



## Building Case Study Homeless Mens' Service

### Project Outcomes

- Strengthening the existing courtyard as a social space.
- Integrating comfortable “in-between” spaces for staff to initiate informal chats with clients.
- Increasing staff safety by creating clear lines of sight and boundaries between staff and clients.

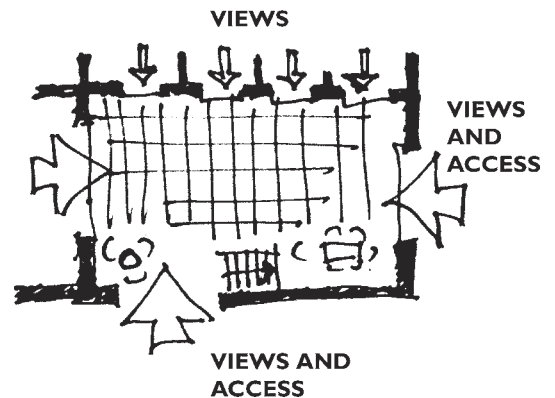
### The Project

*Constructive Dialogue* has been involved in a series of significant renovation projects at Foster House. Foster House is a twenty-four hour facility that provides accommodation and other support to homeless men in inner-city Sydney. The service provides a range of options from an intoxicated person's unit for overnight stays to longer term housing in the community. The Salvation Army contacted *Constructive Dialogue* at a time when Foster House was implementing changes to their program. The new focus was on case management that encouraged clients to move towards more stable lifestyles rather than simply providing crisis accommodation. This involved providing a “continuum of care” that included a new detox unit. There was also a need to implement measures that would create a more controllable and safe environment.

### Initial Review

*Constructive Dialogue* spent significant periods of time observing and participating in the ongoing life of Foster House. Some issues identified in the initial assessment included:

- **Courtyard Focus:** The central courtyard significantly contributed towards a positive environment throughout the building.
- **Connections:** The link between floors was important in enabling staff to be aware of what was happening within the building. These links also allowed clients to feel part of a larger community.
- **Enclosure:** Clients feel safe in spaces that were small and enclosed, specifically corners where they could sit or sleep with their back to a wall.
- **Boundaries:** The client group had an impaired ability to understand and acknowledge social boundaries. Barriers needed to provide a clear physical separation, but also allow for easy visibility and conversation.



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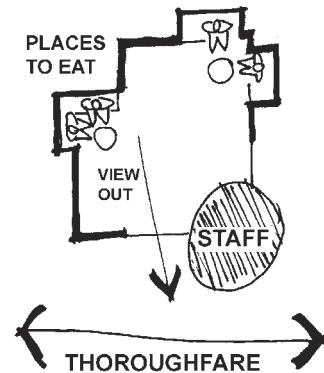
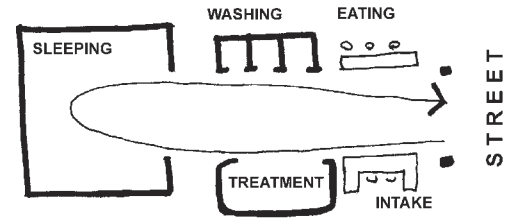
level 1, 17 federation road  
newtown nsw 2042  
p +612 9516 4411

[www.constructivedialogue.com.au](http://www.constructivedialogue.com.au)  
[info@constructivedialogue.com.au](mailto:info@constructivedialogue.com.au)

## The Brief

A project team was formed that included all senior staff. This group established a set of design ideas for various parts of the service. These design ideas included:

- **Intake Process:** Clients who enter the intoxicated person's unit from the street should pass by staff and the range of services that are on offer including food, a shower, new clothes and treatment, before moving through to a place where they can sleep.
- **Nooks as Places for Retreat:** To enable informal chats, there need to be alcoves or side spaces in which clients can eat, wait or sit around before leaving the building. These are spaces in which staff can engage proactively with the clients.
- **Courtyard Focus:** All services and parts of the building must relate strongly to the central courtyard. Windows open onto the courtyard, activities occur along the edge of the courtyard and there are clear access routes through the courtyard to the intoxicated person's unit.
- **Clear Boundaries:** Staff should interact with clients in open booths and other areas that allow good visibility for other staff, easy escape for either party and a barrier between the staff and the client.



## The Design

A series of significant renovations have been well received by staff and residents. The outcomes of the design process have included the following:

- **Maintaining the Courtyard and Strengthening it as a Social Place:** The location of the detox unit was carefully selected to allow detox programs to take place in a sunny spot along the edge of the courtyard. This decision was the outcome of initial discussions about the program and occurred prior to the commencement of the design.
- **A Warm and Safe Environment:** Open interview booths were created to allow staff and residents to observe what was happening around them, maintain privacy and at the same time avoid an institutional, punitive appearance. This was achieved using an innovative building material - industrial strength cardboard rolls.
- **Support of the New Program:** The design includes a space near the entry of the intoxicated persons unit where clients can sit, eat a snack and watch passing traffic, away from the main path of travel in and out of the building.
- **Client Privacy and Feelings of Security:** A system of sleeping and eating units is being developed that will allow clients to maintain privacy in an environment that will feel safe and will provide a place for a case worker to sit for an informal chat.

Beyond these explicit design changes, a primary outcome of the project has been the increased understanding within the staff of the impact of the building on their programs. They have stated that they now have a greater ability to plan and make ongoing changes.





## References

The following people would be happy to discuss the project further:

### **Maj Geanette Seymour**

Secretary for Program, Australia Eastern Territory,  
The Salvation Army.  
Phone 02 9266 9549

### **Maj Bob Seymour**

Manager, Foster House, The Salvation Army.  
Phone: 02 9212 1065

### **Capt Edwin Cox**

Property Secretary, Australia Eastern Territory,  
The Salvation Army  
Phone 02 9266 9622