An Interior Renovation of the Community Care Center of Muncie, Indiana

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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May 1997

Graduation date: May 10, 1997
This project focuses on the interior design of a local retirement home in Muncie, Indiana. With the introduction of the A.D.A. (Americans with Disabilities Act), many public access areas have been changed to include those with disabilities. This act also helped professionals in design to realize that people with disabilities have special needs once inside a space, and that all design is not functional to all people. This is especially true when analyzing the needs of the elderly.

After observing multiple nursing homes around town and in my hometown, I realized that many places do not take into consideration these needs. Thus I decided to focus on one particular nursing home in Muncie, the Community Care Center. Here is a facility that I felt needed some improvements just to make the residents feel more at home. The intent of this project is to offer suggestions to the director of the facility, and hopefully to educate him on some interior design choices to make the facility more pleasant to the residents, employees and to the guests.
When a visitor first enters the Community Care Center of Muncie (hereafter referred to as C.C.C.), he or she may notice that the interior seems to be a little dark and dreary for a retirement home. Quickly the smell of an institution fills the visitor's nose, and it is evident that this is a nursing home. This is a typical reaction of most visitors that enter any facility, but this facility seems to emphasize it. When I first entered upon the C.C.C., my mind was full of ideas on how to change the space into something more enjoyable and pleasant. Thus began my research in retirement communities and housing for the elderly.

It seems that there are many design aspects that need to be taken into consideration. These include lighting, colors, and placement of furnishings. I knew that the facility needed a “make over” in the sense that the interior seemed outdated and dreary. It wasn’t until I studied elderly environments that I realized how much of a change the facility really needed. The goal of this project is to educate on the basic needs of a retirement facility, apply these into a design, and then suggest the design to the director of the facility as a proposed change.

The nurse's station posed to be the biggest challenge to the design of the nursing home. As it stands now, the nurse's station is not very functional and does not lend to a productive center. The nurse's station is the main area of activity, so I decided to give this area more focus in its design. I noticed that the counter top was too high for any of the residents who used a wheelchair. It was also difficult for the nurses to see any...
residents beyond the counter top. The nurses seemed to have no view of the residents who were coming and going. The nurse’s station also seemed to be too open to the residents around them. Residents could easily stroll into the nurse’s station without any difficulty. There was also a lack of storage space for the nurses to keep files and supplies.

In designing the nurse’s station, I decided to move the counter top to the wall so that the nurses could limit access to the residents. I then decided to have the counter top split into two different levels. The suggested seating height for a counter top is 30 -33”. This makes it easier for a resident in a wheelchair to communicate with the nurse, and also for the nurse to see the residents. The counter top on this lower level also has a “lip” that extends out one foot so that the resident in a wheelchair can easily maneuver under the counter and be more comfortable.

The remaining part of the counter top is at 43”, a recommended standing height for desk surfaces. This will enable the nurses to work at a comfortable level, and will also accommodate those residents that have back problems and cannot reach higher counters. This can also act as a shield for the nurses who are working at the desk and need some privacy.

I also included more cabinet space within the nurse’s station, both upper and lower. The upper cabinets are those that can be pulled open and the door secured on top of the upper cabinet. This will be ideal for the hanging files that the nurses need on a continual basis. The lower cabinets are ideal for office supplies and other office needs, so that there is no
clutter with the nurse’s files.

The nurse’s station will also have lettering on the wall that states the facility name. I had noticed that the facility had no interior markings that displayed the name of the facility. I felt that this was a minor design, but important.

This leads into the use of signs within the facility. I also noticed that there was a lack of signage in the facility. The elderly rely upon landmarks in the home to identify rooms and places. I suggest that the facility make use of door signs on bedroom doors, the dining facility, location of restrooms, bathing area, and lounge areas. These signs are widely available in several styles and colors. Also as a landmark, paintings should be used throughout the facility so that the residents will be able to identify the wing that their room is located, or where the main dining area is placed.

Another landmark design is to use color. I found that this aspect of design seemed to be neglected in the facility. The facility is mostly finished in hues of brown, beige, and white. The individual rooms are brightly finished, but almost childlike. It is suggested that the colors focus around blue, red, and yellow (the primary colors) because they are high contrast and easily noticeable. As a person gets older, the distinction between colors grows more difficult. Greens and blues seem to be one color.

I therefore chose to do a variation of the primary colors. In this
facility, I suggest a color scheme of navy blue, burgundy, and off white (almost yellow). These three colors will also remind the residents of their rural heritage, as these are country colors. It is suggested that paintings and colors reflect the history of the surrounding area and the heritage of the residents. The carpeting throughout the main hallways, dining area, and lounge areas will be mostly navy blue with small amounts of burgundy and off white accents.

The walls will be finished with lighter shades of these three colors. I have also suggested some wallpaper samples that can be used in the deluxe bedrooms, lounge areas, or the dining room. The patterns are not very busy and will reflect the style of the room that they are placed (busy patterns are not suggested for those residents who may have dementia).

The lighting in the facility also poses a problem. The lights seem to be too yellow for its application in an area where most of the residents have vision problems. It is suggested that fluorescent lights be used in a facility of this size. Fluorescent lights produce no glare and are more fashionable than the old style fluorescent lights most people remember. It is best to select fluorescent lights that have a warm white glow rather than a cool white glow. This will make the facility feel more like home not a “hospital” type of facility. The lighting should also be more emphasized in task areas, such as the nurse’s station and desks in resident’s rooms.

To eliminate a lot of the noises in the nursing home, the ceiling tile should be replaced with a more efficient acoustical tile. Acoustical tile
absorbs more sounds than average ceiling tiles. Selecting an acoustical tile will lessen most of the background noises, especially in areas surrounding the bedrooms, and will create better communication for residents and nurses. The color of the ceiling should be neutral, or off white, from my color selection. I will also be placing ceiling fan and light combination in the dining room instead of the chandeliers that exist. These ceiling fans will also be off white. This will also create less confusion for the residents.

When people grow older, the element of confusion becomes more prevalent. The elderly lose their ability to sense visual surface changes, especially walls and floors that are the same color. This is why I chose to keep the ceiling fan the same color as the ceiling. The residents will see the fixtures as part of the ceiling, and not something else. This theory will also be applied in the bathrooms of the deluxe bedrooms and the common bathing area.

Each bathroom will be fitted with either a navy blue or burgundy floor. The product I suggest for the bathroom flooring is the tile that has raised circled designed on it. I felt that this would decrease the chance of slipping, and will also make the resident aware that they are entering the bathroom. The style I chose has the colors suggested for the scheme of the facility (navy and burgundy). The walls of the bathroom will be off white, and the fixtures within the bathroom will be bright colored as well. This will help the resident decipher between the wall and the grab bars they can hold on to, or the mirror that is tilted forward so that they can see
themselves better. There will also be a different toilet installed that has a wider base so that the resident will assume that it is more stable.

As for the carpeting in all the main areas, the pile will be low enough that a wheelchair will be able to move freely. It is suggested that the carpet have a liquid barrier backing to prevent odors and staining. It is also suggested that the carpet be solution dyed so that stains will come out easily. The carpet will also act as a noise absorber, and will reduce glare for the residents. In each of the bedrooms, a ceramic tile will be used that matches the color of the bathroom within that room. This will make cleaning easier, and will allow the residents to be less confused about the room.

These suggestions are basic in nature, but can change this out dated nursing facility into a place that feels more like home, and more pleasant for those that work within its walls. I feel that these suggestions could fit into the budget of this facility. There is no room for luxuries at this particular location, but the changes will make the facility more luxurious in its atmosphere.
Bibliography


