

# A dedicated facility designed for correctional researchers: The Addictions Research Centre

George Centen<sup>1</sup>

Facility Planning and Standards, Correctional Service Canada

**A**n increasingly wired world provides an opportunity to create a research environment that returns to design basics, in an inspiring setting.

In April 2001, the Addictions Research Centre of the Correctional Service Canada moved into its new office facility, in Montague, Prince Edward Island. The Division was recently created to provide an internationally recognized center for research into addiction issues, particularly as they relate to the field of criminal justice.

The new facility is comprised of two buildings located on the banks of the Montague River — an 1,100 m<sup>2</sup> office building and an adjacent residence for visiting researchers and experts in the field of addictions. The main building provides offices for 24 researchers and administrative staff, a multi-media resource library and related support space.

An increasingly wired world has permitted the establishment of this international research facility in a setting well known for its wonderful scenery. While the new center includes the latest technologies for information retrieval, communications and multi-media presentation, it also provides a return to some of the more basic design considerations relating to work, interaction and comfort.

From the initial site selection to the design of landscape elements, an underlying design tenet in the development of this new facility was a belief that, as technology becomes more pervasive, there is an increased need to create an environment that supports occupant well-being and encourages human interaction. Researchers spend a considerable part of their day individually submerged in the technological world — drilling through layers of information, communicating electronically and viewing the world through the “eyes” of a 19 inch monitor.

These technologies provide essential tools to getting the job done, and, indeed, formed an important consideration in the design of this facility. However, it is some of the more subtle design attributes that respond to the needs of the specific occupancy, by providing a comfortable and dynamic work environment that encourages personal communication.

The overall building is arranged in two wings, emanating from a double height reception area. One wing comprises administrative offices and general

use areas including a conference room, staff lounge, computer hub and file data room. The other wing consists of two floors of research offices arranged around a double height resource center. Unlike the prevailing trend towards open office environments, the center consists largely of individual, enclosed offices. This approach recognizes the nature of the work, which requires a high level of work related privacy, personal concentration and often involves the review of sensitive information over an extended period of time.

It was considered important that the arrangement of spaces, according to organizational structure, and the use of enclosed offices not diminish the sense of team or the opportunity for face-to-face communication. The design of connecting spaces — including circulation, reception and resource center areas — provided a means of addressing these concerns. Flowing one into the other, these spaces provide a physical and visual connection between all office areas and occupants.

Accented by the natural finish of the exposed post and beam structure, bathed in natural light from a variety of angles and orientations and containing a variety of spatial configurations, these common areas go beyond their utilitarian purposes. It is intended that they will provide a backdrop for a range of activities to occur — from quiet personal reflection to spontaneous and animated small group discussions to formal presentations and meetings.

The first of these connecting spaces — the main entry lobby — serves as the primary organizing element in the plan — with views to all parts of the facility as well as a visual connection between the public, entry face of the building and the more private, water side. The double height space, capped on either end by glass curtain walls, provides a “public forum” for information sharing, presentations and “public” events. The use of exposed post and beam structure, floor-to-ceiling glazing and internal windows looking into the space are meant to create a sense of an outdoor, “public” street connecting the two facades and the two wings of the building.

The more “public type spaces” such as conference and meeting rooms and the director’s office are located immediately off of the main reception area, facilitating access by visitors, while also providing a

buffer to the more private offices beyond. This layering of spaces, from public to private, respects the nature of the various functions, while also facilitating building security.

Building security, which is generally directed towards the general protection of contents and, in particular, sensitive information, is largely unobtrusive. It commences with the proper zoning of spaces within the building. File data and computer rooms are afforded additional protection with the installation of door and room alarms and the use of card or key pad access. The main building entries are similarly card access controlled, providing increased security, built-in monitoring and graduated levels of access. The latter feature also facilitates use of the building after hours and by a changing group of visiting experts.

Moving into the administrative wing, corridors are wide and culminate in another double height space, topped with clerestorey windows. This open area is located immediately outside of the staff lounge and boardroom and is meant to serve a number of purposes — for health breaks during conferences, as a production area for the assembly of major reports and as an informal meeting space. Open office areas have been positioned so as to provide ample daylight into these areas, in addition to that coming from above and via borrowed light from the staff lounge. The resulting space provides a hub for the administration wing and a source of natural light into the interior of the building.

In the case of the two storey research wing, the organizing element is the resource center. Beyond its primary purpose as a multi-media library, this two story space connects all research offices visually and physically. Circulation space around the mezzanine level has been designed to encourage informal discussions and sharing of information, with wider and higher than normal corridors and ample natural light. Additionally, all fixed elements in the space have been placed around the periphery, leaving the area available for a variety of furniture configurations and uses, including public presentations.

Each research cluster contains open and closed offices, a meeting room, student and visiting expert office spaces and an informal discussion area. While the research clusters are organizationally separate entities and physically located on two floors, the design of the resource center and adjacent circulation spaces attempts to promote a sense of team and encourage a sharing of information and ideas. The location of cluster meeting rooms, overlooking the

main reception area, further reinforces the connection between the various research teams.

Individual offices were designed to create comfortable, acoustically separate work environments that would respond to a range of personal preferences and work habits. Each office has been fitted with its own environmental controls for heating, cooling and ventilation, permitting occupants to create a work environment that is most comfortable for them. This individual approach to mechanical systems also recognizes that researchers often work during non-core office hours, permitting portions of the building to be selectively energized. Similarly, multiple switching of ceiling lights and the provision of desk top lighting permits a variety of lighting conditions, suitable to the individual and the task. As an additional conservation measure, room occupancy sensors control lighting and ventilation systems, switching systems off when the space is unoccupied.

Perhaps the most visible design feature in the individual offices is the size of the exterior window. In addition to providing impressive views, the large and low sill windows visually extend the relatively modest office space by connecting the office to the landscape beyond. Daylight and visual relief provides a means of obviating the demands of concentrated focus required during intensive research and data analysis.

The emphasis on basic design considerations extends beyond the building to the exterior. While the site of the new facility is less than two acres in size, its location provides ample opportunities for visual relief to the daily demands of the job. The building configuration and orientation, the extension of spaces into outdoor areas and the creation of a pleasant landscape strive to connect the building to its surrounds and extend its uses to the exterior.

Research has always benefited from advances in technology. Its latest contribution, and perhaps one of its most important, is the freedom that it affords to locate research operations in such inspiring settings. The design of a facility for research should seize and further this opportunity by promoting the attributes that are important to all work environments — a pleasant setting, natural light, view, comfort, personalized environmental control, and a range of spaces for personal interaction. ■

<sup>1</sup> 360 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0P9.