



LEADERSHIP IN THE DESIGN OF WOMEN'S PRISONS: A CASE STUDY

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Ten years ago, San Diego County, California began a process of replacing a 50-year-old women's correctional facility. In late 2014, the first phase opened, and in 2016, all 1,216 beds were available.

The facility, which has won multiple awards already, is based on a campus design supporting a dynamic security model. This achievement by the San Diego Sheriff's Office was possible because staff believed designing for

women should be based on **initiative** and not the inertia of past projects.

This process - from the identification of need to the completion of a post occupancy evaluation - offered an opportunity to closely observe the results from the initial leadership. This led the policy and program development to result in the implementation of the design. Operational planning provided the evidence basis for the resultant design.

Leaders who were willing to look beyond their own history and personal biases challenged the planning and design team to innovate. This paper presents examples of the results by examining the basis for design; leadership intervention in the process; impact of operational choices on design outcomes; and lessons from the post occupancy evaluation.



In 2010, the International Corrections and Prisons Association published “Design Principles for Women Prisons” that attempted to use the intentions of the “United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for Treatment of Prisoners,” also referred to as “The Nelson Mandela Rules,” as a means of translating basic minimum rules into guiding design principles. Using the minimum rules as a basis, the design principles used core values, guiding principles, and vision statements to identify design examples from constructed women’s correctional facilities that demonstrate a potentially new visual response.

Suggested Core Values



Guiding Principles



Successful Community Reintegration



Dynamic Security Model



Objective, Analytically Based Classification



Purpose-designed, Built, and Operated



Evidence-based Living Unit and Program Assessment



Direct and Continuous Interaction Between Staff and Offenders



Minimize Restrictive Accommodation

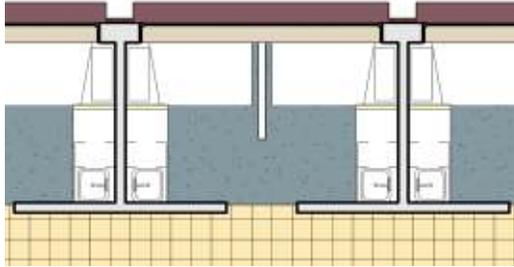


Design Promotes and Sustains Normalized Communication

Guiding Principles



Responsible Behavior
Results in Free Movement
Opportunities



Appropriate Levels of Personal
Privacy



Consider Travel Time and
Frequency for Visitation Time



Maximization of Appropriate
Mother and Baby Contact



Availability and Access to
Medical and Mental Health
Services



Dining is an Opportunity for
Socialization



Admission, Release or
Transfer Area Reflects
Human Rights and Dignity



Prioritize Least Restrictive
Procedures Available for
Security Risk



San Diego Women's Facility Vision Statement

1. Using the women-specific risk and needs assessment tool, the operational and design basis should embrace new initiatives.
2. The facility should offer a range of programs and spaces that encourage responsible decision-making and the implications of being held accountable for their choices.
3. Public, staff, and prisoner safety and security are paramount.
4. The use of normal materials, fixtures, and furnishings appropriate to the security requirements of each space will characterize the facility design.
5. The daily regimen will be based upon the provision of productive activities for 14 hours, or more, each day for women that have exhibited willingness.
6. Upon leaving prison, women will have been offered release-preparation opportunities to help reduce re-offending.
7. The requirement for any barrier or separation of staff from prisoners will be based upon documented levels of risk for the occupants.
8. The aesthetic and environmental aim will reflect the uniqueness of this gender-specific facility.



The San Diego vision provided the planning and design team with the basis to test operational and design concepts driven by the collective initiative of the project leadership team.



-STEPHEN A. CARTER

Six functional components required serious deliberation and research before design solutions could be reached.



1. Appropriate Site and Size

THE CHALLENGE:

Remote site and large facility.

THE SOLUTION:

Taking into account the biological, emotional, and physical characteristics of women, and the sensitivities to the developing neighborhood of Santee, the facility was designed as a 45-acre campus. Within a decorative walled facility, most women move freely across the campus from six different housing types to educational, medical, dining, vocational, and work centers that are organized much like a community college.





2. Living Units that Support Relationships and Promote a Positive Sense of Self

THE CHALLENGE:

Foster relationships and communication.

THE SOLUTION:

The design team chose to configure the association space into smaller groupings through design and/or organization of furniture. Smaller lounge areas or multi-purposes rooms were also added to supplement the main association space providing the women an opportunity for studying, writing, small conversations, or just to “step away.”

3. Living Accomodations

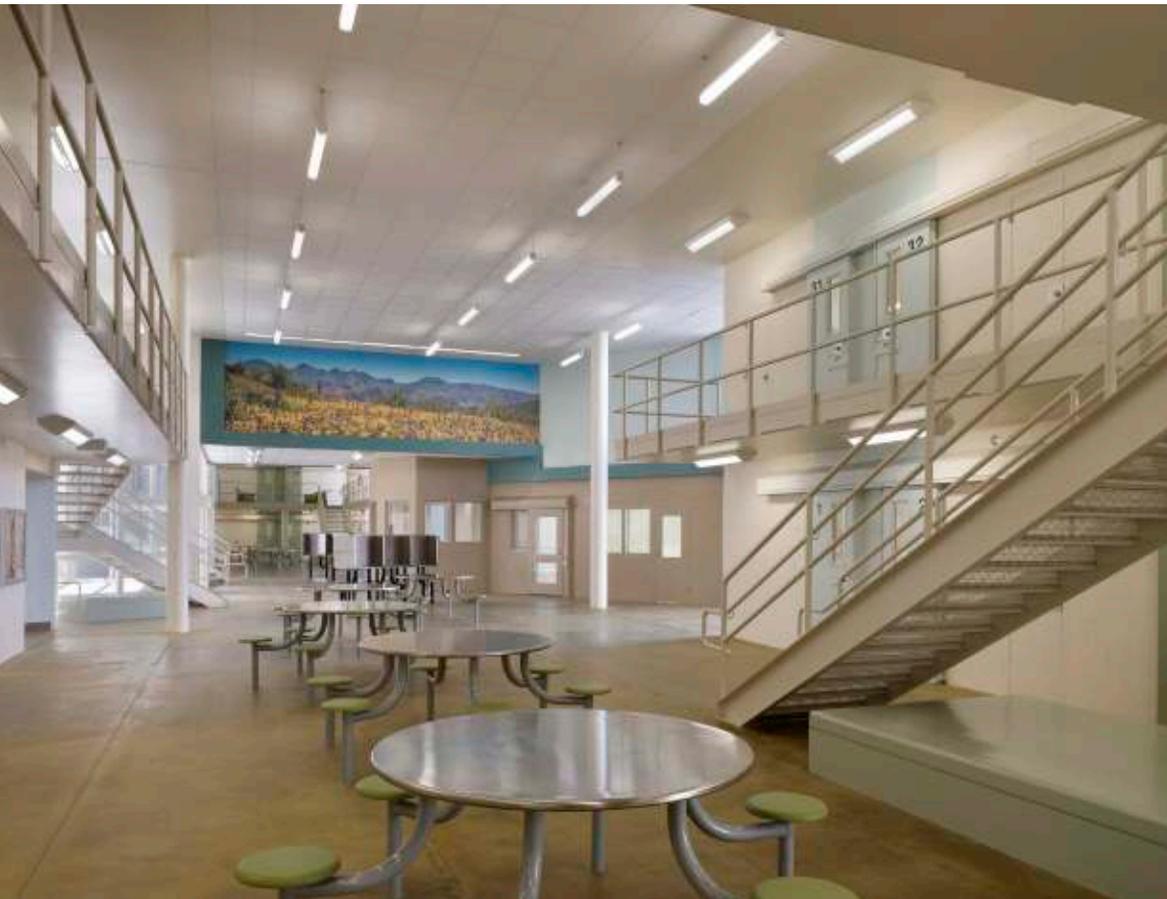
THE CHALLENGE:

Identify appropriate mixture of single, double and multi-occupancy settings.

THE SOLUTION:

Applied best practices from the *National Institute of Corrections* and *Center for Criminal Justice Research* to disaggregate the population into six security and need levels.





4. Reception and Discharge

THE CHALLENGE:

Create a secure admission area that mitigates anxiety and ensures personal dignity.

THE SOLUTION:

Architecturally, this is achieved with open seated waiting, private internal rooms and a normative interior environment. Operationally, this was achieved by foregoing typical processing functions (search, strip, shower) and providing the option to shower once settled in a housing unit.

5. Gender-Responsive Programs and Services

THE CHALLENGE:

Providing indoor and outdoor spaces that address female-specific needs.

THE SOLUTION:

Create program and treatment spaces that are flexible and can be modified to respond to group or individual learning. Offer life skill programs and vocational programs that are appropriate to the community to which they are returning.



6. Visitation for Maintaining Healthy Family Ties

THE CHALLENGE:

Determine the correct balance between contact and non-contact visitation.

THE SOLUTION:

Provide options for non-contact visitation in situations where there is a need for a partition between the female and her visitor. Group and individual therapy rooms are available in the visiting area. The majority of visiting provides no physical barriers, provides “child-friendly” provisions, and utilizes indoor and outdoor visitation spaces.



Conclusion

One of the basic tenets of architecture is that good clients are essential for good design solutions. During the course of design projects that often last many years from early feasibility and space programming studies to the final permission to occupy, countless decisions must be made through filters of operations, cost, and politics.

To successfully design a facility with great attention to gender differences, it is important to empower and promote

leadership at all levels within the political and professional communities to examine new design initiatives for women who must spend a period of their sanction incarcerated. Evidence continues to be drawn from worldwide examples that, for female offenders, design solutions can and should be innovative, normative, and inspiring at a cost well below the cost of male facilities.

Stephen A. Carter is a Founder, Executive Vice-President, and Global Strategic Development Officer of CGL Companies. He received his Bachelor's Degree in Architecture from Clemson University and his Master's Degree in Urban Design and Planning from the Architectural Association, London, England. He has led planning projects in more than 40 states, 300 counties, and several foreign countries involving needs assessment, operational and architectural programming, design review, program management, and policy evaluation, among others.

Stephen has served on the faculty of the College of Architecture and Planning at Clemson University and as a trainer at the National Academy of Corrections in Colorado; Wakefield Training College-UK; and the Harvard Development Seminars. He has served as Chairman of the American Correctional Association's(ACA) Facility Design Committee; Chairman of the ACA Exemplary Practices Council; and the ICPA Planning and Design Committee. He was a charter board member of the ICPA and served on the board for 16 years, eight as Treasurer. Stephen writes a regular column on trends in corrections for Correctional News and is a frequent contributor to the American Institute of Architects Knowledge Communities periodicals.

