Designing for Humanity

A look at how the architecture of correctional facilities impacts inmates

This project was born out of a passion to change the lives of others through architecture. I started this project by researching the difference between American and Scandinavian prisons. Scandinavian prisons tend to be more humane and use evidence-based design to accomplish their goals. I used the information I found to guide the direction of my project. Through this design I intended to give prisoners eyes to the possibility of change and rehabilitation within corrections.

My project is located in Bismarck, North Dakota on the current site of Missouri River Correctional Center. I am proposing a complete demolition and redesign of the buildings on campus. At the center of this new facility, is the idea that everyone will leave with the tools they need to live a successful life after incarceration. Each building emphasizes the importance of nature, community, and education.

Theexample of evidence-based design is a unique way of looking at what the future of corrections in America could be. I believe we have the opportunity to change countries like through architecture. By encouraging inmates to live in a way similar to what they will experience after incarceration we will see changes in the rate of recidivism.

Missouri River Correctional Center currently runs as a low security facility south of Bismarck, North Dakota. The site floods often due to its proximity to the Missouri River which has caused a lot of damage to buildings on the campus. Many of the buildings were so old and dilapidated that they had to be torn down. The buildings that remain standing are too small for the number of occupants that reside there. The current living situations are unsatisfactory and do not help inmates reintegrate back into society. Designing spaces that are similar to what they will experience when they are released will give them a better chance at a successful release.

The design focuses on the importance of community, nature, and memory. The campus layout gives inmates the opportunity to design their own schedule, encouraging a seamless transition back into society. The buildings are designed to allow for maximum natural light to penetrate the spaces. This detail is intended to lighten the mood of everyone who encounters the space.

The single bed dormitory is used as a reward for those who show good behavior. The building has better amenities and helps further integrate inmates back into society. Designing spaces that are similar to what they will experience when they are released will give them a better chance at a successful release.

Under the umbrella of corrections are several types of facilities ranging from county jails, state prisons, all the way to maximum security penitentiaries. Each facility has a different purpose and with that a different level of security. Correctional centers are typically low-security buildings that house offenders who have proved they have the right to be there. Often these people are moved from state penitentiaries to correctional centers when they have a small remainder of time left in their sentence or are about to be released. The goal of most correctional centers is to prepare inmates for reintegration into society. One way that is becoming more popular is evidence-based design. This project was born out of a passion to change the lives of others through architecture. I started this project by researching the difference between American and Scandinavian prisons. Scandinavian prisons tend to be more humane and use evidence-based design to accomplish their goals. I used the information I found to guide the direction of my project. Through this design I intended to give prisoners eyes to the possibility of change and rehabilitation within corrections.

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