

Introduction

Fairview Training Center, in Salem, Oregon, one of the nation's oldest and largest state-operated residential institutions, closed in February of 2000. At its peak in the 1960s, it housed more than 3000 persons with developmental disabilities. Upon the direction of the Department of Justice, downsizing and the eventual closure of Fairview took place, and residents were placed in community group homes. The major focus in the design and construction of residential group homes has been the safety and welfare of the resident and of achieving a "home-like" atmosphere.

The health and safety of the staff in these settings was largely unaddressed and has resulted in increased injuries, time loss from work, and a disruption in the continuity of care for the residents. As a result of this problem, the Oregon Mental Health and Developmentally Disabled Services Division (MHDDSD) applied for, and was awarded a grant through the Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Division (OR-OSHA) to investigate mitigation of injuries through architectural design, equipment research and development, and safety plans. More specifically, the task was to evaluate and develop structural design plans and specifications to provide a safe work environment, to use sound ergonomic principles, and the same time, maintaining a home-like atmosphere for the residents. The belief is that improvements in physical layout, space, light and equipment protect the safety of residents and staff.

MHDDSD assembled a multi-disciplinary Technical Advisory Group consisting of an ergonomist, a nurse safety specialist, two architects, a building contractor, a workers' compensation loss-specialist, representatives from MHDDSD, and OR-OSHA. The Group began its investigations using information gathered from focus groups made up of workers from Fairview and community group homes. This information was invaluable in giving the Redesign Group direction. As would be expected, competing interests between Group members surfaced in this collaborative process. Different backgrounds, perspectives and priorities enriched the process, and eventually produced a better quality and more balanced product.

The Group visited some 25 homes throughout western Oregon. This included new construction homes and remodeled (retrofitted) homes that present great challenges. Staff at the homes completed a safety survey and responded to questions on specific issues during the onsite investigations. Over 300 photographs were taken and the Group has selected, for this manual, those that give you a pictorial survey of: what we observed, what was changed, what appeared to be defective situations, and what we recommend. Where pictures did not serve to illuminate our point, illustrations were used.

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Architectural drawings were also developed for specific, high use problem areas of homes. It was difficult to separate redesign and safety because of their integrated relationship. In these instances, we included safety information for the reader's use.

This manual is the result of the Technical Advisory Group's investigative and problem solving efforts. The book is divided into sections corresponding to living areas of the home and site. Some general design considerations and suggestions introduce each of these sections. The Group has attempted to provide accurate information at a technical level, useful to anyone interested in safe and efficient group home design. The manual concludes with various appendixes that provide additional technical information related to home design and staff safety. The names, professional experience and phone numbers of the Group members are also given. All members of the Group are willing to provide further information on any of the topics discussed in this volume.

We hope the information collected here will be useful to readers interested in all issues related to design and safety, where people with developmental disabilities live, and where staff perform the important task of assisting them to realize their full potential. Recommendations in this book are not meant to supercede existing laws, rules and regulations, which take priority in all circumstances.