

integrated wellness

a healing centre for victims of trauma and abuse

Submitted as part of the requirements for the degree of Magister in Architecture (Professional) in the Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology. University of Pretoria, Department of Architecture, November 2005

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definitions

Definitions

Holistic: pertaining to a healing system that focuses on both the mind and the body as equal parts in creating a healthy whole.

Psychological therapy: this method not only includes counselling, but is made up of physical therapies, sensory therapies, eastern techniques (such as Yoga and meditation), aesthetic techniques and traditional methods.

Trauma: this category includes rape, abuse, assault, violence and any other act, whether the victim is physically harmed or not, that may induce psychological disturbances.

Other definitions are explained in the text where they are used. Abbreviations are explained in the text as they are used.

introduction

Introduction

“More than 90% of the people walking about in an ordinary neighbourhood are unhealthy, judged by simple biological criteria. This ill health cannot be cured by hospitals or medicine.” (Alexander 1977: 252)

Theme

Today due to high rates of abuse, trauma and violence many people are subjected to psychological stress (Kaplan 1989:172). Many of the victims who need help, do not get it. Others who are helped do not have a strong enough support system, to enable them to cope once their counselling has ended.

With the AIDS pandemic, much of the focus has been on AIDS orphans. There are other groups affected, such as teenagers and women. According to the UNAIDS report, women are at a greater risk of infection and bear the brunt of the epidemic, as they have to take care of others, lose jobs and schooling due to illness, and face stigmatism and discrimination (2004 global report on AIDS, p4 executive summary). Young people aged 15-24 account for more than half of all new HIV infections worldwide (2004 global report on AIDS, p8 executive summary). Counselling and morale-boosting is necessary to improve their lives.

Psychological counselling has a lot of stigma attached to it (Froneman and Louw interviews 2005). When a traumatic event occurs that disturbs the psychological state of a person, counselling is not always sought. In traditional Black culture, counselling in the western format does not exist (Molefe interview 2005). Previously the traditional healer often helped in this matter, as a thorough understanding of holistic treatment is intrinsic to this discipline. Physical ailments that were a result of psychological causes, cleared up as the treatment continued.

The misconception today is that people who seek counselling are not able to deal with their problems, or are mentally unstable (Louw interview 2005). Counselling is not always necessary, as people are naturally resilient, but working through subconscious thoughts and problems is beneficial (Louw interview 2005). Eliminating negative thoughts, fears and feelings has an immediate beneficial effect on our total wellbeing (Reflexology Manual 2003:3).

The proposed design is for a Healing Centre for women. It aims to focus on a holistic system of healing, as well as psychological and emotional care. The centre is not a primary health care facility, but is for those whose psychological state has affected their physical health. It will also cater for victims of trauma and abuse, patients of long-term illness, early terminal illness (where psychological wellbeing improves patient comfort) AIDS/HIV sufferers and general psychological healing. At the centre, through improvement of the mind, self esteem and morale, general health will be improved. The physical environment created at the facility will be conducive to healing.

The concept for the Healing Centre was conceived through the influence of the ‘look good, feel better’ initiative used with cancer patients, which helps improve morale through make-up and aesthetic treatments. The centre will further develop this concept to ‘feel good, be better’, in terms of an improved sense of well being and health. The centre will provide psychological care and therapies in many forms to help improve psychological health, and so physical health.



Location

The location of the proposed Centre is off Lynnwood Road, to the east of Pretoria in the Bronberg. The site is off the main road, in an area which has little development, and far enough away not to be affected by the urban sprawl which is taking place in the east. It is also close enough to Pretoria to be used as a day facility, and located near the areas which it will serve, such as Mamelodi.

Through the Bronberg Conservation Initiative (BCI), a Strategic Environment Assessment was carried out in 2002 and the area was identified as a unique ecological and physical resource, which needed protection from urban development and other uses. This area contains many valuable biophysical, cultural, historical and other visual resources. The Bronberg Conservation Initiative has an interest in the facility. With the social and cultural history of the area, a reintroduction of traditional healers will strengthen the link to the past. The guidelines and other regulations set by the BCI, will have an effect on the development of the facility. The site is currently being used as a caravan park and picnic location known as Nkwe. There is basic infrastructure on the site, in the form of small buildings and cabins.

development

Development

The intention of the architecture is to create a centre that will be in harmony with the natural environment in which it exists. The functioning of the building must have as little negative impact as possible on the environment, using passive systems with a high regard for embodied energy. The building and its functions must respond to the site and setting, so that it will not be visually intrusive, or psychologically intrusive to the people using it.

The environment created by the building complex must be conducive to healing. The architecture must be appealing cross-culturally and accommodate users from a variety of backgrounds. The architecture must not be institutional or exclusive, and so intimidate the users. The Environmental Preference Report, conducted by the author, must be considered when designing the facilities, so that a variety of users feel comfortable within the building complex. The building complex must be legible to its users, and provide choice in terms of activities and spaces, that is that the individual can choose to be with the rest of the group as a community, or on their own as an individual. The project is connectivity reliant, connecting people, place and the environment as a cohesive and interdependent whole.



The project will be composed of three main components, which operate together as a whole, as well as separately. These are the Healing and Wellness Centre, the Health Spa and the Herbal and Research Centre. The Healing Centre is the main focus and consists of various treatment and counseling rooms, studios, healing compounds and accommodation, as well as the necessary service and administration areas. The Herbal Centre is made up of a herbal research centre, conference centre and restaurant, as well as a Herbal Shop and Nursery. The Health Spa consists of the usual spa facilities and treatments.

The main user group of the Healing Centre will be those from low incomes, such as Mamelodi, which lies approximately 25km from the proposed centre. Women there do not always have the finances for therapy, and may not consider it when it is needed. The centre will mainly focus on post primary psychological counselling, but will offer primary counselling to those who need it. The therapies that will be used include conventional counselling, as well as group therapies, art and dance, reflection and meditation, physical therapies, aesthetic techniques, alternative treatments and traditional African methods.

Clients of the accompanying Spa facility will have some similar therapies, as well as conventional spa treatments. These users will be from higher income backgrounds. The Herbal Centre will function mainly as a research facility for indigenous plant medicines, and will also contain a conference centre, restaurant and shop to help generate income.

Exploration and focus

The design discourse covers the relevant normative theory, the psychological experience and benefits of nature as well as an environmental preference questionnaire conducted by the author, which together explore the effects of the environment on people.

The context of the study includes a site assessment and history, the socio-cultural environment of many of the users, and the culture of healing. Healing incorporates traditional healing, alternative healing and wellness promotion. Rehabilitation, victim empowerment, trauma intervention and mental health associated with these are dealt with briefly.

Outcome of study

Along with the necessary counselling and support, skills empowerment workshops will be presented at the Healing Centre. These workshops will be extended to set up permanent work opportunities near the homes of the users in Mamelodi, with the help of sponsors. This approach further helps to reintegrate the women into the community, empowering and helping the community as a whole. Through educational and preventive healthcare workshops conducted at the Healing Centre, general quality of life and wellness will be improved. The users will be helped to improve their emotional and intellectual health, as well as their lives.

exploration & focus



client

The centre will run as a semi-private venture. The Herbal Centre, Spa and Healing Centre will be owned by a private healthcare provider. The Herbal Centre will operate as a research facility as well as a commercial venture. The Spa and Herbal Centres will give a percentage of their profits to the Healing Centre.

funding

Funding will be provided by in a number of different ways. Firstly the Centre will partially fund itself through the profits of the Spa and Herbal Centre. Industry related business, such as manufacturers of feminine products and cosmetic companies, and the Cosmetics Toiletries and Fragrance Association (CTFA-SA) will obtain donations, products and services for the Healing Centre. Themba Lesizwe is a Network of trauma service providers that fund non-profit organisations. Their grants range from R50 000 to R300 000 per year. Such a grant would be obtained. Government funding will be applied for, in terms of the traditional healers, as well as funding from the National Lottery for the indigenous knowledge systems.



