Designing Interiors for CAPSA: creating a healing space

McKinley Emmett, Utah State University  
Susie Tibbitts, Faculty Advisor

CAPSA is a non-profit domestic violence, sexual abuse, and rape recovery center. It provides support services for women, men, and children impacted by abuse. Their facility must be designed to not only provide a safe place for victims, but the interior environment must heal its occupants. CAPSA’s mission is to provide support for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault and to reduce incidents of abuse through prevention education.

An assessment of CAPSA’s needs for a functional office was done to determine what spaces would be needed to assist those looking for help. With six in-house therapists and four legal council professionals, those seeking help have access to various resources. A Support Group Center and Research Center will be used to help heal and educate victims. The Support Group Center will help those who have faced similar challenges connect with one another, while the Research Center provides a place for a fresh start. It is also a place for children to heal if they have been a victim or witness to abuse. Each space will be designed to provide education and instruction to those seeking help.

To get help, give help, or donate, visit capsao.org for more information.

Results: CAPSA’s New Headquarters

CAPSA’s new headquarters will treat and assist those who have been victims of abuse. Before designing the space, it is important to understand the mental state of those victims and the necessary elements the space will need to make it a place of healing and comfort.

An article published by the US National Library of Medicine discussed the cognitive changes and interpersonal relationships of women who have suffered from domestic abuse. The results of this study determined that there were significant differences between women who have been abused and those who have not. Women who suffered from domestic violence had higher results in depression and destruction dimensions, while women who had not experienced abuse had higher results in reproduction and incorporation. Women victims of abuse said they would describe themselves as more angry, lonely, sad, and less sociable. These negative emotions can become a risk for mental health disorders and will be used within the space. These psychological aspects will play an important role in healing those who visit CAPSA’s new headquarters.

After researching CAPSA and the affect abuse has on victims, research of what the space needed to include started with color psychology. The color that seemed to be best suited for CAPSA’s new headquarters was green. Green is the color of nature. It has been proven to be beneficial to the mind and body. It slows the metabolism and produces a calming effect. Green has an emotional correspondence with safety and has great healing powers. Accent colors such as blue, tan, and white have positive psychological affects and will be used within the space. These psychological aspects will play an important role in healing those who visit CAPSA’s new headquarters.

Research of inspiration came after understanding the needs of CAPSA and color psychology. The space needs to feel open and light. Various shades of green and neutrals will be used to create a comfortable office while natural textures and the occasional pattern will keep the space feeling modern.

Security and privacy is the number one focus of CAPSA. When laying out the floor plan for their new headquarters, it was important to take into consideration the location of each room. CAPSA encourages those visiting the office to feel comfortable as the Research Center and Support Group Center are located in the center of the office. This allows those who come and go to feel part of the space. A closed off reception space and vestibules are used for added security and privacy.

To ease navigation throughout the office, wayfinding has been used to assist visitors. Large-scale vinyl numbers have been applied next to each office to help avoid any confusion. Each number is a different shade of green applied to a neutral backdrop. This color combination uses the research findings of color psychology to help calm and relax those visiting the office.

The sitting area is a neutral space that is comfortable for visitors to wait to be assisted. Because this space is one of the first places to be used by those seeking help, color psychology research was taken into consideration. Greens and blues were used with neutrals to help begin the healing process as soon as someone enters the space.

The Call Center is a 24-hour support phone line where trained advocates can provide support and resources to those seeking help for themselves or others. This space needs to be functional and secure. There are 20 call stations and a small lounge area beneath the large windows. Because volunteers will be coming and going during all hours, a vestibule is located just off the main entrance for added security.

After researching the needs for CAPSA, color psychology, and inspiration, furniture research was the last step before designing the space. Ergonomic chairs and adjustable sit-to-stand desks will be used in every office as well as the Call Center to ensure a productive environment for employees and volunteers. The office not only needs to heal those who need help, but it needs to be a comfortable place for those who work there. Comfortable furniture will also be used throughout waiting areas and lounge spaces. Not only will ergonomics play an important role in furniture selection, but durability of finishing and fabrics will also be taken into consideration.