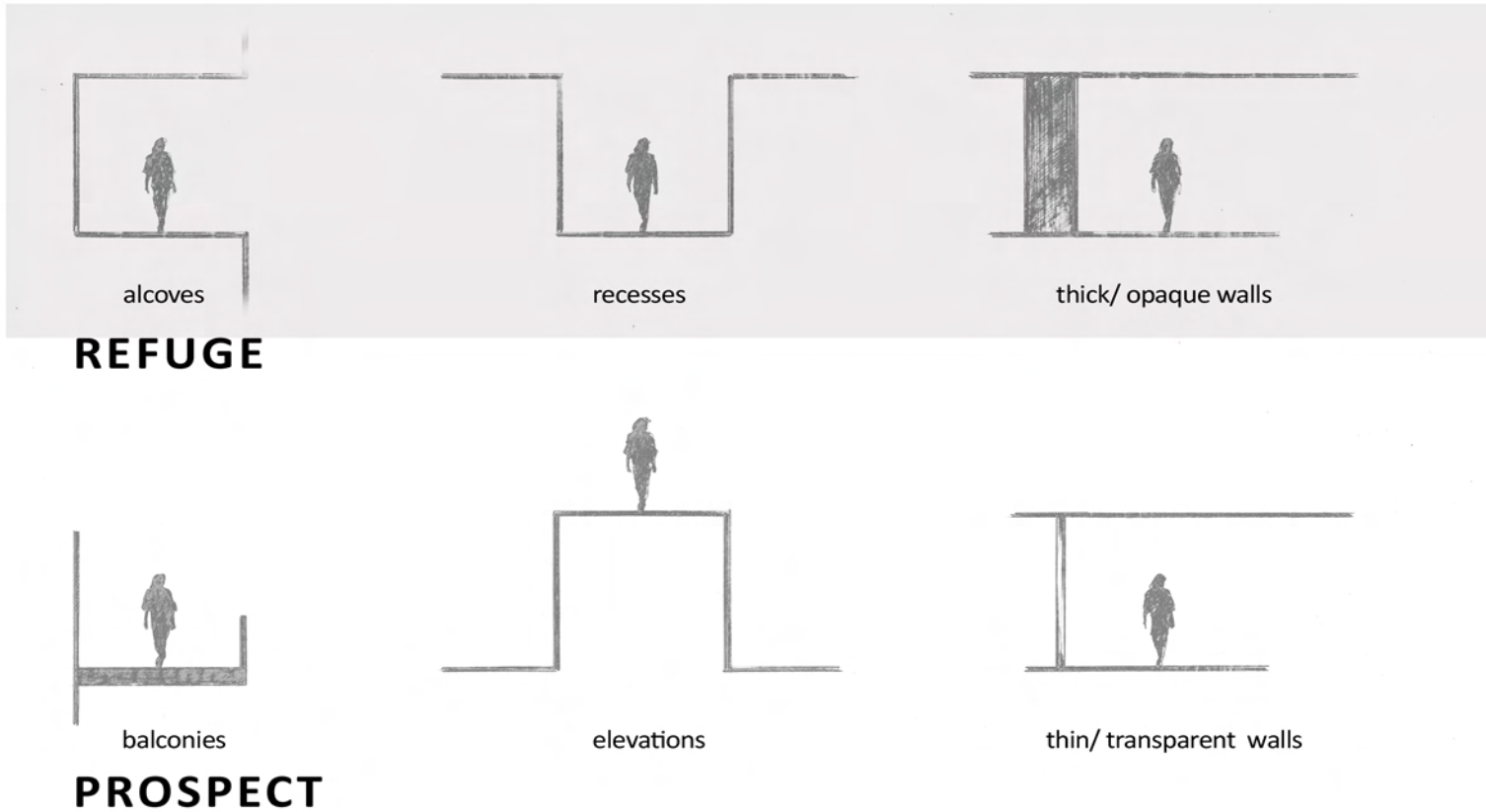
Biophilia is the inherent human inclination to affiliate with natural forms and systems.<sup>15</sup> Biophilic design theory can be used to explain why exposure to nature and sunlight in the built environment could help transition home residents reduce stress and develop different coping strategies.

In 1984, Behavioural scientist, Roger Ulrich, conducted a study of patients recovering from gallbladder surgery and found that patients assigned to rooms with views of trees were able to be discharged earlier, had fewer negative evaluations from nurses, and required less painkilling medication than patients assigned to rooms that faced a brick wall.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, views of natural content can be incorporated into the design of a transition home in order to provoke therapeutic responses from residents, resulting in a more restorative and healing environment.

### **3.3 Prospect-Refuge Theory**

English geographer Jay Appleton introduced the prospect-refuge theory as an explanation of human environmental preferences and coping technique. It states that environments that offered open views (prospect) or a certain amount of concealment (refuge) provided an evolutionary advantage to humans.<sup>17</sup> The concept of prospect refers to settings or landscape elements that assist with obtaining information about the environment. On the other hand, refuge refers to settings that can provide shelter and protection. According to Appleton, humans preferred settings with both prospect and refuge because such places aided survival from imminent dangers by offering an observation point to see, to react, and if necessary, to defend.<sup>18</sup>

Opportunities for contact with these particular landscape elements of prospect and refuge are reduced in modern urban life.<sup>19</sup> However, key features of the nature and structural configuration can be integrated into the built environment. Elements of prospect within a transition home increases a resident's visibility and, therefore, opportunity for social interaction. For women seeking privacy, elements of refuge create areas for solitude and reflection.



Consequently, elements of prospect and refuge provide opportunities for a potential offender and must be taken into consideration when designing the exterior environment.<sup>20</sup> Estranged spouses or intimate partners may attempt to hide in areas with a high degree of refuge outside of the transition home. Areas characterized by large amounts of refuge or concealment; and minimal prospect evoke the highest degree of fear amongst individuals.<sup>21</sup> These areas would be characterized by lurk lines, blind spots or numerous hiding places within the surrounding environment. The safest areas are characterized by minimum refuge for a possible offender and high prospect for a potential victim.<sup>22</sup>

**Fig. 3.5 PROSPECT REFUGE THEORY**

**Fig. 3.6 ASPECTS OF SECURITY** Elements of Prospect-Refuge Theory should be considered as security measures.



low ceilings



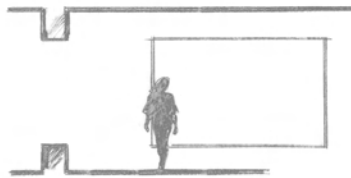
high/ small openings



reduced lighting



high ceilings



low/ large openings



increased lighting

		PROSPECT (Victim)	
		HIGH - Open Prospect	LOW - Blocked Prospect
REFUGE (Offender)	LOW No hiding places	<p>Most Safe</p>	<p>Moderately Safe</p>
	HIGH Many hiding places	<p>Moderately Unsafe</p>	<p>Most Unsafe</p>



**Fig. 3.7 SITE AXONOMETRIC**

### 3.4 The Courtyard

One of the constraints of living within a protected facility is the ability to enjoy outdoor spaces. Some residents may not feel comfortable leaving the building due to the fear of their abuser finding them. A courtyard gives the needed security while providing an outdoor space for a range of activities. The courtyard accommodates multiple women and children and includes a variety of outdoor spaces. Trees, arbours or canopies can provide additional shade or wind breakers or help create various levels of privacy since some residents may not want to socialize and may prefer to read, write a letter or study while outside. Areas for group activities are provided to encourage residents to socialize in order to discourage feelings of isolation, boredom or depression.<sup>23</sup> Architecturally, courtyards bring light into the building's interior or provide sight lines into controlled space. This is particularly useful when the facility is situated in an unpleasant area.<sup>24</sup> Courtyards also help to reduce the shelter's noise and visual impact on the neighbourhood since they concentrate all activity within the facility. This area is often fenced to provide additional security.

A community garden can serve as a restorative escape from the possibly hectic environment of a transition home. Planting, caring for, and watching seedlings grow can serve as a learning experience or hold a symbolic meaning for both women and children.<sup>25</sup> Gardening and horticulture can be enjoyed at many levels such as taking an active role in planting and maintaining a garden or the passive involvement of simply sitting in a garden. Both have been documented to increase happiness, contentment and overall well being.<sup>26</sup> After the First and Second World Wars, special-purpose garden facilities were often provided in hospitals for veterans, the elderly, and the mentally ill. Many specialized facilities that are built today for those suffering from AIDS or cancer have also recognized the therapeutic effect of the garden. Ronald MacDonald Houses, which are places for children with cancer and their families, typically provides a homelike environment and an adjacent garden.<sup>27</sup>

Children living in transition homes should have access to a secure outdoor area for play and recreation. Otherwise, children might be confined to the shelter for security reasons. Other playgrounds within the neighbourhood that are not on the grounds of the transition home are not comparable to play areas on the property that children can use casually, without having to rely on adults or older siblings for supervision. Clear sightlines are needed for supervising adults between indoor common rooms and the playground.

A specific area within the courtyard must be allocated for residents to smoke. This is partly in recognition of the prevalence of smoking among occupants and building code regulations. Residents staying at Martha's House in Hamilton were required to leave the security of the building when they smoked since there was no enclosed outdoor space. They were encouraged to go for walks around the neighbourhood but most preferred to sit on the porch or stand on the sidewalk. A smoking area in a courtyard helps to reduce neighbours' concerns of residents loitering on public sidewalks to smoke.

### 3.5 Appropriate Lighting

In addition to nature, daylight and sun exposure were also critical for the wellbeing, health, and survival of early humans. Daylight and sunshine enabled visual surveillance of surroundings, finding food and water, and avoiding threats such as predators that would be concealed in darkness.

Building interiors today are lit by a combination of daylight and electric lighting. Different types of lighting conditions impact human health and performance by affecting mood, perception and ability to complete visual tasks. Light is also an important factor in reducing depression, decreasing fatigue and improving alertness.<sup>28</sup> An advantage of natural light is that it helps to regulate circadian rhythms and is a natural source of vitamin D. Daylight entering through windows can be extremely beneficial to residents and staff provided there is no glare or thermal discomfort. Furthermore, accessing natural light is of no additional cost to the facility. The need for artificial lighting can be reduced by efficient utilization of sunlight wherever possible.

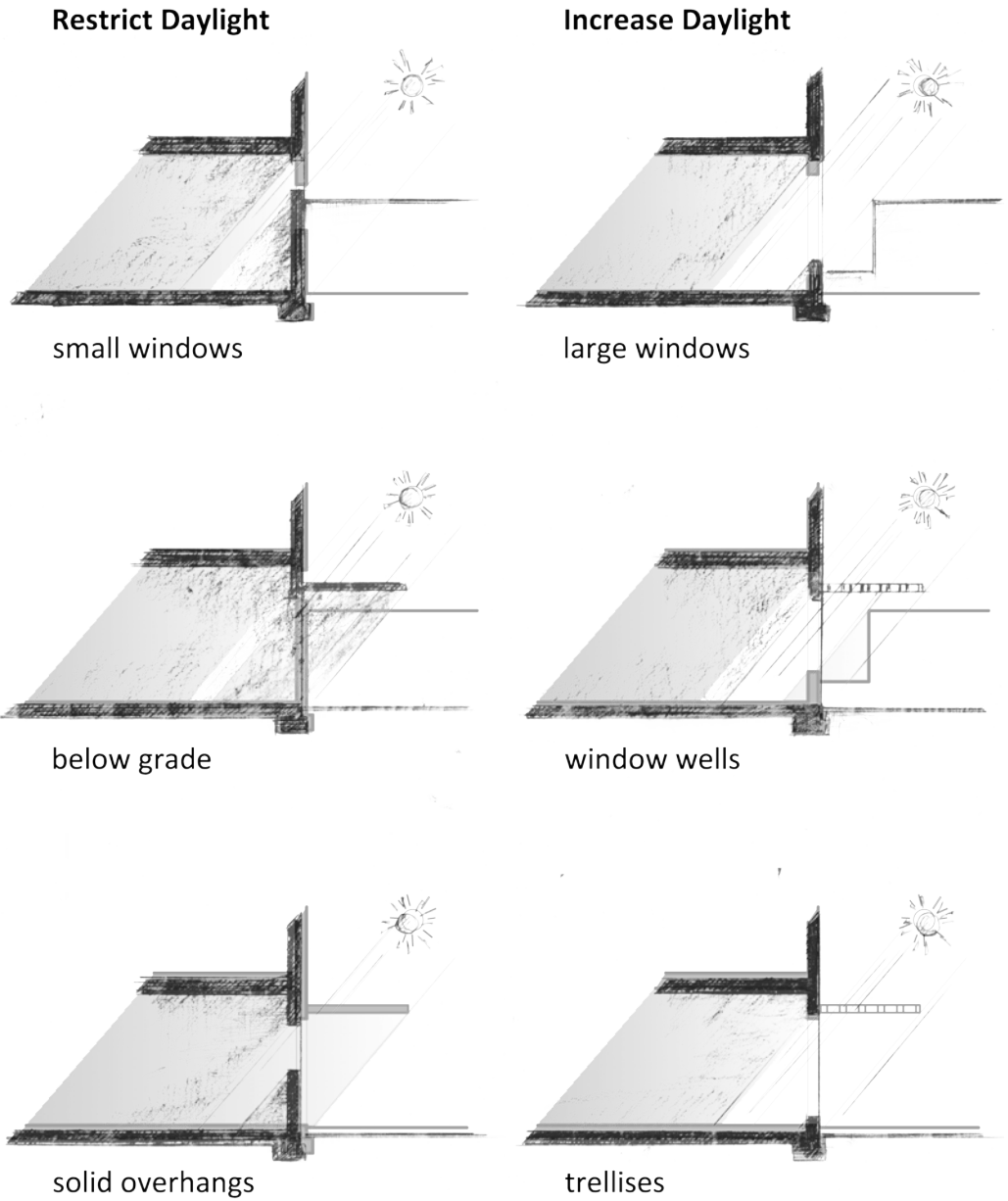
Furthermore, spaces and zones can be differentiated through variations in lighting. Overhead fluorescent lighting is typical of institutional environments while wall sconces or suspended fixtures have less of an institutional feel. Daylight or warm incandescent light sources and movable lamps also have a more domestic quality.

### 3.6 Materials and Finishes

The quality of the interior communicates program values to both residents and visitors.<sup>29</sup> Studies of maintenance in group homes and transitional housing indicate that residents take better care of physical environments that are comfortable, familiar or homelike.<sup>30</sup> The choice of materials used in the construction of transition homes corresponds to the maintenance of the facility. The materials used in transition homes are generally identical to those used in multifamily housing. On the interior, this includes gypsum board walls and ceilings, vinyl tile floors, and plastic-laminate countertops in bathrooms and kitchens. These are all legitimate materials, but they often do not tolerate heavy use or abuse, which is to be expected in housing for a transient population.<sup>31</sup> However, building made entirely of durable materials such as concrete, steel, glass or ceramic tiles lose its residential appeal and are more comparable to schools or hospitals.<sup>32</sup> Durability is essential, but an institutional environment that appears to be indestructible may challenge residents to destroy it.<sup>33</sup>

The same principles apply to the design and selection of furniture. The items available to the general public through large retail stores that specialize in mass produced, partially assembled furniture, although stylish and cost-effective, will not work in most shelter contexts. They simply are not sturdy enough to withstand hard use by many different residents. The plastic-laminated finishes often chip, and legs tend to snap off when items are moved. Furniture made of solid wood or covered





**Fig. 3.8 DAYLIGHTING** Design features can increase or reduce the amount of natural light entering buildings.

with floor linoleum rather than plastic laminate is available, and some has been created expressly for use in shelters. Upholstered items, such as sofas and lounge chairs, have to be similarly sturdy. Arms are the most vulnerable and therefore are often not upholstered. Solid-colour cushions show dirt and stains more readily than do bright patterns.<sup>34</sup>

### 3.7 Colour

Colour, while subjective, can be a design factor in reducing environmental stress when understood and used in the context of a specific population. Careful use of colour can help to create certain atmospheres or make a room appear to be more pleasant.<sup>35</sup> The colour green was once associated with creating a calming mood in public gathering areas. However, the colour grew to be identified with institutions and produced ineffective results.<sup>36</sup> A typical paint colour found in residential facilities is off-white. This is a good background colour for accent walls, changeable artwork, or murals that personalize different spaces. Special colours for residential suites and for common rooms produce a variety of characteristics and spaces throughout the transition home. Doorways painted in specific colours can serve as orientation points, especially for children who have trouble finding their way in new places.

### Notes

- 1 Joan Forrester Sprague. 1991. *More than housing : Lifeboats for women and children*. Boston ; Toronto: Butterworth Architecture.
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- 5 Jain Malik, *op cit.*
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- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 Ulrich, Roger S. "Biophilic Theory and Research for Healthcare Design." In *Biophilic Design : The theory, science, and practice of bringing buildings to life*. edited by Kellert, Stephen R., Judith Heerwagen, and Martin Mador. 2008. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 *Ibid.*
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- 15 Kellert, Heerwagen and Mador, *op. cit.*
- 16 Jain Malkin, *op. cit.*
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- 18 *Ibid*
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- 20 Nathan Petherick, *op. cit.*
- 21 Nathan Petherick, *op. cit.*
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- 26 Canadian Horticultural Therapy Association, <http://www.chta.ca/contact.htm>
- 27 Claire Cooper Marcus, *op. cit.*
- 28 Anjali Joseph. "The Impact of Lighting Outcomes in Healthcare Settings" *The Centre for Health Design*. Concord, CA, 2006.
- 29 Joan Forrester Sprague, *op.cit.*
- 30 *Ibid.*
- 31 Sam Davis, *op. cit.*
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 Joan Forrester Sprague, *op.cit.*
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 Jain Malkin, *op. cit.*
- 36 *Ibid.*



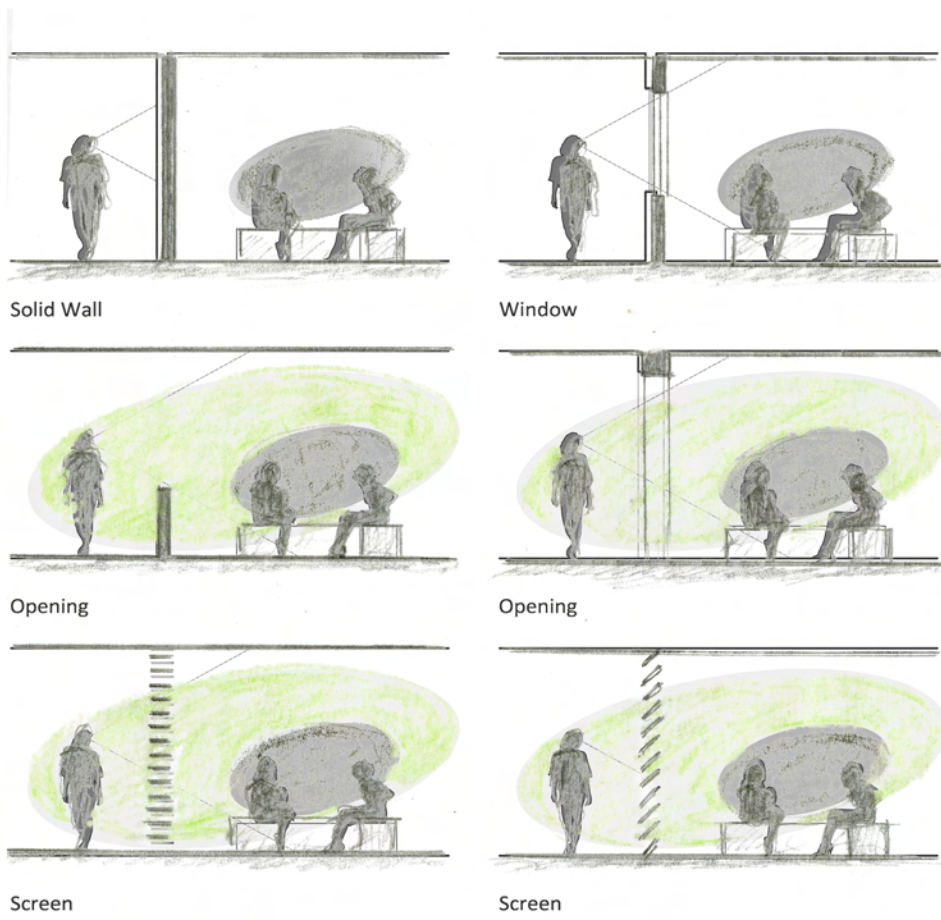
**Fig. 4.1 SOCIAL SUPPORT**

# 04

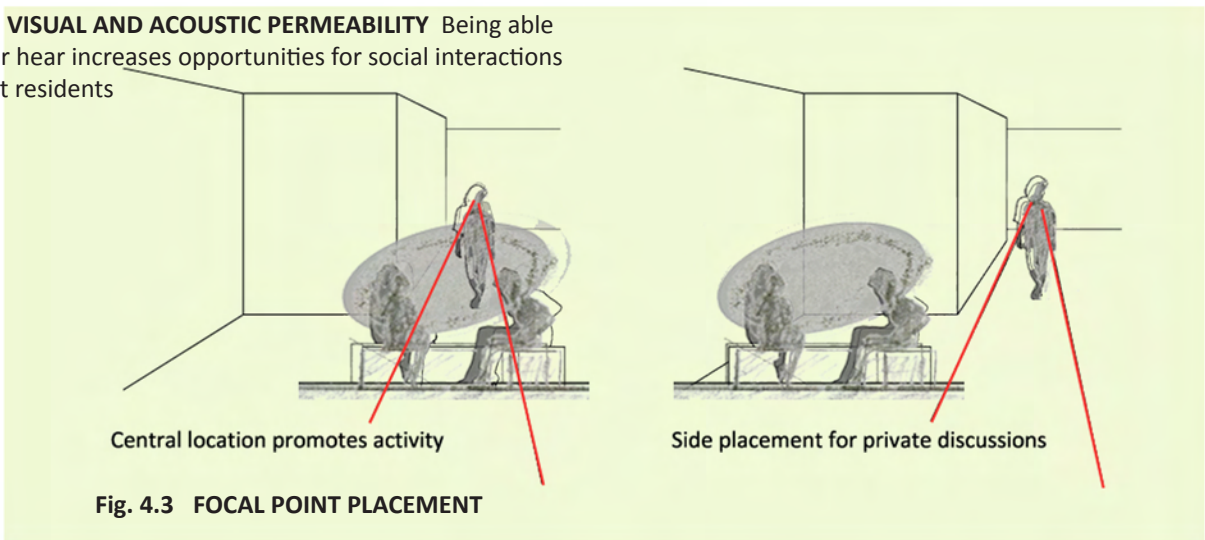
## ENABLE SOCIAL SUPPORT

Women who have experienced domestic violence, who are recovering from substance abuse, or who are struggling to raise a family, can benefit from close peer support and sharing.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is important for the design to encourage social networking within the centre. Cohabitation and shared amenities encourages social interaction among the residents. Relationships are based on shared interests and backgrounds; they are also dependent on opportunity and how our environments are arranged.<sup>2</sup> Making it possible for people to make contact or to avoid contact as they choose should be an important consideration for designers. Unless there is a chance to meet, neither friendship nor acquaintanceship is possible.

One of the purposes of a transition home is to provide long term accommodations along with continual support, information and referrals to assist women and children to become independent and move forward. Programs and services offered within a transition home naturally encourage residents to share their personal experiences. Residential programs may include individual counselling and support, as well as group programs for women or children. Outreach counsellors, community educators, and legal advocates can work within the facility as opposed to external offices. Counselling for non residents can be held within the building and participants can share their experience and become familiar with the facility. Childcare is essential for residents and non-residents since many women are prevented from pursuing their education or employment goals because they do not have access to affordable childcare.



**Fig. 4.2 VISUAL AND ACOUSTIC PERMEABILITY** Being able to see or hear increases opportunities for social interactions amongst residents



## **4.1 Design Layout and Planning**

The extent to which spaces are interconnected via doorways and passages influences the social capabilities of a space.<sup>3</sup> Common rooms divided by solid walls or closed doors hinder spontaneous social interaction since residents cannot easily see or hear each other. Screens and wall openings permit visual and acoustic permeability across solid barriers. This arrangement reinforces a sense of community by allowing those passing by to participate in the activities taking place within the public rooms.

The focal point in a room provides an area for residents to interact.<sup>4</sup> Focal points are determined by the directness of doorway openings or are where circulation paths intersect. The size of a room can also help to enable social support among residents of a transition home. Deeper and larger rooms provide residents with more visual exposure. Larger rooms are also more suitable for those who would like to hold more private conversations as they are given more privacy. Groups located further away from circulation paths reduce the likelihood of their conversations being overheard by those passing by.<sup>5</sup>

## **4.2 Support Services**

The ultimate purpose of transition homes is to provide long term accommodations along with continual support, information and referrals to assist women and children to become independent and move forward. Shelters respond to immediate crises but also try to prevent future episodes of violence or homelessness. Programs and counselling services are essential to the success of the residents. Residential programs may include individual counselling and support, as well as group programs for residents. Outreach counsellors, community educators, and legal advocates can work within the facility instead of in external offices. Counselling for non residents can be held within the building and participants can share their experience and become familiar with the facility.

The following are other elements of the transition home that have been integrated into the architectural program to encourage social support.

### **Retail Outlets**

A coffee shop or salons are places to indirectly educate the public about domestic violence, poverty and other women issues. Posters or pamphlets highlighting programs within the transition home can be displayed and force a conversation amongst the customers. Some women experiencing a crisis may be intimidated to go directly to a shelter for help. Therefore, they can retrieve basic information about shelter services from the staff. This is also an opportunity to educate relatives and friends of those in need.

Many women that have been homeless or lived in an abusive environment have developed a sense of isolation and distrust which works against their willingness

to receive help. Restabilising one's self-esteem is an important component to overcoming homelessness or abuse.<sup>6</sup> Women struggling to secure shelter and food may find it difficult to maintain personal hygiene and appearance. The physical contact of having hair washed and cut helps to comfort fears and establish receptiveness to other forms of assistance.

### **The Entrance**

The entrance to the transition home needs to be inviting and portray a sense of refuge. The entrance should be clearly visible from the street. Residents may not feel comfortable using a side entrance that cannot be monitored by neighbours. A change in plane and height, along with appropriate lighting and differentiation of material can help to draw attention to the entrance.<sup>7</sup>

There are two secured entrances into the transition home. The first entrance is directly off Concession Street in order to accommodate staff and residents that use public transportation or to provide direct access to local shops. This is also the entrance for members of the public to access some of the services that the facility provides. Occupants that drive can access the transition home through a second secured entrance that is closer in proximity to the parking lot. Therefore, residents and staff are not required to walk around the building late at night in order to gain access.

Security factors greatly into the design of the entry sequence. Many facilities have adopted a policy where only staff is permitted to let people enter and leave the residence. However, staff is not always positioned at the door and residents or visitors must wait outside until their call is answered. This can be an uncomfortable situation for residents fearing exposure to potential harm or harassment. The entry sequence also serves as a buffer between the transition home and the surrounding community. Neighbours might be easily annoyed by large groups congregating on an open porch. Design features that might help to avoid these concerns include a gated courtyard or a large reception area. Loitering is done either inside the building or in the courtyard. This minimizes the visual impact on the community and screens women from dangerous encounters with their abusers.

The location of the reception desk is also a security component. It is ideal for a staff member to be able to monitor the entrance, the common lounge and provide information from a single station. A shelter for families requires a well supervised area to accommodate children while the mother is sorting through administrative issues.

### **Classroom**

Planning for the future is an essential component of a transition home. The classroom is to help residents gain the skills that will enable them to be employable and independent. Instructional courses and seminars can also be presented to former residents and members of the community. A community kitchen can help residents and non-residents to learn new cooking and budgeting skills. The social aspect



of a community kitchen is also an important component for the women participating in the program.

### Childcare Centre

Childcare is essential for residents and non-residents attending programs in the transition home or meeting other appointments. If a woman is pursuing her education or employed, childcare becomes a major issue. Many women are prevented from pursuing their education or employment goals because they do not have access to affordable childcare. Acquiring childcare services is a significant barrier for women fleeing domestic violence.

### Day Room

The day room or common lounge is an area where residents can relax and socialize, as they would in the living room of their own home. The area is easily monitored by staff and serves as an alternative to sitting in a lobby or standing in line. There is also a library and tables for residents looking for a place to study. The lounge is a prime area for socialization. Women who have experienced domestic violence or homelessness are unlikely to have a social network or a strong sense of community.<sup>8</sup> Living in permanent housing, obtaining and retaining employment, and simply negotiating daily life require social skills.

Furniture arrangement is very important to the social interaction potential of a space.<sup>9</sup> *Sociopetal* seating arrangements encourage interaction by movable furniture pieces or comfortable interpersonal distances. This results in ease of eye contact and physical comfort during conversations. Seating arranged in groups of two to four in large communal spaces provides choices and a small-group sense of privacy.<sup>10</sup> *Sociofugal* seating arrangements usually involve inflexible furniture and direct people away from each other so that eye contact is difficult. Sitting too close or too far tends to discourage social interaction.<sup>11</sup>



**Fig. 4.4 FURNITURE ARRANGEMENTS** Sociopetal seating arrangements encourage social interaction. Sociofugal seating arrangements direct people away from each other.

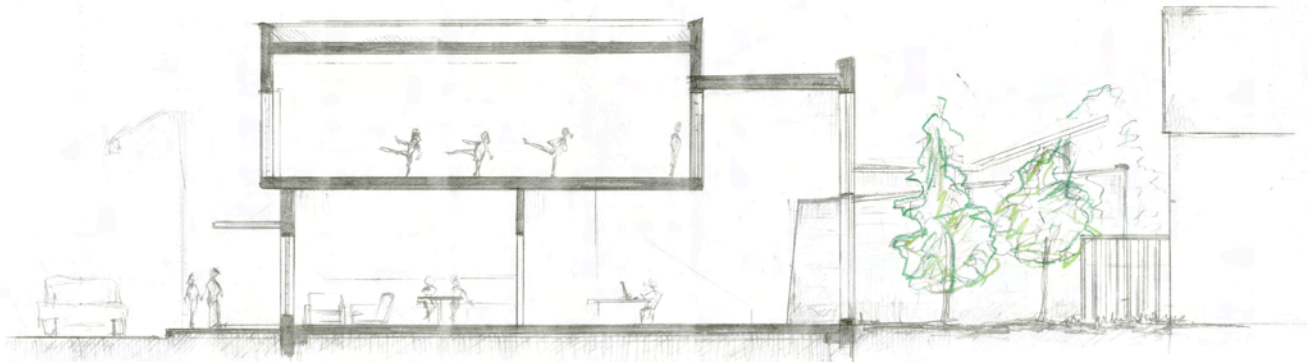
## Counselling and Outreach Services

Individual and group counselling is an essential service that is available at most emergency shelters and transition homes across Canada. The majority of the residents are suffering from either physical or emotional abuse when they first arrive at a transition home.<sup>12</sup> A medical room is provided for health-care specialists to regularly visit the facility. Access to these services can also be made available to current and former residents.

## Studio

A place to exercise also provides some therapeutic value. Physical abuse, homelessness and stress can take a toll on the body. As other aspects of women's lives improve in the transition home, so will their willingness to pay attention to their physical health. Regular exercise is one component of establishing discipline and structure.<sup>13</sup> Residents and non-residents could participate in weight lifting, yoga or self-defence classes. Group exercise provides further opportunities to interact with other women.

Out of the Cold is a drop-in program for people seeking temporary accommodations during the winter season. It is operated by local faith groups and provides sleeping mats for the homeless at various locations across Hamilton. When I spent the day at Martha's House in Hamilton, residents and staff were concerned about homeless individuals being allowed in the facility at a moment of crisis. They feared theft, drug abuse or violence by this unknown group. Therefore, during extremely cold nights, homeless women can be sheltered in the studio. This permits the different populations to be sheltered and secured at the same time.



**Fig. 4.5 STUDIO AND COFFEE SHOP SECTION**

## Notes

- 1 Joan Forrester Sprague. 1991. *More than housing : Lifeboats for women and children*. Boston ; Toronto: Butterworth Architecture.
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**Fig. 5.1 SPATIAL HIERARCHY**

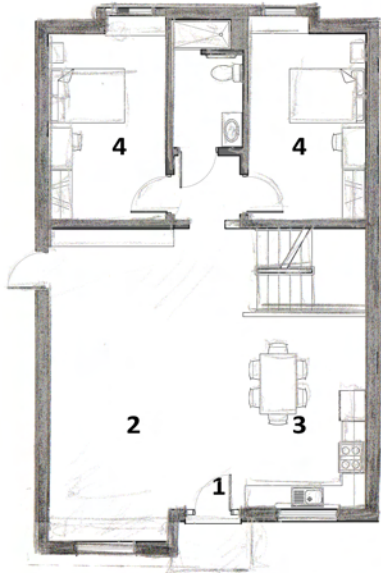
# 05

## GIVE A SENSE OF CONTROL

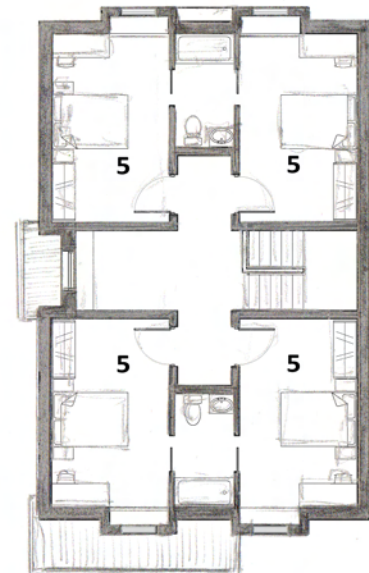
Residents are often encouraged to be as independent as they wish. However, there are many rules and restrictions when living in a transition home. Control is defined as the ability to either alter the physical environment or regulates exposure to one's surroundings. Physical constraints, flexibility, privacy, defensible space, and certain symbolic elements are key design concepts significant to control. Physical constraints within the built environment that reduce choice or behavioural options can cause stress.<sup>1</sup> Prolonged exposure to uncontrollable environmental conditions has also been linked with learned helplessness. Helplessness is related to psychological distress and may be associated with physical disease.<sup>2</sup> Insufficient spatial resources, inflexible spatial arrangements, and lack of climatic or lighting control, all threaten individual needs to effectively interact with interior space.<sup>3</sup> Privacy and spatial hierarchy are major contributors to providing shelter residents with a sense of control.<sup>4</sup>

Communal housing may be a preference for some but it is also a source of stress. Whenever people live together for extended periods common problems are likely to appear. Friction between residents results from sharing the same space with people of different values, interest and habits. Therefore, the townhome model was adapted to separate the residents into smaller household communities. More children are starting to accompany their mothers into transition homes. Therefore, three of the townhomes are dedicated to families. A fourth townhome is assigned to single women or teenagers.

All of the townhomes have an area where residents can relax, socialize, and watch TV as they would in the living room of their own home. A shared kitchen allows residents to learn new cooking techniques, nutrition information and budgeting skills. The social aspect of preparing a meal is also an important component for the women living in the residence.<sup>5</sup> Sharing meals is a way of connecting with others in a relaxed setting. Sharing a kitchen takes coordination and cooperation on behalf of all



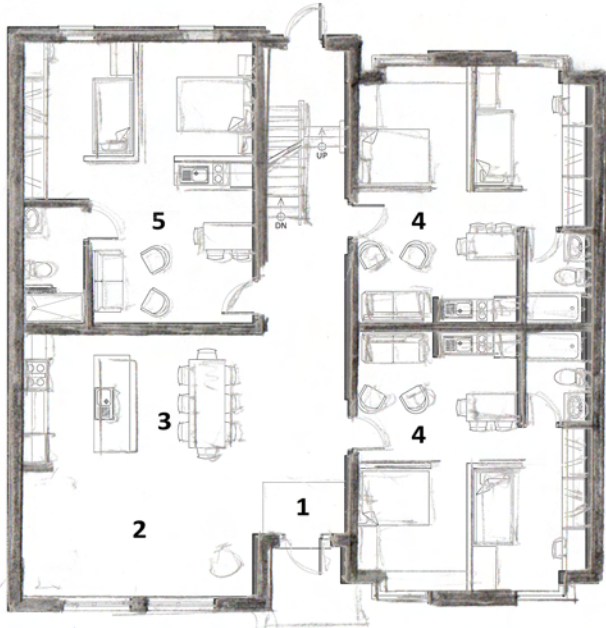
**Ground Floor Plan**



**Second Floor Plan**

1. courtyard entrance
2. lounge
3. communal kitchen
4. accessible suite for single women or teens
5. suite for single women or teens

**Fig. 5.2 Unit Plans: Home for Single WOMen and Teenagers**



**Ground Floor Plan**



**Second Floor Plan**

1. courtyard entrance
2. lounge
3. communal kitchen
4. suite for mother and two (2) children
5. accessible suite for mother and two (2) children
6. suite for mother and six (6) children

**Fig. 5.3 Unit Plans: Home for Women With Children**

those involved. For women who have been homeless for some time, have no cooking skills, have specific diets, or have no inherent connections with other residents, this arrangement may be unworkable.<sup>6</sup>

## 5.1 Residential Units

When I spent the day at Martha's House, I was given an additional tour of the shelter but this time I had a resident as my guide. She brought me to her bedroom so I could see for myself how she had been living for the past three weeks. The room was roughly 150sf with walls painted a intense shade of green and bare of any artwork. The view from the window was towards the alley that separated the shelter from the neighbouring building. There were two sets of twin mattress sitting directly on the floor and jammed against adjacent walls. One bed was stripped completely bare as it was not being occupied at the moment. Besides the mattresses on the floor, there was no other furniture in the room. What belongings the women had brought with her were stored in a black garbage bag beside her bed.

There was no place available in Martha's House for residents to have a moment to themselves to reflect and contemplate the next steps in their lives. All rooms, including bedrooms and bathrooms, were communal and did not allot for privacy.

The sleeping quarters for the design proposal are separate suites as opposed to one large room or dormitory. More children are starting to accompany their mothers into transition homes. Therefore, the number of one-bedroom units is limited. Larger apartments with space for two or three beds accommodate families much better.

The design proposal for the transition home requires members of the same family to share a single room. Private space is important for strengthening the family household. Both adults and children need privacy as single mothers often have little opportunity for time away from their children.<sup>7</sup> At least half of an adult's or a child's time is spent in personal private activities which include sleeping, playing, contemplation, dressing and personal hygiene. Space for these activities may be in a separate or shared room. Low walls and open shelving are used for visual and acoustical separation between mother and children areas to reinforce personal space. Open shelving also provides storage space and an area to display of photographs and personal belongings. This encourages personalization of a space for the changing population of a transition home. Arranging furniture and displaying personal objects can reinforce a mother's and child's ability to take control over other aspects of their lives.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, sleeping is the most personal activity, requiring the most personal space.<sup>9</sup> Private territory is reduced to a bed and the area around it when members of a household share a single space. Larger beds are provided for mothers and reflect their dominant personal space. Some residents may also find sleeping in a single bed quite unsettling once they were not accustomed to doing so.<sup>10</sup>

Design may offer opportunities to combat stress by providing rest, recovery,





**Fig. 5.4 SECTION THROUGH HOUSEHOLD UNITS**

or contemplation. Reflective activities in particular demand a minimum of distraction and some degree of isolation. Privacy nooks and alcoves provide a space to retreat to and buffer some of the negative impacts of residential crowding and loud noise.

## Notes

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- 10 Allen Whittle (Facility Manager, Good Shepherd Centres oh Hamilton ) in discussion with the author, March 2008.

## CONCLUSION

I got off the bus a block away from the transition home. Luckily, I did not have too far to go because the weight of the groceries and my book bag was starting to put pressure on my shoulders. As I approached the building, the smell of freshly baked muffins grew stronger from the coffee shop on the ground floor. The patio was quite busy with small groups and individuals taking in the afternoon sun. I spotted Lucile, one of my neighbours, inside the coffee shop. She was deeply engrossed in a conversation with another woman whom I have never seen before. I wonder if that is her sister. I believe she mentioned that she was expecting her sister to visit from Ottawa when we were in the laundry room last week. Lucile is originally from that area, but was referred to a transition home in Hamilton because her husband's constant threats of violence presented a serious risk.

The door to the adjacent salon was left ajar, which permitted the sound of endless gossip and blow dryers to flood the air. Two of the stylists are former residents. They help to inform the general public of the various events and community programs that are held within the facility every month.

During the day, the entrance doors remain unlocked so that visitors can easily access community programs, counselling services and medical appointments. In all accounts, the receptionist has a clear view of whoever enters the building at all times. The foyer is mainly lit by the large louver window on the far wall. The angles of the wood trellis permit daylight from the courtyard to enter the space but visibly screen the activities that are taking place outdoors. The courtyard is only accessible to residents and staff. I gained access to the courtyard by passing through the childcare centre. The room was empty and the youth worker informed me that all the children were playing outside. From the garden path, I spotted my daughter performing cartwheels on the lawn with two other girls. Once she saw me in the courtyard, she ran over and yanked one of the bags from my arms.

She skipped along as we crossed the garden to our townhome on the other side of the courtyard. A few of our neighbours were gathered in the common lounge and were transfixed by a soap opera playing on the television. We all exchanged greetings then my daughter and I ascended to our apartment on the second floor. Once inside, my daughter ran over to the drawing set that was left on the floor by the couch. Through the open shelves, I could still see her vigorously colouring in shapes as I lay down on my bed. It had been a long and exhausting day, but I could not be happier to finally be home.

Many homes today are far from resembling sanctuaries and cause its occupants to seek alternative accommodations. Not having a place to call home restricts access to necessities such as suitable shelter, security, nutritious foods, education and social service programs. It can also affect the overall well-being of an individual and might increase stress, lower self-esteem and isolate people from the community.<sup>1</sup>

Women arrive at a transition home for a number of reasons. For some the cause is primarily economic—high rents, low income, and a great scarcity of affordable housing. Others are fleeing abuse either by a parent or a partner. In the past few years an increasing number of refugees have arrived at women's shelters. Others have come through the mental health system and ended up on the street. For many it is a combination of factors but the majority will have experienced abuse at some point in their lives.

Transition homes are critical sources of support for women and children in crisis. They are an essential component of the services and programs that respond to the needs of individuals fleeing domestic violence and those facing difficulties with housing and poverty. More than just a safe place to stay, transition homes<sup>2</sup> offer residents access to a variety of services that will help them to better their lives. In addition, shelters often engage in outreach activities, thereby extending their much needed support to those residing outside the doors of the facility. They allow a woman the necessary time to heal from the wounds of an abusive relationship, to find counseling, a job or educational opportunity and a new home for her family.

In order to understand the complexities of poverty and develop an effective response to women issues, it is important to examine how poverty impacts men and women differently. The thesis documented some of the gender dimensions of homelessness in Hamilton and across Canada and the links between gender and poverty. Violence against women and childrearing are significant factors in homelessness and the availability of housing for women.

Women and children living in transition homes are often fearful and uncertain about their safety, their future, and their isolation from normal social relationships.<sup>3</sup> The complex environment of a shared residence also contributes to the stressful situation. Stress can cause a person's physical, mental and emotional condition to weaken and affect the healing or recovery process.<sup>4</sup> Data from homeless shelters, assaulted women's shelters, supportive housing and drop-ins show that a high percentage of women experience on-going living difficulties as a result of trauma, and that they

require support to maintain their housing.<sup>5</sup>

Transition homes are designed not only to support and facilitate outreach programs or to provide a safe place to stay, but they must also embrace the women and children that reside there in a supportive therapeutic environment. A women's place is not limited to a single location. However, a women's place cannot be in a home that does not offer security, respite and warmth.

The intention of this thesis is to look at how design and architectural decisions can impact women and children residing in a transition home. There is a grave misconception that designing for the less fortunate does not require achieving any standards for quality or comfort. The design of our surrounding environment affects our behaviour, the way we feel about ourselves, and the way we get along with others. The design of a transition home for women and children must take into consideration the relationship between behaviour and environment if they intend to create a community where these effects are positive and beneficial.

A sizable body of research suggests that the design of a physical setting impacts the wellbeing of both residents and staff.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, housing and space play a role in the quality of life of individuals and communities. To create a therapeutic environment, architects are responsible for using design to find solutions that will affect the residents and staff in positive ways, throughout the transition home.

What are the architectural qualities that are found in buildings that are responsive to both the needs and the feelings of the people who used them? There are no official design guidelines or standards to create a transition home for women and children. Therefore, I reviewed information about the ways human behaviour is influenced by the buildings human inhabit. Much of this information was derived from analysing existing women shelters, healthcare settings and intentional communities. More of it was drawn from research in the humane sciences and the field of environmental design.

Theories from the field of environmental design have a lot to offer the architectural profession. Psychologist and other behavioural scientists have studied how people respond to colour, light, sizes of rooms, seating arrangements and other issues that can be applied to architecture or interior design. However, the task of sorting through the information available and translating it into design recommendations was a long and complicated process. Fortunately, the thesis derives four design principles that can be used to situate a suitable transition home within an urban location and to create a therapeutic environment. Site selection, providing restorative qualities, enabling social support and giving a sense of control all contribute to the design of a transition home. By better understanding these elements and their physical properties, designers are more consciously prepared to create a therapeutic environment. Through deliberate design choices, architects can offer an appropriate solution to women's housing issues that foster independence, provide safety and give hope for a brighter future.

Site consideration involves architects playing a critical role in overcoming a communities' reluctance to have transition homes for women and children built

in their neighbourhoods. If these programs are to succeed, they must be situated in residential and commercial areas, near public transportation, jobs, social services, and schools – not at the outskirts of town or at the margins of industrial zones. The neighbouring community needs access to information to help them understand the issues that affect housing in their area. A common complaint expressed by neighbours is that they were not sufficiently informed about proposed developments and changes.<sup>7</sup>

Positive distractions help to take residents attention away from the stress or trauma that brought them to the transition home. A courtyard is essential to the design and success of a transition home. A courtyard provides positive distractions by offering views of nature and social activities within the space. One of the constraints of living within a protected facility is the ability to enjoy outdoor spaces. Some residents may not feel comfortable leaving the building due to the fear of their abuser finding them. A courtyard gives the needed security while providing an outdoor space for a range of activities. A community garden serves as a restorative escape from the possibly hectic environment of a transition home. Children might be confined to the shelter for security reasons. Therefore, an exterior courtyard provides them with a safe place to play. Architecturally, courtyards bring light into the building's interior and provide sight lines into controlled space. Courtyards also help to reduce the shelter's noise and visual impact on the neighbourhood since they concentrate all activity within the facility.

A difficulty I encountered with the exterior design of the transition home was the location and planning of the parking lot. The size of the parking lot was determined by municipal guidelines and regulations. It does not reflect the needs of the population requiring these services as the amount of parked cars at one time is likely to be limited. The parking lot also needed to be visible at all times therefore underground parking was neither feasible nor practical. In reflection, surface treatments, visibility and the location of building entrances could help to animate the parking lot for the transition home occupants and the surrounding community.

Women who have experienced domestic violence, who are recovering from substance abuse, or who are struggling to raise a family, can benefit from close peer support and sharing.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, it is important for the design to encourage social networking within the centre. Cohabitation and shared amenities encourages social interaction among the residents. Relationships are based on shared interests and backgrounds; they are also dependent on opportunity and how our environments are arranged.<sup>9</sup> Making it possible for people to make contact or to avoid contact as they choose should be an important consideration for designers. Unless there is a chance to meet, neither friendship nor acquaintanceship is possible. Communal housing may be a preference for some but it is also a source of stress. Whenever people live together for extended periods common problems are likely to appear. Friction between residents may result from sharing the same space with people of different values, interest and habits. Therefore, the townhome model was adapted to separate the residents into smaller household communities. However, the inclusion of townhomes

hinders supervision and the formation of relationships between residents and staff.

Giving a sense of control encourages residents to be as independent as they wish. Control is defined as the ability to either alter the physical environment or regulates exposure to one's surroundings. Physical constraints within the built environment that reduce choice or behavioural options can cause stress.<sup>10</sup> Prolonged exposure to uncontrollable environmental conditions has also been linked with learned helplessness.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, areas for privacy and reflection are provided throughout the design.

The stated design principles are not intended to imply that it is the sole responsibility of the architect to make a positive impact on a building's occupants. Design alone cannot cause two strangers to become friends or instantaneously calm a person upon arrival. However, design can provide opportunities for these events to occur. Additionally, it is the presence of other people that is important. This is reflected in all the principles from the selection of the site to the location of the common rooms.

There is a need for research to provide designers with scientific evidence to support their selections of colour, layout of space, lighting design, or any number of other issues. However, not enough research presently exists testing these issues in specific settings comparable to that of a transition home. The practicality of doing so makes this work especially challenging. There are numerous variables such as resident's history with abuse, presence of children, access to social programs, contact with family and friends, and the attitude of staff that are hard to control. How the community environment is managed also affects both the residents' and the building's long-term success. A well-managed building strengthens program goals, has lower repair costs, and better financial feasibilities.

This thesis is intended to be a useful, practical resource for the designers as well as the operators and managers of transition homes and related facilities. The research and information provided can guide decisions made by those who design and administer transition homes and benefit all who share a concern for improving the design process. More importantly, it will greatly benefit the many women and children that are expected to live and interact in these places and depend on these services.

## Notes

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