

Design does make a difference

Makeover at The George Hull Centre Family Room begins with colour



JANE LOCKHART
DESIGN
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The first time we saw the family therapy rooms at the George Hull Centre for Children and Families, we knew we wanted to do everything we could to improve them.

The non-profit facility provides mental health care to children up to 18 years of age and their families. Sure, the waiting room is vibrant, well-lit and colourful, but that's where it ends.

The four windowless family rooms, each big enough to accommodate children and parents, were cold, institutional office-like spaces, with random, used pieces of furniture.

The walls were colour-less and dull except for some art that was forced to do all the heavy-lifting to add warmth and style. One wall in every room was dominated by a huge, two-way mirror used for observation. It effectively doubled the reflected dreariness.

When asked in a survey

what they would change, the children and parents suggested adding colour to the bland white walls and making the rooms cozier —oh, and toys, more toys.

So, our first task was to choose colours that would appeal to children, teens and parents. Instead of primary colours, or baby pastels, we went slightly bolder, but in warm and cozy shades of teal, green, coral and a shade of purple close to lavender.

Benjamin Moore paint was donated by Design on King and applied to one wall per room, by CM Painting and Decorating. The accent wall, became the jumping off point to start the warming process.

I'm asked all the time how to choose colour to make a room brighter. The answer is always the same. It's not the colour, it's the amount of light in a room.

Even dark colours can look brighter with the right lighting. So, following my own rule we approached our friends at Birnie Electric to see if they could help.

John Flanagan, VP of the Birnie Home Safe Program (ismyhomesafe.ca) came in

and assessed the room's cold fluorescent lighting. They came up with a lighting plan for not only adding warm, LED recessed, residential-style lighting, but also tamper-proof outlets to keep small fingers safe. The lighting immediately transformed the rooms.

Fabric to cover the two-way mirrors was generously donated by Avant Garde, and Drapes and More did a lovely job finishing them. Art was provided by Celadon and original photography was donated by Sherri O'Hanlon and framed by Picture It Framed.

Dimplex, upon hearing of our quest to bring a homey touch to the centre donated an electric aquarium! It's like the real thing, right down to the bubbly sound effects without any of the maintenance.

Bouclair supplied accessories like drapery rods, chalkboards, rugs, pillows and storage boxes. These wonderful touches raised the cozy quotient immediately.

Scaled-down club chairs were donated by Monte Design Group along with two sofas from Jane By Jane Lockhart added the perfect touch. Generous monetary donations allowed us to purchase kids and adult-sized furnishings and accessories and yes, toys, too. Thank you partners!

The big reveal day was a flurry of activity captured on video and presented on the Marilyn Denis Show on January 31st Bell Media's Let's Talk Day.

Now thanks to our contributing partners and generous donors, the staff and families can feel comfortable, like they're in a real family room not a clinical office space. A follow up survey told us the changes are a big success.

As more research and acknowledgment of mental health issues expand, it's encouraging to see that care extended to children, like at the George Hull Centre. We hope that the newly designed rooms will be a positive contribution to the care and treatment the kids will receive.

— Jane Lockhart is a celebrity designer and leading expert in the world of design. Visit www.janelockhart.com.



AFTER: The first task was to choose colours that would appeal to children and parents, and that meant going bolder including a shade of purple close to lavender.



BEFORE: Walls at the George Hull Centre Family Rooms were colour-less and dull except for some art that was forced to do all the 'heavy lifting.'

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