

Exploring Place for Community Mental Health Support in Natural Environments

by

Kristiana Schuhmann

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Architecture

at

Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
July 2012

© Copyright by Kristiana Schuhmann, 2012

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

The undersigned hereby certify that they have read and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance a thesis entitled “Exploring Place for Community Mental Health Support in Natural Environments” by Kristiana Schuhmann in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture.

Dated: July 11, 2012

Supervisor: _____

Reader: _____

Reader: _____

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

Date: July 11, 2012

AUTHOR: Kristiana Schuhmann

TITLE: Exploring Place for Community Mental Health Support in Natural Environments

DEPARTMENT OR SCHOOL: School of Architecture

DEGREE: MArch

CONVOCATION: October

YEAR: 2012

Permission is herewith granted to Dalhousie University to circulate and to have copied for non-commercial purposes, at its discretion, the above title upon the request of individuals or institutions. I understand that my thesis will be electronically available to the public.

The author reserves other publication rights, and neither the thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.

The author attests that permission has been obtained for the use of any copyrighted material appearing in the thesis (other than brief excerpts requiring only proper acknowledgment in scholarly writing), and that all such use is clearly acknowledged.

Signature of Author

In loving memory of Rascal

CONTENTS

Abstract	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Mental Health Support Program	1
Mission of Beginning Again.....	1
History of Rehabilitative Environments	3
Program Operations	5
Direct and Indirect User Groups	7
Allied Institutions.....	8
Sites for Community Based Programs	12
Current Site of Treasures.....	12
Sites for L'Arche Community Models.....	12
Developing a Natural Recreation Model	16
Design Strategy	18
Method of Design: Developing a Seed	18
Oak Ridges Corridor Park Site Selection.....	18
Local Community of Oak Ridges	23
Chapter 2: Design	27
Parent Seed Design	27
Store Programs.....	30
Recreation Programs.....	31
Mental Health Programs	48
Planting the Seeds	53
Mental Health Support Program Meets Oak Ridges Corridor Park.....	53
Seeds Take Root	60
Connecting the Seeds	60
Community Courtyard Design.....	62
Detail Design	62
Chapter 3: Conclusion	80
References	81

ABSTRACT

The thesis looks at developing a new model for a mental health support program which is integrated into a natural recreational environment. Its starting point is Beginning Again, a registered charity in Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada, which provides a supportive workplace, called Treasures, to engage psychiatric patients in meaningful and productive work. The intent of the thesis is to develop an architecture that reflects the mission and objectives of the program in order to increase the opportunity for recovery and interaction with the local community. This is done by creating a more general prototype or “parent seed” which can be applicable to many locations and then testing the model by planting it in the Oak Ridges Corridor Park, located in the suburban community of Oak Ridges, Ontario. This thesis builds upon the long history of rehabilitative environments to create a community model of care that regards work as primarily a social and cultural activity which contributes positively to health and well-being.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my parents and sisters for all their support and love through this long journey which has taken me across the globe but always back home. A warm thank you to my Halifax family who have filled my time here with laughter and encouragement. To my wonderful assistants who have contributed their time to developing this into a project I am proud of, I am grateful. To the members of Treasures (Beginning Again), thank you for being an inspiration. I am grateful to L'Arche and Asha Niketan communities for welcoming me into their homes and lives. This travel would not have been possible without a generous scholarship from the Estate of Bruce and Dorothy Rosetti. Lastly, to my professors Sarah Bonnemaïson, Steve Parcell and Richard Kroeker, thank you for your dedication and experience.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Mental Health Support Program

Mission of Beginning Again

Founded in 1986, Beginning Again is a registered charity and mental health support program located in Richmond Hill, Ontario which provides a supportive workplace to engage psychiatric patients with meaningful and productive work. The organization networks in the local community with small businesses, religious affiliations and community projects to build mutually beneficial relationships.¹ Beginning Again works in partnership with local mental health agencies and hospitals who refer outpatients to participate in the program as a part of their path to recovery.² Often, mental illness (fig. 1) comes attached with stigmas that a person is dangerous or weak in character, which can result in exclusion and rejection from family, jobs and community life.³ The reality is that society feels uncomfortable with mental illness, yet a recent study from the Canadian Mental Health Association states that “1 in 5 people in Ontario will experience a mental illness at some point in their life.”⁴ Many people are reluctant to seek help out of fear and shame, which can be harmful to the recovery process. Since recovery can mean different things to different people, from the absence of symptoms to learning to live with ongoing symptoms, rehabilitation is about the journey that people take in order to gain some control in their life.⁵ Beginning Again uses interaction and engagement in the local community to create a greater understanding and acceptance of mental illness. The organization focuses on individual goals and empowerment by providing a stable and accepting environment for people with mental health needs to work alongside volunteers from the community in a co-operative business enterprise called Treasures. Through regular shifts, the organization helps indi-

1 An example of this partnership occurs with the Richmond Hill Theatre Club, which donates theatre tickets to Beginning Again. B.A. works with the local women’s shelter, outfitting the women with business attire.

2 Partners include: Canadian Mental Health Association York Region, York Central Hospital Day Treatment Program, Krasman Centre, Community Counselling Services of York Region and York Support Services Network.

3 Canadian Mental Health Association, Stigma and Mental Illness. 2012. http://www.ontario.cmha.ca/fact_sheets.asp?cID=2795.

4 Ibid.

5 Canadian Mental Health Association, Recovery. 2012. http://www.ontario.cmha.ca/about_mental_health.asp?cID=7667.

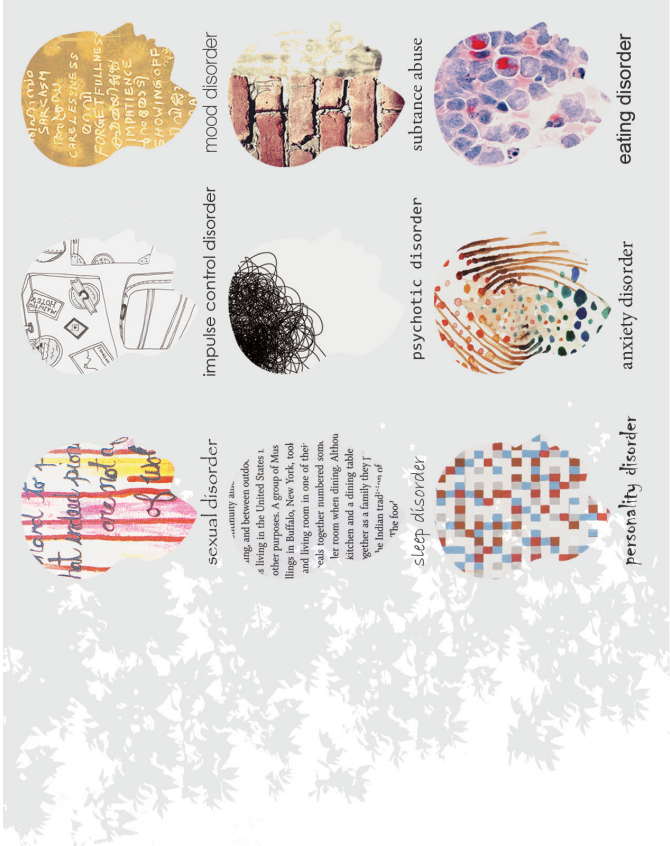


Fig. 1 - Thesis statement drawing

viduals to learn vocational, social and interpersonal skills in order to re-build confidence and gain a sense of purpose in their life. This thesis explores the potential to expand Beginning Again's support services and increase community engagement by developing an architectural framework situated in a natural landscape. The following thesis is developed around the question: How can integrating a Mental Health Support Program in a natural recreational environment increase the opportunity for rehabilitation and interaction with the local community?

History of Rehabilitative Environments

The research topic for this thesis focuses on rehabilitative environments, which includes analyses of the history and development of mental health programs and the architecture where these programs took place. This involves researching successful and unsuccessful built precedents from medical and community based models of care.⁶ Rehabilitative programs (fig. 2) have relied on site for healing since the early Greeks, who used the drama of the natural landscape as a part of their holistic treatment methods.⁷ Epidaurus is one of the most celebrated healing places in the classical world, combining health, theatre, art gardens, scenery and culture. From the 10th to 14th century, monastic hospitals, which were located in agrarian landscapes, were prevalent in Europe and centred on the functions of the church as the primary method of recovery. They gradually developed into medieval institutions woven into the social milieu of the urban fabric and were taken over by state control. According to Michel Foucault, the Renaissance is roughly when "madness"⁸ was first noted as a different state of reality but it wasn't until the 17th century that the mad were locked up (with other so-called deviants), as they were thought to have chosen to reject nature and the path of reason.⁹ Foucault notes an exception to this practice that occurred in the town of Gheel, Belgium, which was one of the first cases of deinstitutionalization. It began as a centre of pilgrimage in the 10th century and developed into a place where patients would engage with the local community during the day and then return to

6 The medical model includes hospitals, institutions and residential care facilities. The community based model of recovery creates "home-like" environments which foster healing through cooperative enterprises and support programs.

7 Charles Jencks and Edwin Heathcote, *The Architecture of Hope: Maggie's Cancer Caring Centres* (London: Frances Lincoln Ltd., 2010), 6.

8 The term "madness" is used here as a reference to the cultural context of the historical era.

9 Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, ed. and trans. Jean Khalfa and Jonathan Murphy (London: Routledge, 2006), xvi.

the hospital at night.¹⁰ Gheel continues to be a town where people of all mental states enjoy the same liberties and where the members of the community take care of one another. Architecture specifically for mental health emerged during the Enlightenment era, with its emphasis on rational thought, science and objectivity.¹¹ Cities were experiencing drastic population increases as well as impoverishment, which led to the spread of filth and disease. In Europe, smaller pavilion hospital types were proposed for the countryside to restore the patient's freedom away from ogling crowds.¹² This move outside the city was intended for the betterment of the patients and their families who did not have the means to support them; however, it became another form of seclusion which increased alienation and public fear.¹³ In her book *The Architecture of Madness: Insane Asylums in the United States*, Carla Yanni describes how the shift to siting institutions in natural landscapes occurred across North America in the late 18th century, based on the medical profession's belief in the curative powers of architecture and the environment to treat mental illness. This theory, known as environmental determinism, operated with the understanding that nature could cure illness and that exercise was therapeutic, whereas the city encouraged vice.¹⁴ The buildings began as small, purpose-built institutions (cottages) and gradually increased in scale to become monolithic asylums with the implementation of the Kirkbride Plan. Later they became obsolete with the shift to neurological treatments such as brain surgery and medications, rendering the architecture less important.¹⁵ According to Yanni, the earlier belief that an improved environment could cure mental health issues was not successful because it wasn't followed through as it was imagined.¹⁶ This model continued until the modern era, when hygiene and technological advancements were introduced, allowing the hospital to return to the urban fabric. The white and transparent "building as a machine" aesthetic was a complete shift from heavy civic structures of the past.¹⁷ With medical advances, patients no longer needed to be contained in a walled fortress; instead,

10 Foucault, *History of Madness*, 118.

11 Jencks and Heathcote, *The Architecture of Hope*, 67.

12 Carla Yanni, *The Architecture of Madness: Insane Asylums in the United States* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 20.

13 Foucault, *History of Madness*, 7.

14 Yanni, *The Architecture of Madness*, 9.

15 Ibid., 142.

16 Ibid., 153.

17 Jencks and Heathcote, *The Architecture of Hope*, 73.

they were given drugs and treatments which put their mind in a shackle-like state.¹⁸ As a counterpoint to the development of the urban hospital, sanatoriums in Europe were thoughtfully designed retreats immersed in nature, with a community and social centre as a part of treatment. There was a return to the notion of fresh air and sunlight restoring the body and spirit. The mid-20th century saw a shift to adaptability, cleanliness and efficiency, with hospitals becoming neutral and sterile environments housed in mega-block podium and tower buildings. In the 1970s, with the onset of deinstitutionalization, a new building type emerged: the local health centre; however, it wasn't until the 1990s that the idea of small, local and innovative health centres would take root. In the book *The Architecture of Hope: Maggie's Cancer Caring Centres*, Edwin Heathcote states that current trends in health care seem to be directed away from the super-hospital and toward more nimble, hybrid institutions.¹⁹ Patient-centered design is at the forefront of this shift, focusing on developing healing environments which serve a re-emerging destination culture, as well as alternative methods of rehabilitation.

Program Operations

Deinstitutionalization of psychiatric services in Canada occurred over a 40 year span, when many psychiatric hospitals and inpatient facilities were closed and patients were discharged into the community.²⁰ The Ontario government initiated community based treatment in 2000, as an option for those being treated in hospitals who want an alternative method of recovery outside the medical environment.²¹ The advantage of removing recovery programs from the boundaries of the hospital and integrating them into the local community is that it creates awareness and acceptance which help break down pre-conceived notions of mental health while fostering engagement and support. Community programs, such as Beginning Again, work in partnership with hospitals and view rehabilitation through social interactions, relationship building and participation to promote health, well-being and happiness. Beginning Again was founded by Elizabeth Davis, who saw the

18 Carla Yanni, *The Architecture of Madness*, 149.

19 Ibid., 85.

20 Patricia Sealy and Paul C. Whitehead, "Forty Years of Deinstitutionalization of Psychiatric Services in Canada: An Empirical Assessment," *Canadian Psychiatric Association*, April 2004, <http://www.cpa-apc.org:8080/publications/archives/cjp/2004/april/sealy.asp>.

21 Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Mental Health Act Amendments. 2012. www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/pub/mental/faq.html.

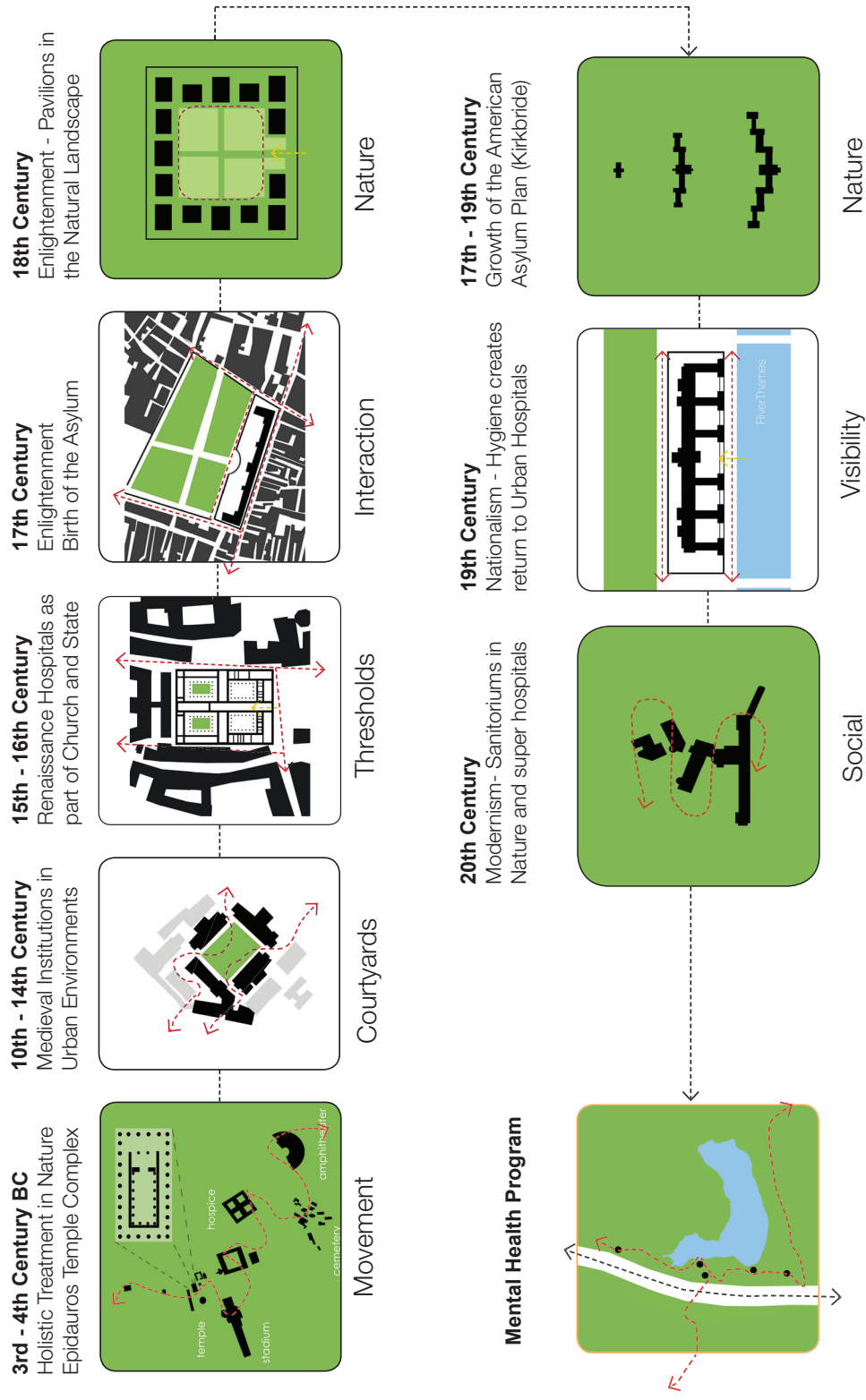


Fig. 2 - Diagram of the evolution of rehabilitative environments, with connection to natural and urban landscapes

need for a place that provided a supportive environment for adults recovering from mental health issues, after experiencing the struggles of someone close to her.²² The journey of Beginning Again began long before the advent of government initiated programs and is a pioneer of mental health support in the local community. The co-operative enterprise of Beginning Again is a non-profit thrift store called Treasures, which recycles donated goods, gifts and legacies from the local community and re-sells them at affordable prices. Currently the store operates much like a retail business. There are two shifts a day, morning and afternoon, with members working one to three shifts per week. Members work in all areas of the store, from the back-of-house operations to customer service jobs such as cashier. Because of the nature of recycled material, donations must be processed individually, which means that most work is done behind the scenes: receiving, fixing, sorting and pricing. An average workday (10-5) will have around seven members and one manager, running the store six days a week. This means there is a steady rotation of members daily and yearly, depending on their recovery situation and time commitments. This cyclical or seasonal way of operating is also reflected in the way the local community engages the store. Most donations come during the spring and fall, when people are clearing their homes and having garage sales. In contrast, the busiest shopping months are in the spring and summer, when people have holidays and leisure time. Treasures has around forty to fifty customers daily; however, business is unpredictable and its financial growth has become stagnant. The profit from the store allows the organization to pay a salary to the manager, who is a mental health professional, as well as pay for operational and overhead costs. Beginning Again believes that if Treasures could earn a more substantial profit, it could expand its services to help more people with mental health issues, as well as upgrade its existing store to reflect its identity and mission.

Direct and Indirect User Groups

There are three main user groups at Treasures: clients, volunteers and customers/donors. Currently the community has 43 active members (clients and volunteers), half of whom are recovering from or living with a mental health issue. Common mental health problems are: schizophrenia, mood disorders, anxiety disorders, eating disorders and substance abuse problems. According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, “people living with a mental illness are at greater risk of experiencing a wide range of physical health

²² Elizabeth Davis, *The Inspiration for Treasures*. 2011. <http://treasuresofrichmondhill.blogspot.com/>.

problems.”²³ This means that clients with mental health issues will also have physical manifestations such as low motor functions or chronic pain. Clients work alongside volunteers who are mostly retired seniors, new immigrants and those who have family members with mental health issues. Seniors, in most cases, are also experiencing their own cognitive and physical aging, while new immigrants work in order to gain experience in preparation for a future career in Canada. Both groups come to Treasures for the social environment and for the sense of belonging that the members of the community create. This results in a diverse community of adults from different economic situations, ethnicities and ages, with a wide range of skills, abilities and experiences. More than three-quarters of customers and donors are from the local community and frequent the store on a regular basis, although the people who donate are not the same people who shop. Patrons of the store are aware of the underlying mental health issues and are respectful of the environment; however, problems can arise when customers misunderstand or are uneducated about mental health recovery and react in a negative or angry manner. This results in uncomfortable and overwhelming situations with members who are in different mental or emotional states. Beginning Again works to promote support and acceptance so that experiences at Treasures are positive. They do this through educational programs, seminars and conferences within the local community. Currently the organization does not have the infrastructure, in either manpower or physical space, to pursue its mission and to create awareness of mental health issues in the community. This situation could be improved by creating a framework that will better support the program’s function while fostering a greater interaction with the community.

Allied Institutions

Similar community models of care were researched in order to understand the best method of developing the program for Beginning Again as well as an architecture that reflects its identity. L’Arche, an international organization of communities centred on the gifts and needs of people with intellectual disabilities, is an organization that stood out as a successful social model. The organization is built on the concept of “life sharing” in which people with intellectual disabilities live, work and learn together with assistants (care-givers) who are also community members. At the heart of this innovative social movement is humanitarian Jean Vanier, who saw the need for a new community model of care which focused on creating a place of belonging, growth and family. In 50 years L’Arche has

²³ Canadian Mental Health Association, The Connection Between Mental and Physical Health. 2012. http://www.ontario.cmha.ca/fact_sheets.asp?clD=3963.



Fig. 3 - Seeds of expansion take root: the development of L'Arche from one community in 1964 to a world-wide organization.

expanded from a single dwelling in rural France to a network of 140 communities worldwide, rooted in 35 countries (fig. 3). One of the major challenges that the development of L'Arche faced was "the danger of creating another form of ghetto ... where people with handicaps were separate from others."²⁴ As a result they discovered that integration in the local community and culture is important not only to provide support, but to reveal to society the human value of those with disabilities. They also realized that if a community is to survive, grow and deepen, it has to be in an area that can provide support, understanding and friendship.²⁵

Located in close proximity to Treasures is L'Arche Daybreak Richmond Hill: the second L'Arche community to open and the first to be rooted in North America (fig. 4). It serves as headquarters for the Canadian network and plays an integral role in fostering new development in the country. The community was founded by Steve and Ann Newroth, who met Jean Vanier at a retreat he was hosting in Canada.²⁶ They were inspired by his mission and recognized a need for a community in Richmond Hill. The Sister of Our Lady Missionaries donated their convent, which sat on an open 17-acre piece of farmland that was a working farm until the 1980s, when suburban development took over the area and agriculture was pushed farther north. L'Arche Daybreak is a diverse and vibrant inter-faith community, a good example of how people of different intellectual capacities, backgrounds and cultures can live and learn together. Today Daybreak has grown to include eight homes which are integrated in local neighbourhoods and three that remain on the original site. The community operates many different vocational programs such as a wood-working shop, a craft studio (pottery, candle making, paper-making) as well as a dance troupe. The work that comes out of the studios is ordered by the local public and businesses to support the community. Daybreak has also made arrangements with commercial ventures to produce wooden wheels in large quantities (fig. 5). The Dayspring Chapel was built in 1999 and offers spaces for worship and contemplation, as well as space for meetings and retreats for local schools and community groups (fig. 6). The building's timber frame construction speaks of a close relationship to the heritage of the site, and the concept of bringing light to people is echoed in its form and materiality. All of the buildings on site are organized like a small village connected by a winding pathway which

²⁴ Jean Vanier, *An Ark for the Poor: The Story of L'Arche* (Toronto: Novalis, 1995), 38.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

²⁶ L'Arche Daybreak, About Us. 2011. <http://www.larchedaybreak.com/about-us>.

members travel throughout the day. This community is successful in the suburban context and is a good precedent for this thesis.



Fig. 5 - Photo of the first L'Arche community in Richmond Hill Daybreak. From Jean Vanier, *An Ark for the Poor*.



Fig. 4 - Members in wood shop at L'Arche Daybreak working on a large order of wheels.



Fig. 6 - Daysprings Chapel, located at the Richmond Hill Daybreak. From L'Arche Daybreak.

Sites for Community Based Programs

Current Site of Treasures

Treasures is currently located in a run-down strip mall in the downtown core of Richmond Hill, Ontario (fig. 7). One benefit of this location is that it receives a lot of foot traffic from customers who frequent surrounding commercial establishments. It is also located within a 4 km (15-20 minute) walking distance of most of the members' residences. Public transportation to the site is frequent, as the store is situated off the main arterial route of Yonge Street. Currently Treasures is plagued with insufficient and inaccessible space, which is limiting its growth and ability to help people (fig. 8). Members with poor physical health have a difficult time maneuvering in the cramped conditions, especially traversing the narrow flight of stairs between where donations are stored and where they are sold (fig. 9). Most of the work processing donations is done in a dark and musty basement, where members spend 3-5 hours of their day (fig. 10). This space is not a healthy environment, nor is it highly conducive to mental health recovery. The store itself has been a target of numerous break-ins over the years and in April 2012 a murder was committed in the alleyway behind the store. This shady activity after hours resonates into the lives of those who work in the plaza during the day. According to David Halpern, in his book *More Than Bricks and Mortar?: Mental Health and the Built Environment*, crime impacts mental health in a negative manner by instigating stressors such as fear and anxiety.²⁷ Beginning Again realizes that in order for Treasures to grow and provide a meeting place for and with the community, it will need space that can accommodate current and future needs.

Sites for L'Arche Community Models

With funding from a Bruce and Dorothy Rosetti Scholarship, further exploration of several L'Arche communities was conducted. This included the communities in India (Kolkata, Bangalore, Nandi Bazaar), Canada (Toronto, Richmond Hill) and Belgium (Brussels), as they remain the oldest and most developed communities within the organization. The research explored how one social model can be adapted to different cultures and environments, while still addressing the needs and structure of the organization. This occurred through an analysis of the built environment, in which artifacts from each community were

²⁷ David Halpern, *More Than Bricks And Mortar?: Mental Health and The Built Environment* (Bristol, PA: Taylor and Francis Inc., 1995), 101.



Fig. 7 - Panorama of the strip mall in Richmond Hill where Treasures (highlighted) is located.



Fig. 8 - Photo of interior of Treasures sales floor.



Fig. 9 - Photo of cramped condition inside current store.



Fig. 10 - Photo of volunteer sorting donations in production room located in the basement.

studied along with common patterns of dwelling and their corresponding architectural language. It became apparent that each community begins from the same “seed” or DNA from the parent L’Arche organization but goes through its own journey to maturity and success. The development of the original seed has accrued with time and experience, evolving with current cultural paradigms but cultivated from the founding mission of L’Arche. The intention is to give new communities support, structure and a solid foundation to build upon, with the ability to adapt as the needs of the community change. As the “seeds” of L’Arche are sown in different landscapes, they rely on the culture, political system and economy of the local environment to shape their growth and define their identity.

Since there is no governing architectural brief for L’Arche prescribing design criteria or aesthetic standards (besides national building codes and accessibility standards), most communities develop in an organic fashion over longer periods of time. Buildings are often donated or acquired through fundraising, which has forced communities to become flexible and creative as they adapt the space for its second or third lifetime. Each L’Arche community tells a different story of the people who have dedicated their time and efforts, as well as the circumstances that fostered its development. On a larger scale, however, common patterns of dwelling have been repeated throughout the world. These seeds were categorized into three major community models (fig. 11) with slight variations that exist within each type: the village model, the mixed-use model and the integrated model. The village model (A) consists of smaller, separate buildings for each programmatic element (living quarters, craft studio, dining, etc.) which are connected by a pathway. The site is normally larger and can include recreational activities because it is located in a rural or suburban area, such as the L’Arche in Richmond Hill and Asha Niketan Nandi Bazaar. The mixed-use model (B) consists of all programmatic elements, both public (workshops) and private (housing), integrated into one larger building. This normally occurs in an urban setting, and depending on safety, can be surrounded by a wall such as the Asha Niketan in Bangalore, India. Lastly, the integrated model (C) consists of multiple homes which are integrated into the dense city fabric and are serviced by one or two community gathering buildings which offer day-programs. The buildings are close enough that members can walk between them, which builds a connection with the local area. This model occurs in urban areas, such as the L’Arche in Brussels and L’Arche Toronto. Currently Beginning Again operates much like the integrated model, serving as a gathering place in an urban

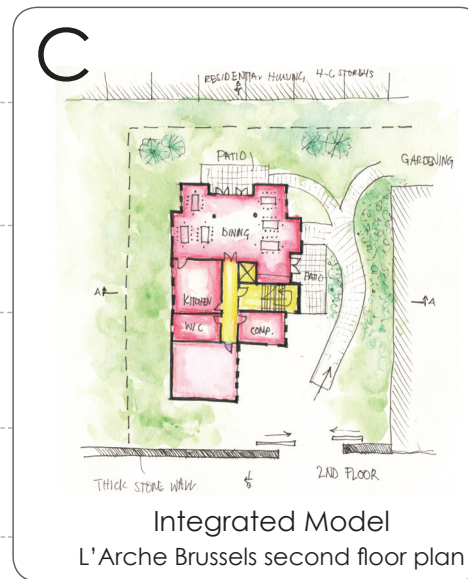
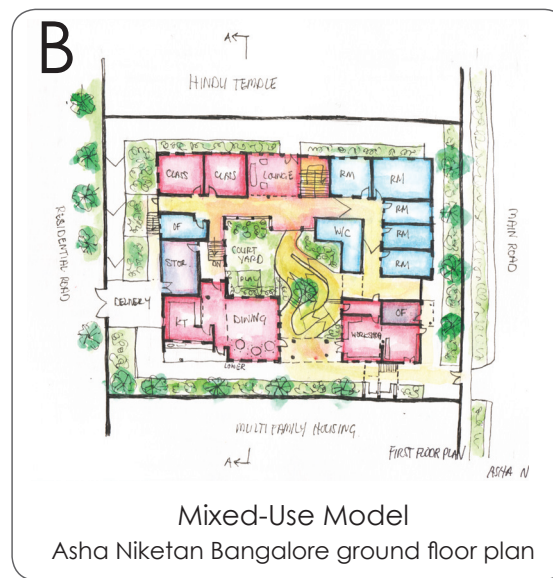


Fig. 11 - Diagrams of three types of L'Arche community models.

area to which members travel from their residences in the local community. Beginning Again has similarities to the L'Arche Daybreak community, such as diversity and acceptance; however, it supports members with different health issues, which changes its operational strategy. For L'Arche Daybreak it's important to provide supportive housing for members with intellectual disabilities, so they can maintain a productive and independent lifestyle; however, with Beginning Again, Treasures acts as a workplace so that there is a separation between home and work, avoiding an institutional quality.²⁸ This also generates movement through the town that requires members to encounter other people and new spaces, which is a step toward learning to live outside the hospital.²⁹ The level of integration and networking in the local community life is much stronger with members of Beginning Again. Since members have only a few shifts a week, they can be engaged in other occupations, people and commitments. The vocational programs L'Arche Daybreak has developed are successful and showcase the talent of its members; however, by selling mostly through ordering, they are limiting social opportunities which could engage the public more directly. Beginning Again can build on its existing infrastructure in order to cultivate similar vocational programs which will create more depth and support to the store.

Developing a Natural Recreation Model

Drawing from the long history of rehabilitative environments, this thesis will look at developing a new community model for Beginning Again by integrating its program in a natural recreational environment; however, unlike the 18th-century asylum archetype, this model is not segregated from society but relies on its connection to the local community for support. This is more in keeping with the spirit of the European town of Gheel. The new model for the Mental Health Support Program draws on similar concepts that nature positively impacts health and well-being, which has been further proven by recent scientific studies. Stephen Kellert, a professor of social ecology, states that "sight and sound and other sensory experiences of nature can reduce stress and tension as well as foster recovery among patients suffering from clinically diagnosed disorders."³⁰ This means that

28 Yanni, *The Architecture of Madness*, 155.

29 A precedent for this strategy is the New York "Fountain House," an organization that provides work, education, dining and a meeting place to allow psychiatrically disabled persons to achieve their potential. Ibid.

30 Stephen R. Kellert, *Building For Life: Designing and Understanding the Human-Nature Connection* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 2005), 21.

nature plays a big role in the healing process and it is important to remain in connection with it, especially for those who are a part of the MHSP. This model is also influenced by the success of the neighbouring L'Arche Daybreak community in Richmond Hill. The natural recreation model will be able to accommodate more than double the current amount of members per day, and will provide a more accessible environment. This move will allow the MHSP to build upon its current structure and expand its business model to allow for future financial and community growth. In order to increase the methods and opportunity for rehabilitation, Beginning Again will introduce occupational therapy and art therapy to complement its existing support program. Occupational therapy is both a cognitive and physical approach to healing which focuses on enabling people to learn basic skills to manage everyday tasks as well as work-related activities, so people can participate to their full potential in the daily occupations of life.³¹ Art therapy, a form of psychotherapy, will also be introduced, which will promote healing through creative and expressive processes. Art therapy uses art media as its primary mode of communication. The new model will introduce a traditional counselling program (psychotherapy) to the MHSP. Although most members who participate in counselling do so in private clinics or hospitals, having a counselling service available will be beneficial to individuals in times of crisis, but also to the health and cohesion of the whole program. This counseling program will seek to create strong ties to the local community in order to promote mental health and will be open to everyone to utilize. Natural environments can inspire additional programmatic elements to benefit the recovery of members but also serve as more conducive settings for rehabilitation. Siting the program in a natural landscape will allow Beginning Again to introduce recreational activities such as biking, trail walking or swimming into the daily lives of members, which will create points for active participation for the public. It will also introduce different (physical) therapy programs which use nature to help restore and remediate those with mental and physical health issues. This includes individualized and organized group activities in horticultural therapy (gardening) and recreational therapy (kinesthetic activities/exercise). Interaction in the natural environment will benefit the mental health program and provide more opportunity for the local community to interact with the mental health community. This can help break down current stigmas of mental illness and create support in the local community to address mental health issues. Figures 12 and 13 look at

31 Canadian Association of Occupational Therapy, Occupational Therapy: Definition. 2012. <http://www.caot.ca/default.asp?pageid=1344>.

the current operation of Beginning Again and explore additional programmatic elements that will complement it according to the different therapies that will be introduced.

Design Strategy

Method of Design: Developing a Seed

The method of design that is used for developing an architecture for the natural recreation model will be similar to the “seed” concept employed by L’Arche, where a parent prototype is developed and then planted in a location where it adapts to the local cultural and natural environment. The benefit of utilizing the parent “seed” concept, instead of designing specifically for the parameters of one site, is that a more general model can be applied to similar natural recreation sites across Canada. This can address mental health support on a larger scale and create the opportunity to help other suburban communities which face sprawl-induced health issues or a lack of services. The parent “seed” will embody the objectives and mission of Beginning Again, which are “to provide training facilities to assist psychiatric patients to develop work skills and a productive lifestyle and to promote through educational programs, seminars and conferences, community interest and participation in activities and facilities aiding recovering psychiatric patients.”³² Designing the DNA for the seed involves moving beyond these words to create an architectural expression of the character of each programmatic element. This means taking a step back from the chosen site in order to understand what each program needs in its relationship to the natural landscape, in addition to other, more tactile factors such as material and spatial qualities. The objective is to create a place that is ideal for rehabilitation and community engagement and will serve as a foundation for the Mental Health Support Program. The second stage in this method, sowing the seed back into the landscape, will activate the design of the seed as it is influenced by the culture and history of the site.

Oak Ridges Corridor Park Site Selection

The testing ground for this thesis is the Oak Ridges Corridor Park (ORCP), located 16.5 km north of Toronto in Oak Ridges, Ontario. The ORCP is an ecological linkage to the Oak Ridges Moraine, a greenbelt which stretches across the southern part of the province. This park will serve as the inspiration as well as the site for developing the natural

³² Elizabeth Davis, *Treasures Executive Summary* (Richmond Hill: Beginning Again, 1986), 1.

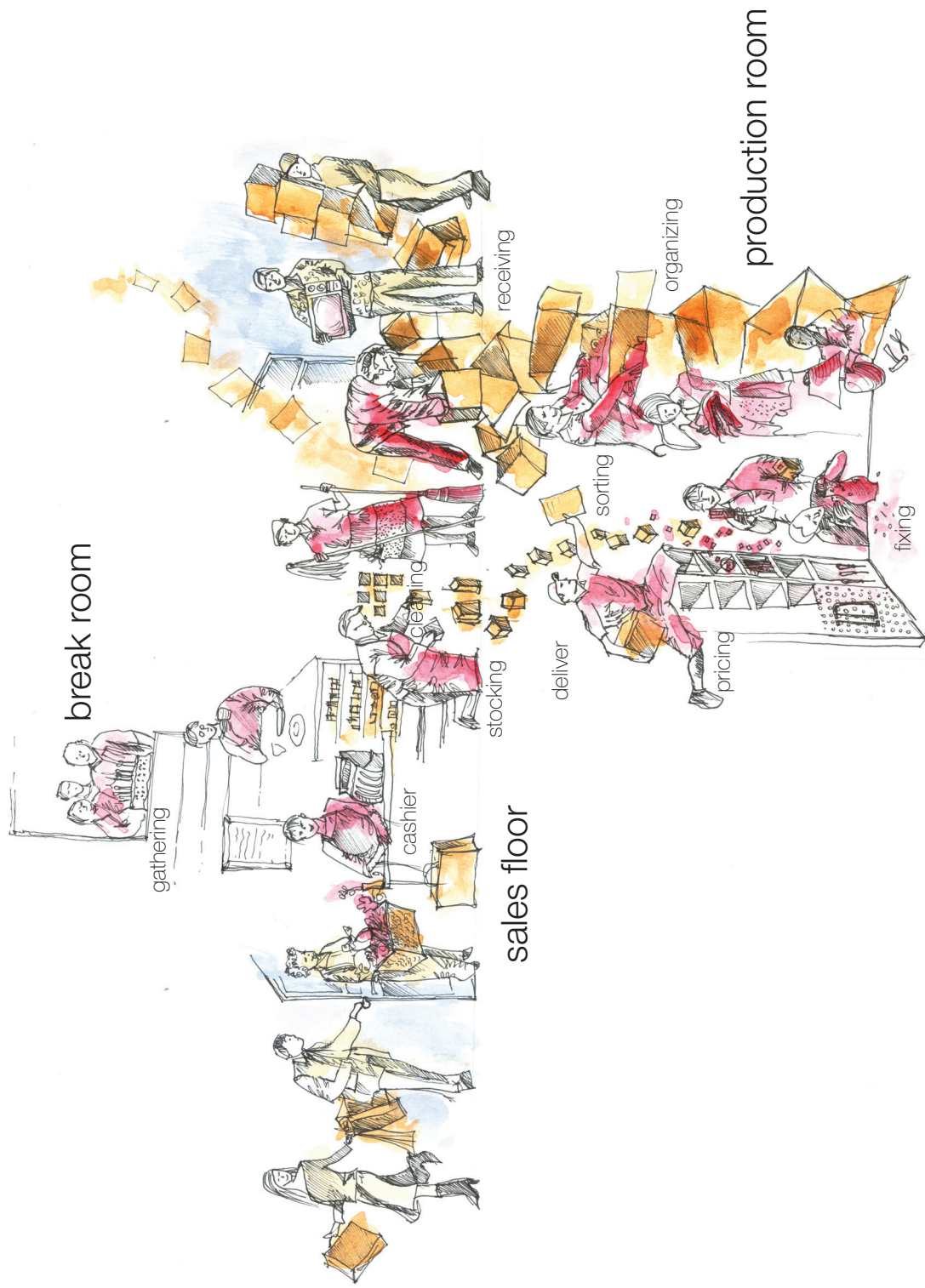


Fig. 12 - Current MHSP operation in Treasures Charity Thrift Store. This program will be included in the natural recreation model.



Fig. 13 - Additional programs included in the natural recreation model.

recreation model. The 428-hectare natural wetland park which marks the entrance to the community of Oak Ridges³³ was transferred by private owners to the Province of Ontario in 2004 (fig. 14).³⁴ However, during the two decades when private developers have owned the land, it has been extensively developed with suburban housing, which has reduced its size and quality and has let several heritage buildings sit abandoned and fall into disrepair. Located within the Corridor Park is Bond Lake, the deepest of a small series of kettle lakes which played a big part in the growth of the town. Originally owned by William Bond, an industrious pioneer whose plan to build a factory there never came to pass, the land was used mostly for farming and logging.³⁵ The Bell family purchased the land in the mid-19th century and built a hotel-tavern for travellers at the mid-way point between Toronto and Lake Simcoe. In the early 20th century the Metropolitan Railway purchased Bond Lake and extended its line up Yonge St., turning the area into a popular cottage resort. The railway brought industrialization as it harnessed the lake for steam power generation; however, it also converted much of the land into a public park for employees and city folk looking to recharge their spirits. With the housing crisis at the end of WWII, the temporary homes became permanent, marking the beginning of the residential community of Oak Ridges.³⁶ This piece of land, with its dappled forests, cool lake and sunny fields, has a history of living, working and recreation which has overworked its natural resources but also brought life to it. The ORCP can be better utilized to serve the town. Currently the site is used by the town for informal recreational activities such as hiking, biking, swimming and bird watching; however, there are few amenities and no supporting services for present or future activity. It is accessible to the surrounding suburbs by car and public bus transit; however, a new public rapid transit system is proposed for Yonge St., which will make it more connected.³⁷ There is potential to cultivate the park into a lively and leisurely place, as it was in the past, to foster social interaction within the community. Introducing a community mental health program to the site will both rehabilitate the environment and improve the health and well-being of the users.

33 Oak Ridges amalgamated with Richmond Hill in the 1970s and is considered to be a community.

34 Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, *Oak Ridges Corridor Park Management Plan* (Richmond Hill: AMEC Earth & Environmental Envision, 2006), i.

35 Sister M. Annette, *Salute to Canada: A History of Oak Ridges* (Winnipeg: Canadian Student Yearbooks Ltd., 1967), 36.

36 *Ibid.*, 58.

37 *Richmond Hill Official Plan: Building A New Kind Of Urban*. (Richmond Hill: Town of Richmond Hill, 2010), 3-85.



Fig. 14 - Photograph where Yonge St. crosses the Oak Ridges Corridor Park, looking north.

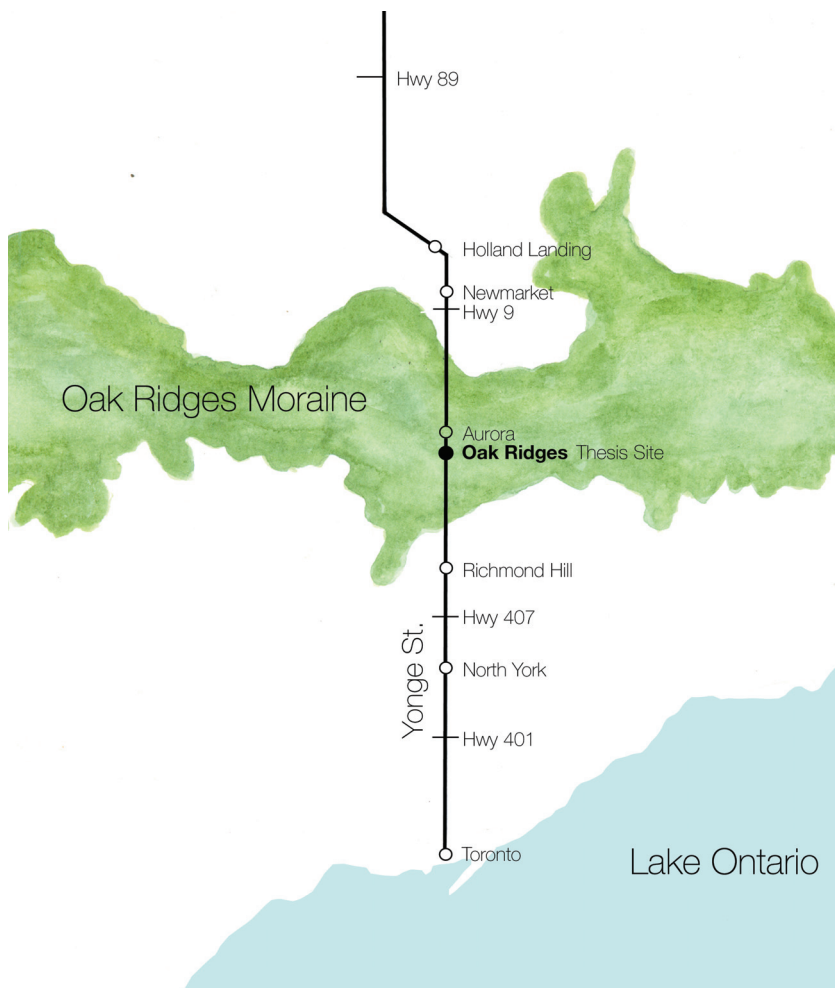


Fig. 15 - Map of Southern Ontario, showing the Oak Ridges Moraine greenbelt and its intersection with Yonge Street.

This site was chosen because of its special condition located at an intersection where the fast and loud thoroughfare of Yonge St. meets the slow and quiet greenbelt (fig. 15). Yonge St., once the longest street in the world, is one of the busiest main streets in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA); however, the 1.2 km stretch of Yonge St. that cuts through the park is unlike any other section. The dense commercial buildings, institutions and residential developments that normally flank the street are replaced by natural features such as trees and vegetation, with glimpses of the water's edge beyond. The speed of traffic increases in this zone, turning the four-lane asphalt road into a fast and busy route from one suburb to the next. As a result, there is a harsh contrast between the road and the rolling landscape, winding trails and tranquil lake. This condition has given the site many different qualities - fast, slow, hard, soft, direct, indirect, old, new, shady, bright - which bring life to the site and make it an ideal environment to develop and test this thesis.

Local Community of Oak Ridges

Currently the town of Oak Ridges (fig. 16 and fig. 17) has a population of 25,000 people (2010) and is one of Canada's fastest growing municipalities. Until recently the town had few institutional services (e.g., sports leagues, schools and health facilities) or commercial centres, which forced residents to rely on neighbouring towns. Due to political and economic shifts, many plots of land that were formerly held in trust by the government or privately owned were released for development, which has resulted in a massive housing boom. This extensive development has stimulated local business growth and employment; however, while the community is becoming more self-reliant, much of this development is being built faster than the infrastructure and natural systems can support. Despite this growth, Oak Ridges still does not have any mental health support services or programs to offer members of the community. According to Sarah Gardner in her essay "The Impact of Sprawl on the Environment and Human Health," people who live in suburban developments experience loneliness and depression from lack of social interaction because the low density pattern of settlement favours privacy over connectedness.³⁸ This means that these support programs are especially needed in suburban areas to combat issues introduced by the built environment. The subject of mental health is seldom broached in

38 Sarah Gardner, "The Impact of Sprawl on the Environment and Human Health," in *Urban Sprawl: A Comprehensive Reference Guide*, ed. David Soule (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 253.



Fig. 16 - Map of current store and proposed location, showing developed vs. natural green spaces.

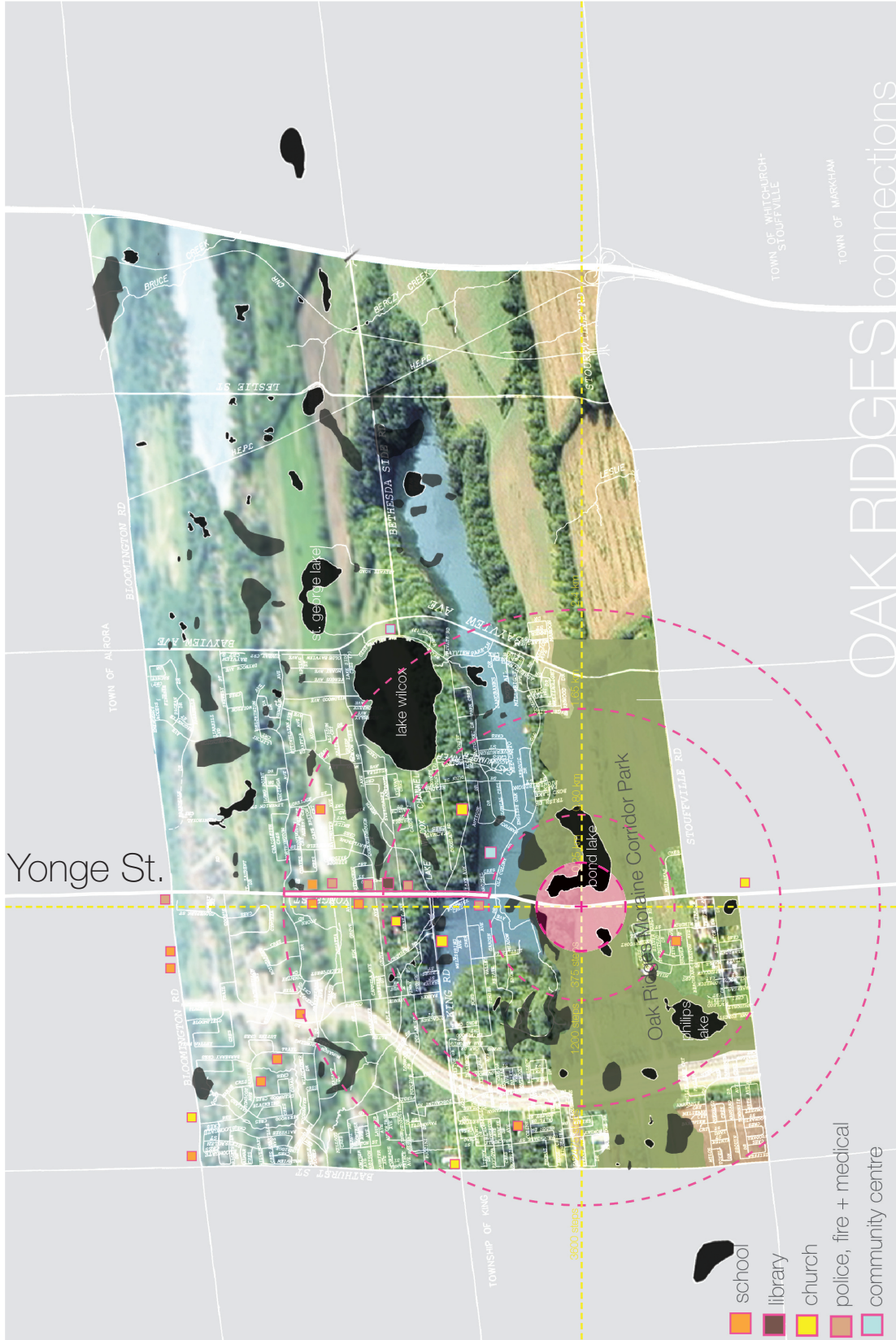


Fig. 17 - Plan of Oak Ridges, noting the connections from the park site to institutional facilities in the town.

public which leads to stigmas and misunderstandings of people who are recovering from mental health issues. Suburban development patterns are not the only factor that contributes to poor health. According to Gardner, “Sprawl-induced pollution causes disease and fosters a sedentary lifestyle that contributes to obesity, hypertension, heart disease, diabetes, asthma and mental disorders such as anxiety and depression.”³⁹ This means the lifestyle of the suburbs, which includes a reliance on driving, causes suburban dwellers not only to lose contact with other people but also to lose contact with nature. Frederick Law Olmstead, a prominent landscape architect, believed that the psychological effects of scenery could promote relaxation and restore faculties made tense by the strain, noise, and artificial surroundings of urban life.⁴⁰ Interaction with nature is a powerful healing tool. Both active (participatory) and passive (observant) contact with the natural environment has been proven to contribute to physical and mental well being.⁴¹ Since Canadians spend an overwhelming majority of their time indoors (90 percent, according to Health Canada),⁴² their only interaction with nature comes from inside, looking out. This means that siting the MHSP in a natural landscape will be beneficial not only in increasing active engagement with nature, but also increasing passive engagement of those who work inside in different areas of the program. Siting the MHSP in a place where members of the town can be part of a supportive community will increase understanding and awareness. The intent is not to create a place that is stereotyped as the “mental health building” but to create an open armature for people in all stages of life to engage and interact with each other. Siting Beginning Again in the Oak Ridges Corridor Park will improve the health of the whole community.

39 Ibid., 251.

40 Charles E. Beveridge and Paul Rocheleau, *Frederick Law Olmstead: Designing the American Landscape* (New York: Universe Publishing, 1998), 31.

41 Gardner, “The Impact of Sprawl on the Environment and Human Health,” 253.

42 Health Canada, Environmental Contaminants Bureau Annual Report 2002-03. 2012. http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/contaminants/2002_03-report_rapport/envIRON-indoor_inter-eng.php.

CHAPTER 2: DESIGN

Parent Seed Design

This thesis looks at integrating the Mental Health Support Program into a natural recreational environment as a method of rehabilitation that revitalizes the chosen site and creates a destination for the local community. Immersing the program in this setting will allow it to expand its services and develop a healthier framework that supports individual recovery as well as community gathering; however, this means developing programs which benefit both Beginning Again and the active local users of the site. This requires a reciprocal relationship where the site benefits from the presence of the program and the program benefits from the presence of the site. The natural recreation model (fig. 18 and 19) looks at developing three streams of programs: store programs, recreation programs and mental health programs. The store programs include a public cafe and art/craft workshop in addition to the original three programmatic elements: the production room, sales floor and break room. The recreation programs include a trail centre, recreation hub and community gardens. Thirdly, the mental health programs include a counselling centre and a retreat centre. This provides an opportunity for different user groups from the local community, who otherwise wouldn't have much contact with the MHSP, to become involved and active with the organization. The design of the parent seeds looks at creating a community model of care that regards work as primarily a social and cultural activity which contributes positively to health and well-being. This involves crafting space which fosters community gathering as well as reevaluating how work is conducted in order to increase opportunities for social interaction. The type of work or activity that a program engages, as well as the level of contact that the program has to the public, determines its relationship with nature. The parent seeds explore two types of interaction with nature: passive (observant) and active (participatory). Passive interaction refers to spaces that have inspiring views of natural settings, whereas active engagement refers to spaces that have a direct and immediate access to nature, blurring the threshold between inside and outside. In addition to allowing inside spaces to flow out, bringing the natural environment into the interior creates a deeper connection between the inside and outside while rooting the program into the site. This means using natural materials such as wood, brick and stone which relate directly to nature, as they are made of, and shaped from, the earth. This gives authenticity

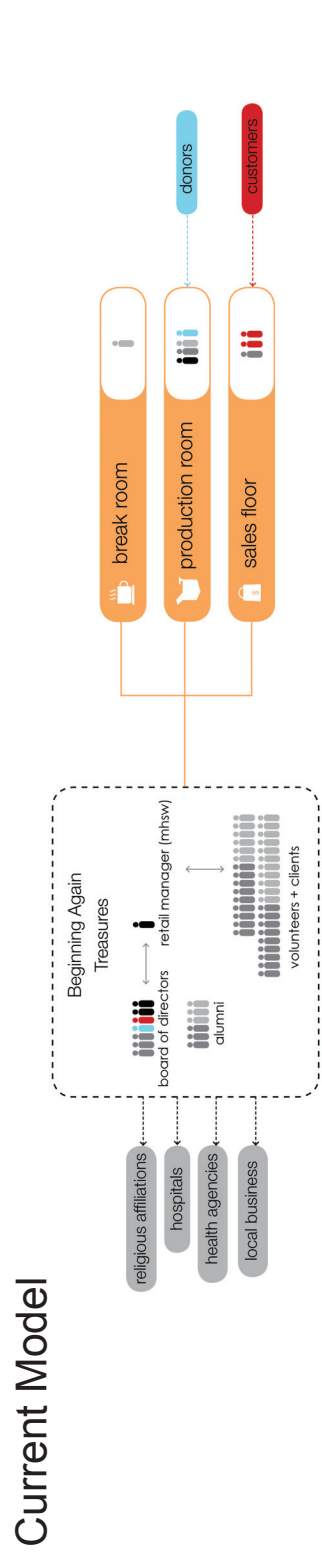
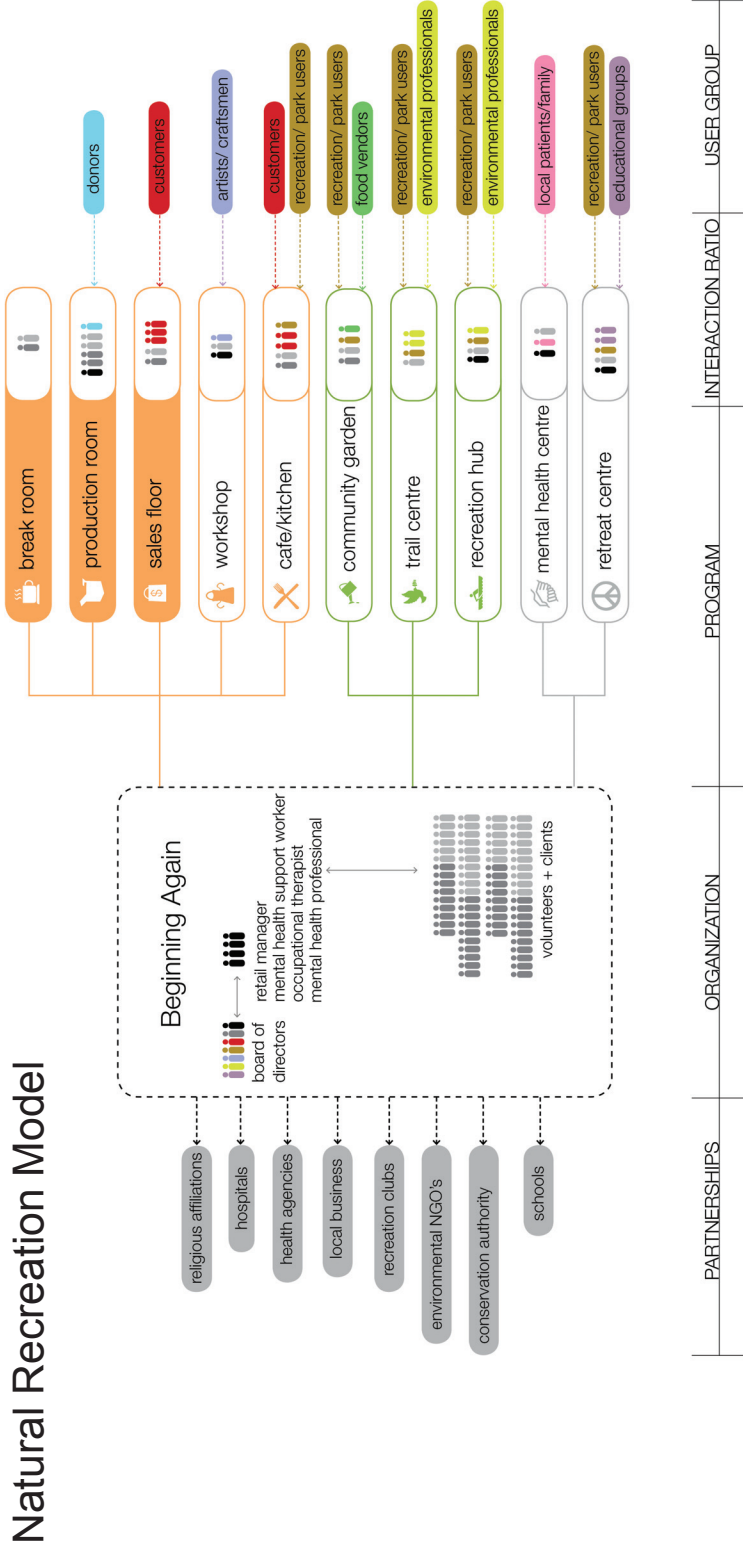


Fig. 18 - The natural recreation model offers improved levels of engagement with local community and mental health program.

RECREATION PROGRAMS

Trail Centre
1000 sq.ft.
5-10 ppl

offices

Recreation Hub
500 sq.ft. 5-8 ppl



TREASURES STORE PROGRAMS

Sales Floor
2100 sq.ft.
5-50 ppl

change rooms
cash desk

Production Room
1000 sq.ft. 5-8 ppl

office

Workshop
1200 sq.ft.
5-20 ppl

work room

Cafe
1000 sq.ft.
5-20 ppl

Kitchen

Staff Room
250 sq.ft.

MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS

Retreat Centre
2000 sq.ft.
10-100 ppl

support space

Mental Health Centre
375 sq.ft 2-5 ppl.

Fig. 19 - Program layout and scale comparison.

and tactility to the space. According to noted Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa, “Natural materials express their age and history, as well as the story of their origins and the history of human use. All matter exists in the continuum of time; the patina of wear adds the enriching experience of time to the materials of construction.”⁴³ Pallasmaa believes that the use of scaleless and flat man-made materials has devastating mental effects, as they are devoid of the dimension of time and therefore weaken the human experience. Natural materials, however, are imbued with a life of textures, imperfections and irregular patterns that are reassuring and calming, contributing positively to create healthy environments. Since the organization operates under the sentiment to create “new beginnings for people and things,” it is fitting to build upon this by introducing the culture of recycled and re-used natural materials from the local area of the chosen site.

Store Programs

The connection between the original programmatic elements of Treasures was re-envisioned in order to create better flow and organization of the spaces; however, the inherent structure of programs remained the same. The production room (fig. 20 and fig. 21), where donations are received and processed, is a place only for members of the MHSP. This space needs to be located close to a vehicular access route to facilitate donations but also needs to have a view to a more calm, natural setting for workers to observe. To better facilitate the different stages in processing donations, the production room is broken up into smaller stations which have open work surfaces that can accommodate individual or group tasks. This is accompanied by a storage area which organizes the donations according to the departments into which they will go. Support spaces include a private office/workroom which can be used by members who are apprehensive about working in a public area, but also to have a secure place for managing finances and operations. Connected directly to the production room, the sales floor (fig. 22 and fig. 23) has display and shelving space for different departments: gently used clothing, books, housewares and miscellaneous objects, and will accommodate larger pieces of furniture which can generate more income. These departments are divided into smaller stalls which give the feeling of enclosure and a place to pause, but are also open to the cash/checkout desk for

43 Juhani Pallasmaa. *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons Ltd., 2005.), 31.

supervision. This space serves as a meeting place for the local community and needs to be visible on site in order to attract business and give a presence to the community. The break room (fig. 24 and fig. 25) is an inviting place for members of the MHSP to celebrate occasions and to build relationships with peers. It is meant to be not only a kitchen table but a place for individual reflection. This space is more private than the café, a safe place for those who are in early stages of recovery or have different coping abilities in social situations. The public café/kitchen (fig. 26 and fig. 27) provides an eating place for and with the community. It is an informal and flexible gathering space, to serve beverages and baked goods to customers and members. The café is a hearth that has the structure and warmth to support tête-à-tête gatherings but is also an adaptable space that can accommodate larger meetings for local clubs or associations, such as cooking classes. Seasonally, the café opens up to the outdoors, loosening the threshold between interior and exterior space. The intent is also to attract those who are coming to the site for recreational purposes, providing them a space to refuel or relax before or after their activity. To complement the store there is an arts/craft workshop (fig. 28 and fig. 29) which provides creative space where members can make, display and sell their work. The creative process is a tool for communication, self-exploration and healing and will be of benefit to the members of the community who already have artistic talents but will be equally effective for people with no experience.⁴⁴ The space includes wet and dry areas for painting, knitting, sewing, crafting and pottery, which can be done independently or as a group activity (15-20 people). Natural day-lighting is especially important in the workshop in addition to framing views of nature, in order to provide inspiration as well as good working conditions to the artists. The intent is to hold public art classes or sessions in the workshop and to have it available in between the scheduled activities as a free space for members to work. The classes will be open to local artists or aspiring craftspeople. A second option is to rent it privately during off-hours to generate more income for the organization.

Recreation Programs

The MHSP introduces three recreational program elements to mediate between the members of the mental health community and the local users of the site: a trail centre, recreation hub and community gardens. The intent is that members of the MHSP who want to be more engaged in the natural environment and who are interested in a more social role

⁴⁴ The Ontario Art Therapy Association, About Art Therapy. 2010. <http://www.oata.ca/arttherapy>.

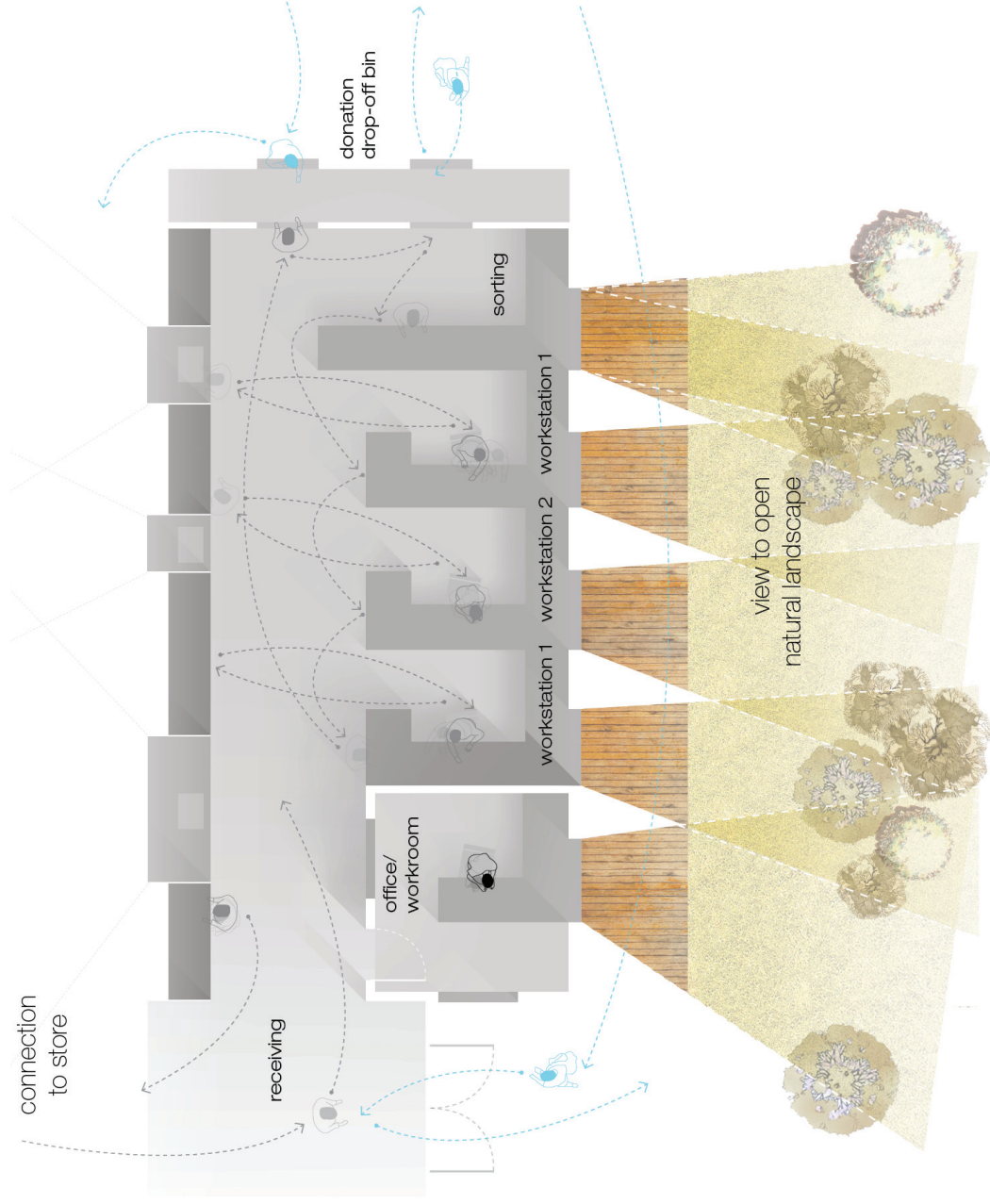


Fig. 20 - Plan of the production room, showing the pathways of movement of donors (light blue) and members (grey) while processing donations.



Fig. 21 - Character drawing of the production room, highlighting how the larger, open space is broken up into more intimate work spaces.

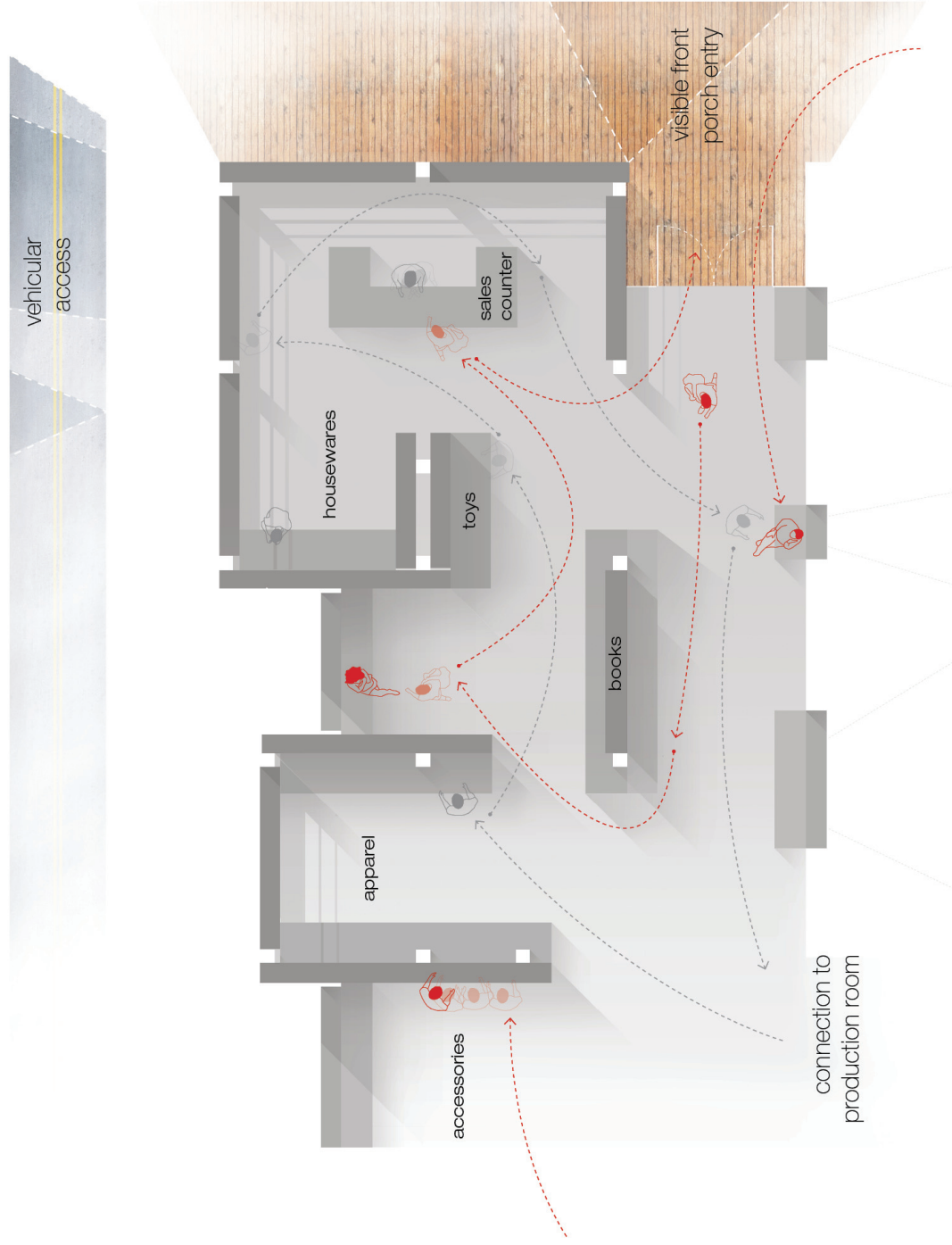


Fig. 22 - Plan of the sales floor, showing the intersection of the pathways of movement of shoppers (red) and members (grey).

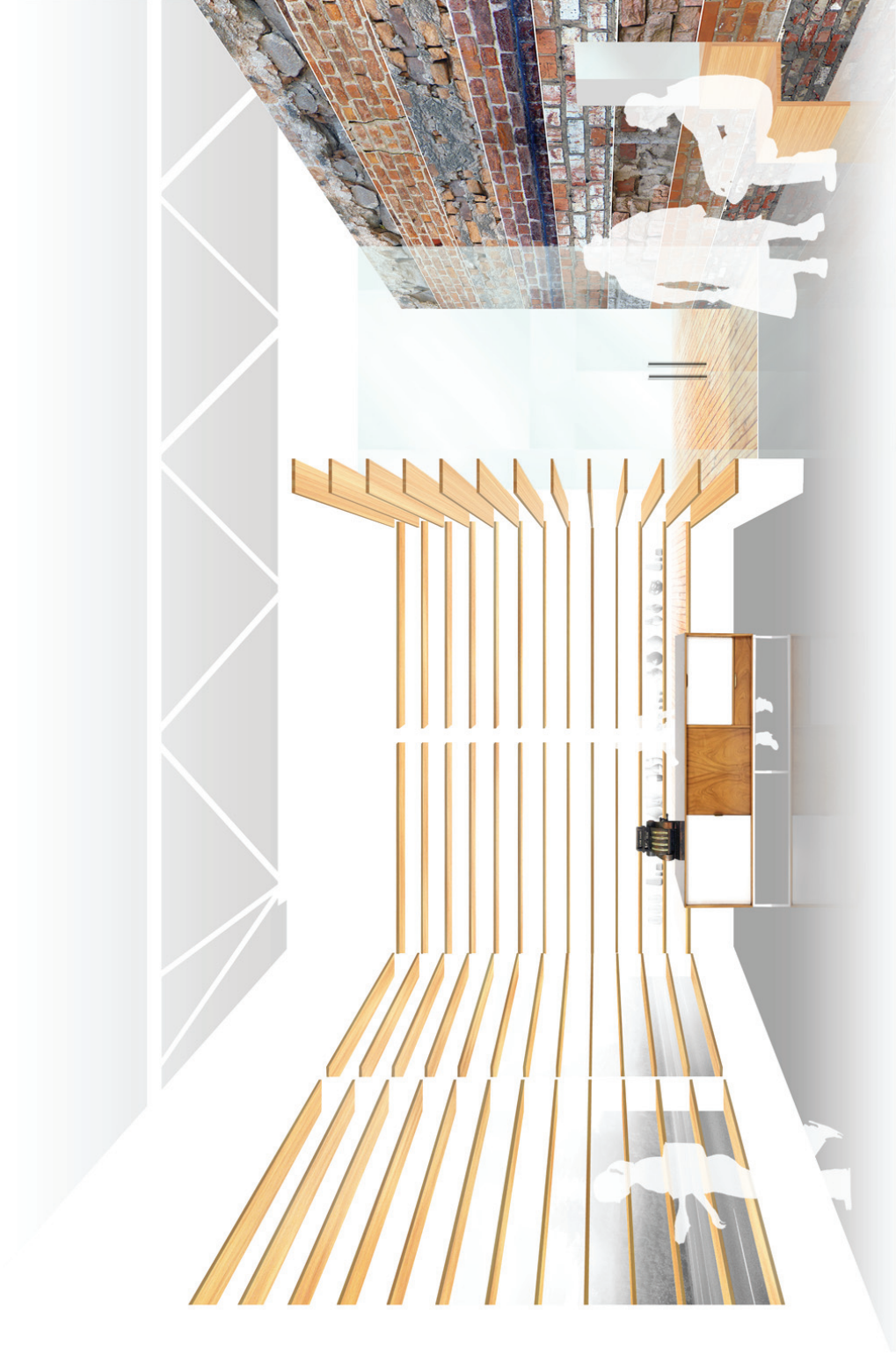


Fig. 23 - Character drawing of sales floor, highlighting the visible front entry and the display shelving which is a part of the wall system.

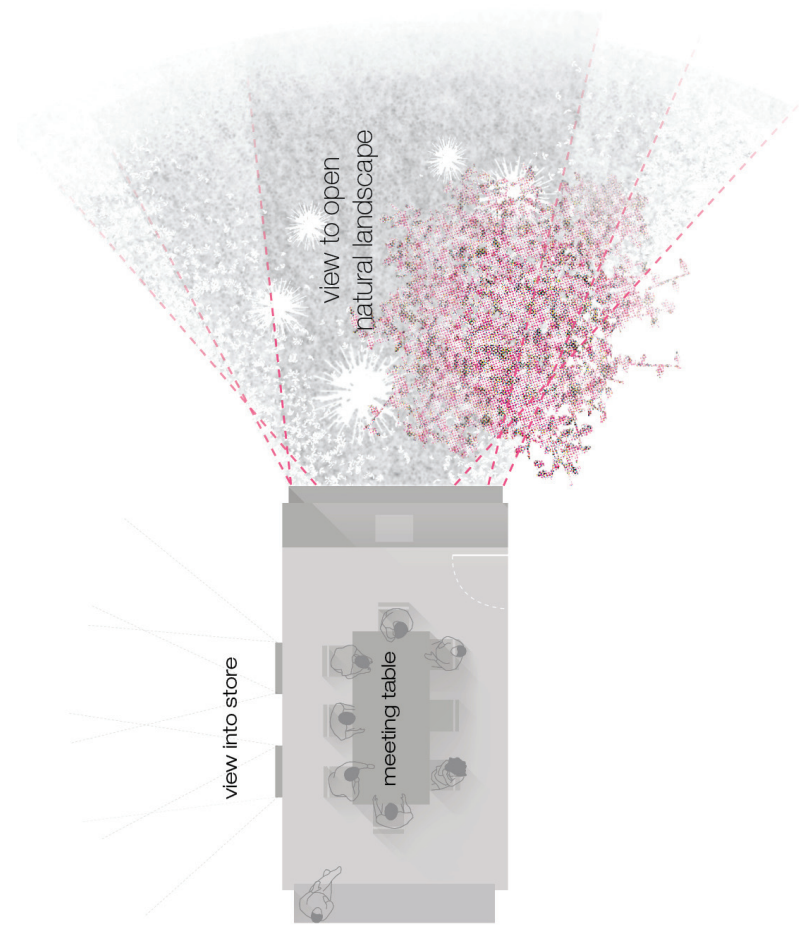


Fig. 24 - Plan of the breakroom, showing the central kitchen table and flanking built-in nook.

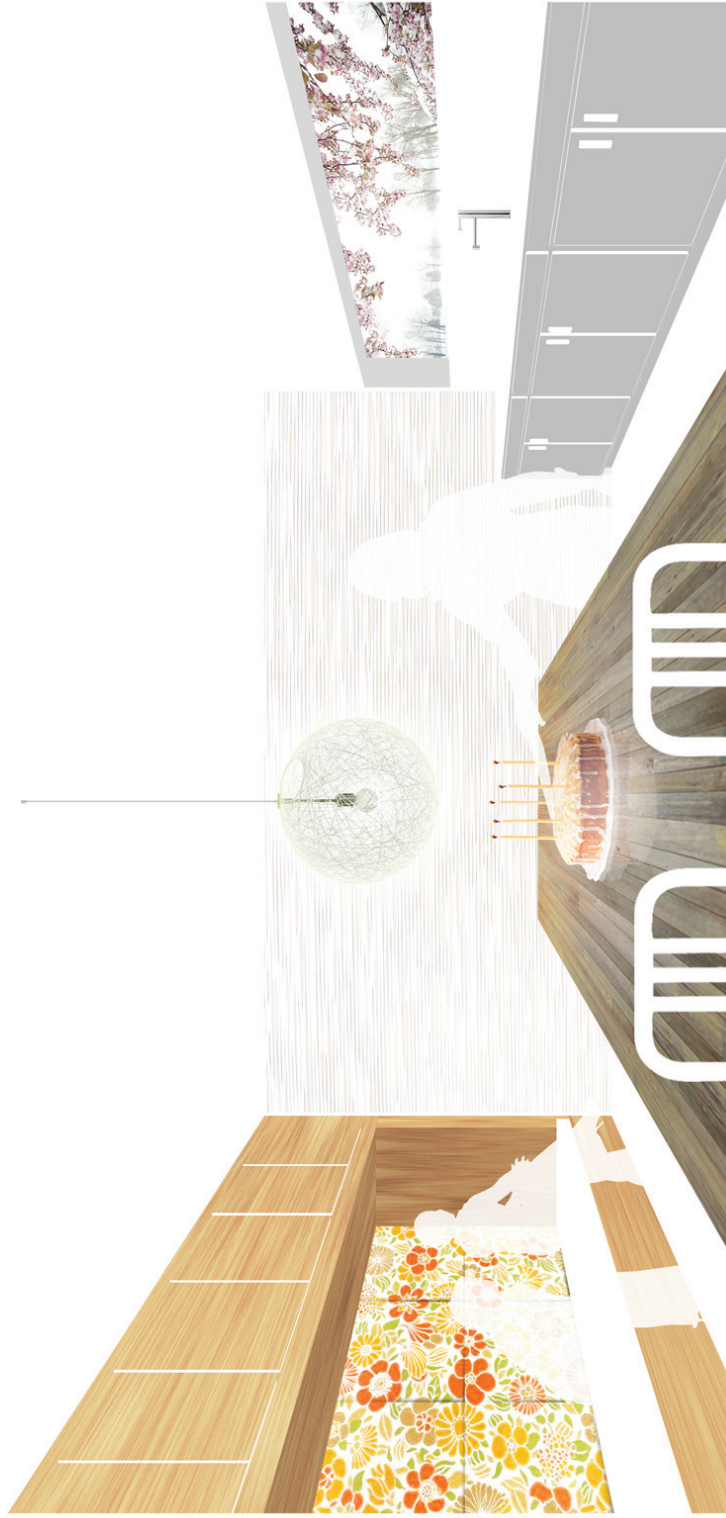


Fig. 25 - Character drawing of the breakroom, highlighting the intimate setting and view to a natural setting populated with trees.

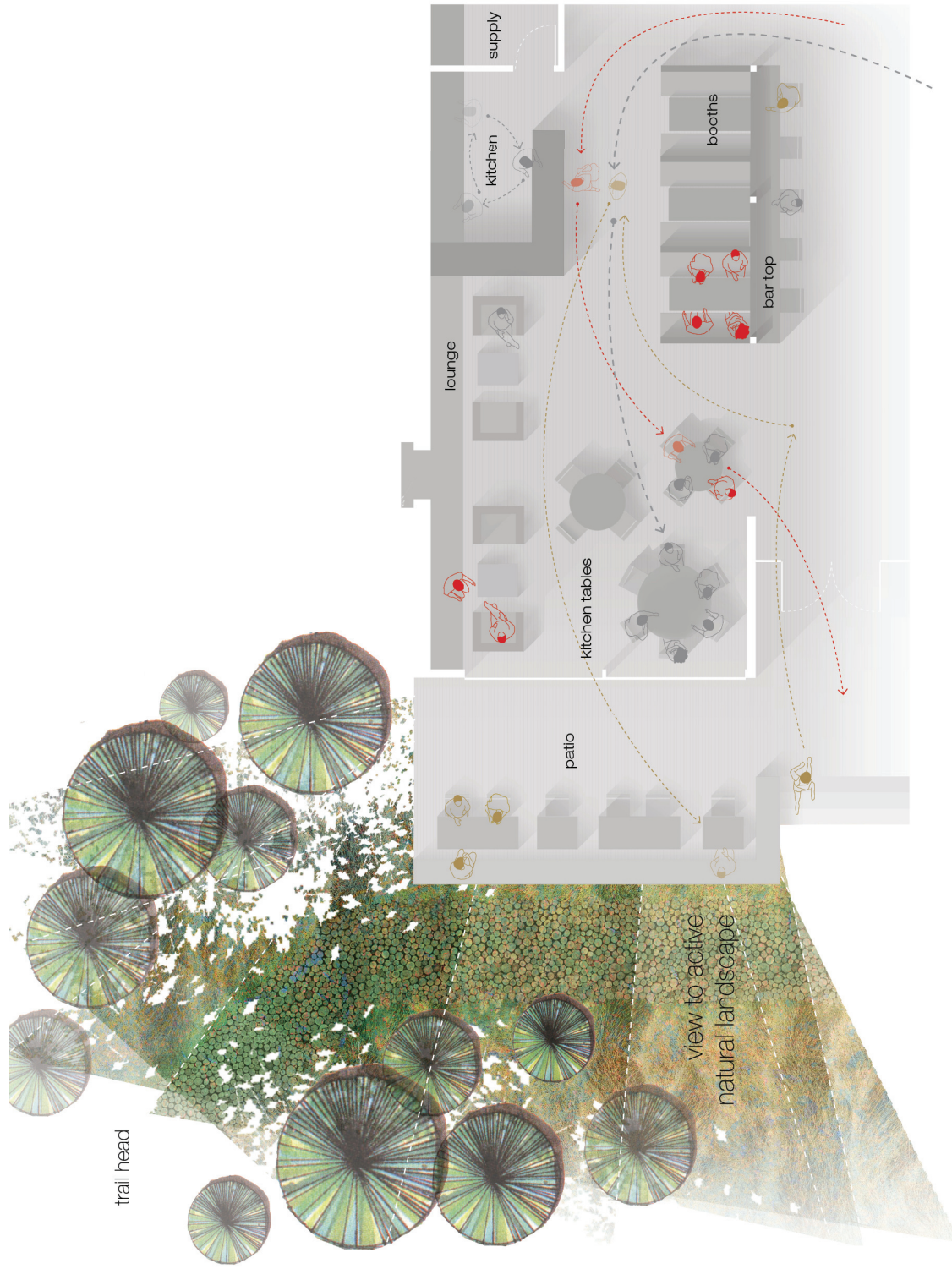


Fig. 26 - Plan of the café, showing the intersecting pathways of movement of shoppers (red), recreation/park users (brown) and members (grey).



Fig. 27 - Character drawing of the café, highlighting the inside and outside connection, as well as the hearth element for gathering.

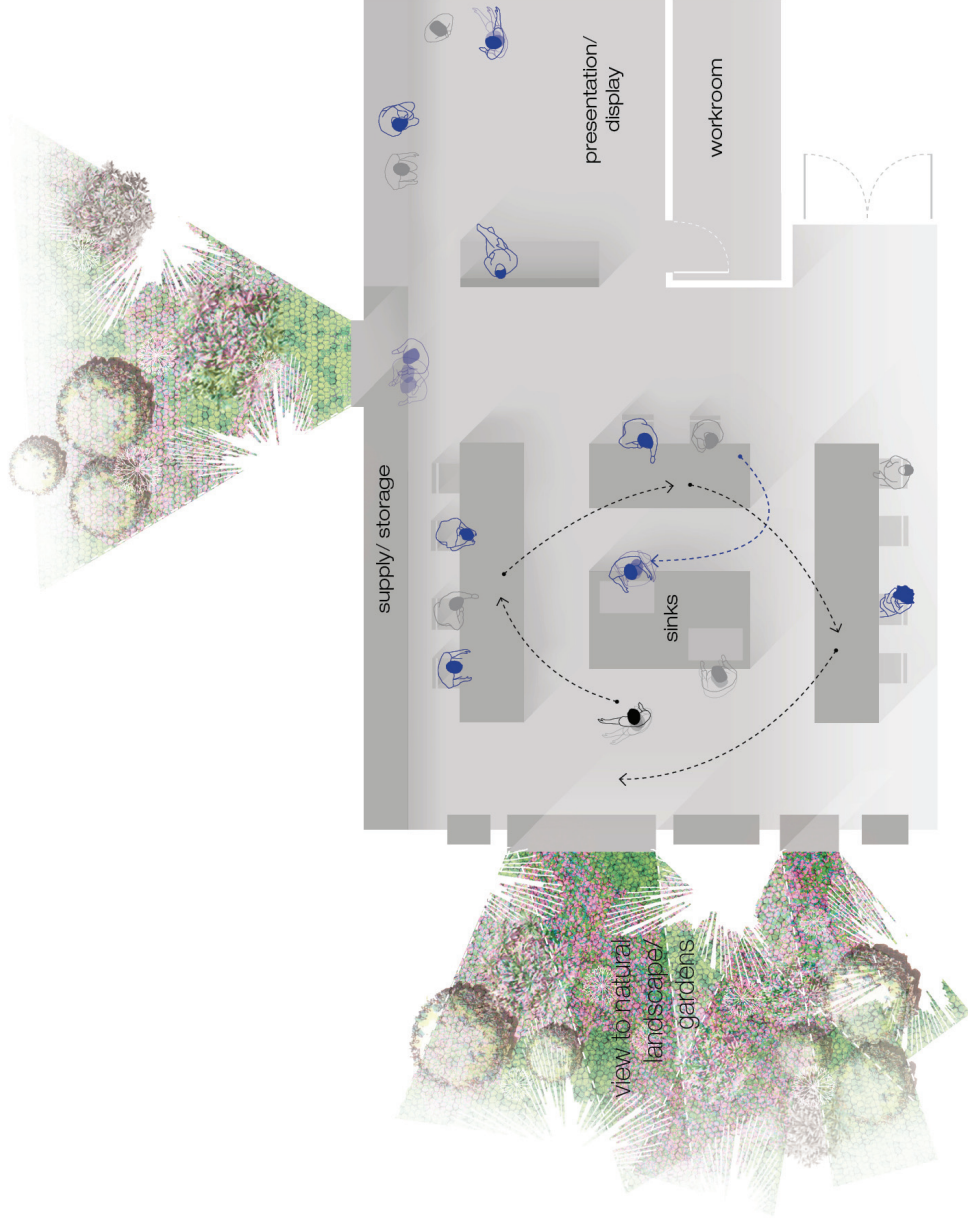


Fig. 28 - Plan of the workshop, highlighting the pathways of movement of members (grey), instructor (black) and artists (blue).



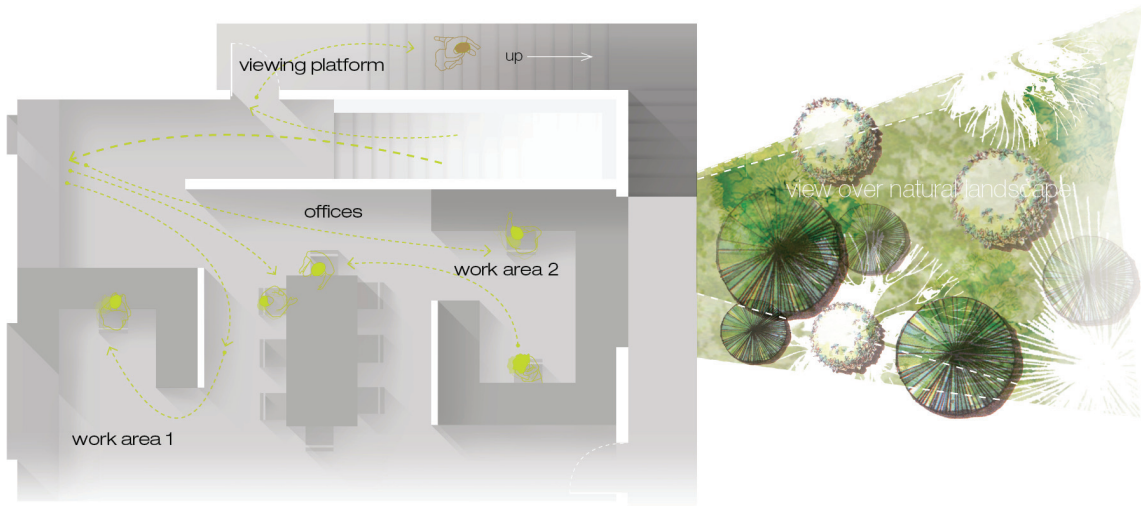
Fig. 29 - Character drawing of the workshop, showing the framed views of nature and the communal sinks.

can operate and work in these programs: for example, to serve as a trail guide or to repair bicycles. This is one of the methods that Beginning Again will use to expand its business model while introducing more points of interaction with the public.

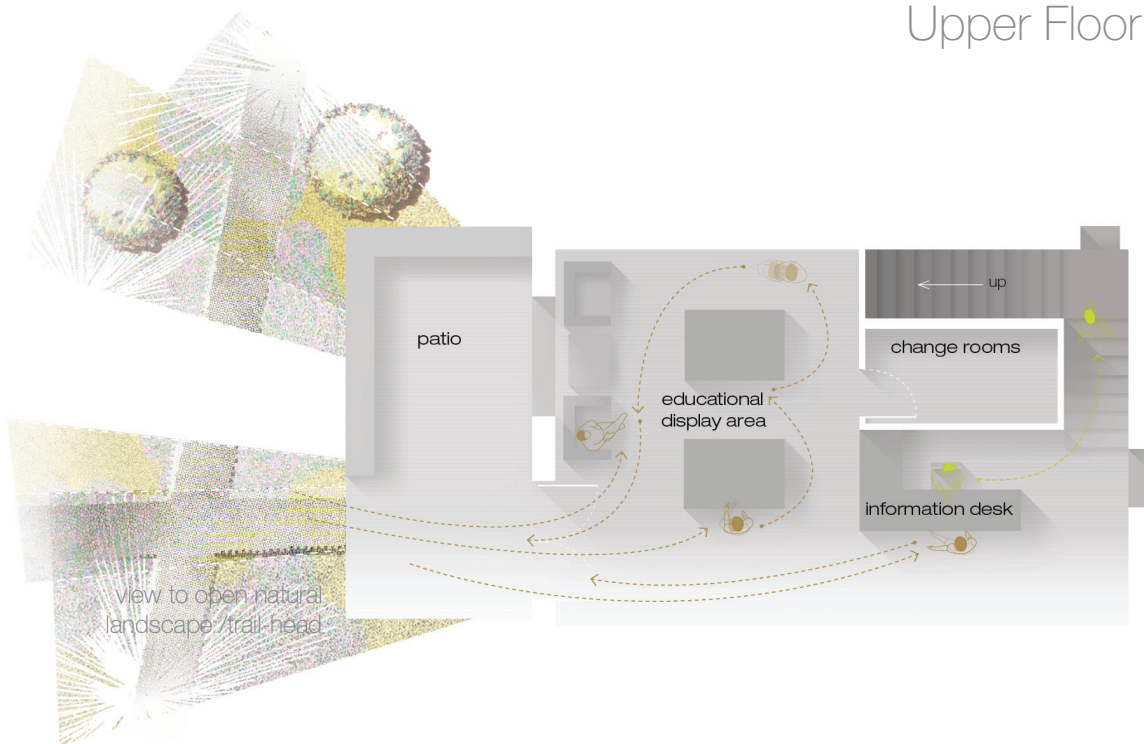
The trail centre (fig. 30 and fig. 31) needs to be the most visible and accessible program, as a beacon to the local community. The ground floor of the centre provides information about trail systems on site and spots for recreational activity for the single hiker as well as small school groups. There are also educational displays which promote an understanding of the ecology and heritage of the site, and the importance of valuing our ecosystems. The top floor of the trail centre offers workspace for governing bodies of the site and other NGOs who are environmental professionals to use as a literal and figurative “watchtower.”

Counterpart to the trail centre is the recreation hub (fig. 32 and fig. 33) which is located deeper into the thick of the natural landscape, with immediate access to the water and hiking trails. The hub will offer rental equipment for the public to use, such as bikes, non-motorized boats and binoculars, to explore hiking trails and if available, the water. This also includes activities and amenities for cold weather such as snowshoeing, skating and curling. A peg-board-like storage system visibly displays the equipment on the walls, which is adaptable in order to facilitate seasonal rotations and daily movements of equipment. Support spaces for the recreation hub will include changerooms and space for repairing equipment. The hub is meant to promote a healthy lifestyle and interaction with nature for the community; however, nature has limits and the scale of the program considers the ecology of the site.

The third recreational program is the community gardens (fig. 34) which needs to be located on a fertile piece of land. This is a place where people from the local community and members can gather to plant flowers and vegetables while exercising and re-connecting to the environment. While the gardens will provide a platform to socialize and share knowledge with the wider community, it will also be a place of solitude and relaxation for many. According to Laura J. Lawson in her book *City Bountiful: A Century of Community Gardening in America*, when community gardens supplement job-training and employment programs, they become a “sheltered workplace that blends training in practical gardening skills with horticultural therapy, general education, community outreach, and environment-



Upper Floor



Ground Floor

Fig. 30 - Plan of the trail centre, showing the pathways of movement of recreation/park users (brown) around the displays and the environmentalists/NGOs (light green) in the office space.



Fig. 31 - Character drawing of the trail centre, highlighting the connection between inside and outside, as well as idea of the centre as a “watchtower” over the site.



Fig. 32 - Plan of the recreation hub, showing the intersecting pathways of movement of recreation/park users and members (grey).



Fig. 33 - Character drawing of the recreation hub, highlighting the peg-board-like storage and display system, as well as the accessibility to several natural features.



Fig. 34 - Character drawing of the community gardens, showing plots (15-20 at 250 sq. ft. each) that have movable shade/storage coverings.

al restoration.”⁴⁵ Understanding gardening can contribute to the health and well being of the community while serving as an effective social tool to the MHSP. The produce also can be used by the cafe and donated to local food banks and shelters. The intent is to engage not only local gardeners but also local food vendors such as restaurants and grocery stores who are interested in growing safe and fresh produce.

Mental Health Programs

The third stream for engaging the local community and promoting awareness is the mental health programs. The mental health centre (fig. 35 and fig. 36) provides counselling services and resource material to members and the local community for support and education. It will be run by professionals in the mental health field and is an option for Beginning Again’s members, in proximity to their workplace. The program is immersed in, and open to, a natural context in order to bring feelings of calm and quiet into the space, which only nature can provide. It is important with the mental health centre to create a balance between being accessible and open to the public but also maintaining a sense of privacy and safety to make the experience more comfortable and positive. The mental health centre operates separate from the store, in conjunction with the retreat centre, which is a place for larger community gatherings. It is available to the MHSP to host large community outreach seminars and information sessions, and also for educational groups to use for day-programs which focus on the importance of nature in our health and well being. The retreat centre is available to clubs for indoor recreational activities such as yoga and meditation, meetings for walking/running clubs, and practice space for theatre and dance groups. The space is meant to be multi-functional for different groups and affiliations. The retreat centre serves as a place for quiet reflection and contemplation but also for connection to peers. It has an expansive view to nature which surveys the many natural features of the site; however, it also looks to bring elements of the outside to the inside to create a deeper connection with nature. The programmatic elements outlined above were developed, as they had the most potential to generate interaction with the local community while increasing methods of rehabilitation.

45 Laura J. Lawson, *City Bountiful: A Century of Community Gardening in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 296.

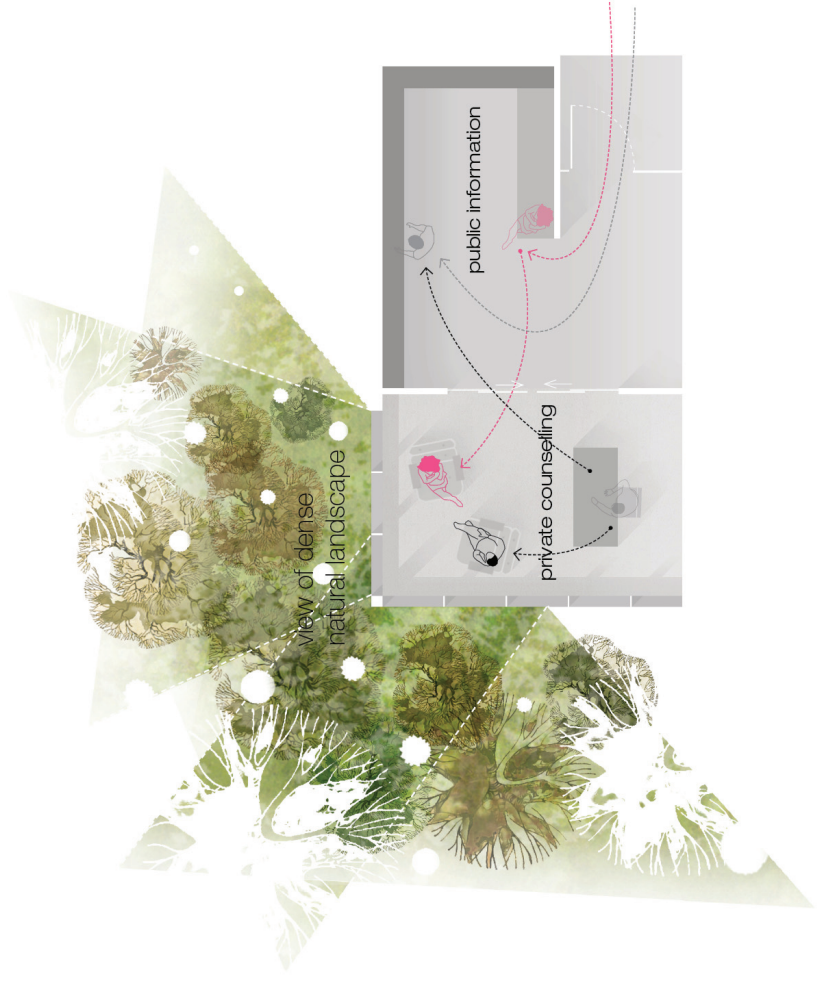


Fig. 35 - Plan of the mental health centre, showing the pathways of movement of patients (pink), health professionals (black) and members (grey).



Fig. 36 - Character drawing of the mental health centre, showing the contrast between the public and private spaces and their relationship to nature. 50

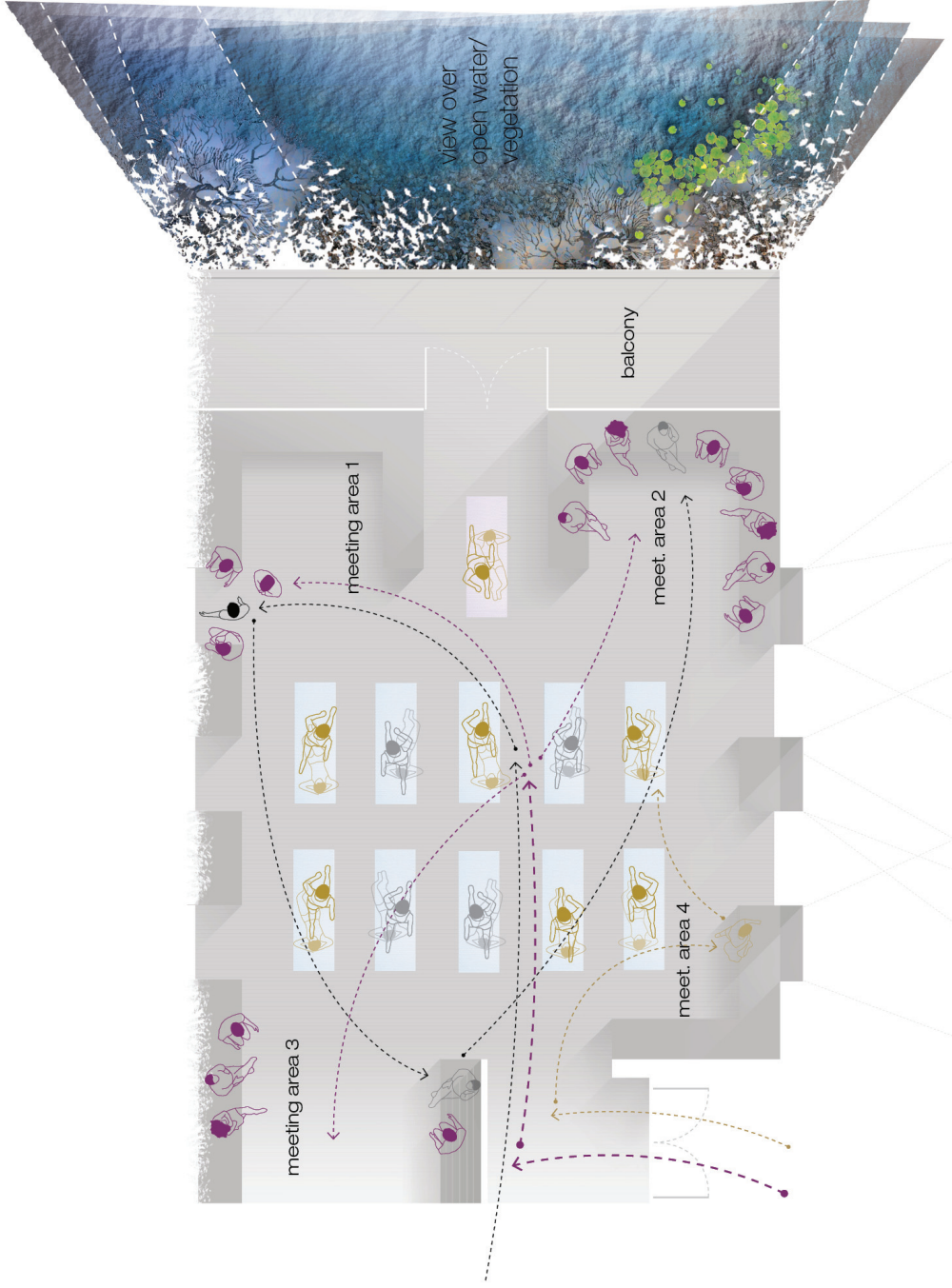


Fig. 37 - Plan of the retreat centre, showing two scenarios of use: a yoga class (grey and brown) and an educational retreat (purple and black). The pathways of movement illustrate the stages in a day-retreat, starting with a group session and then breaking into smaller groups.

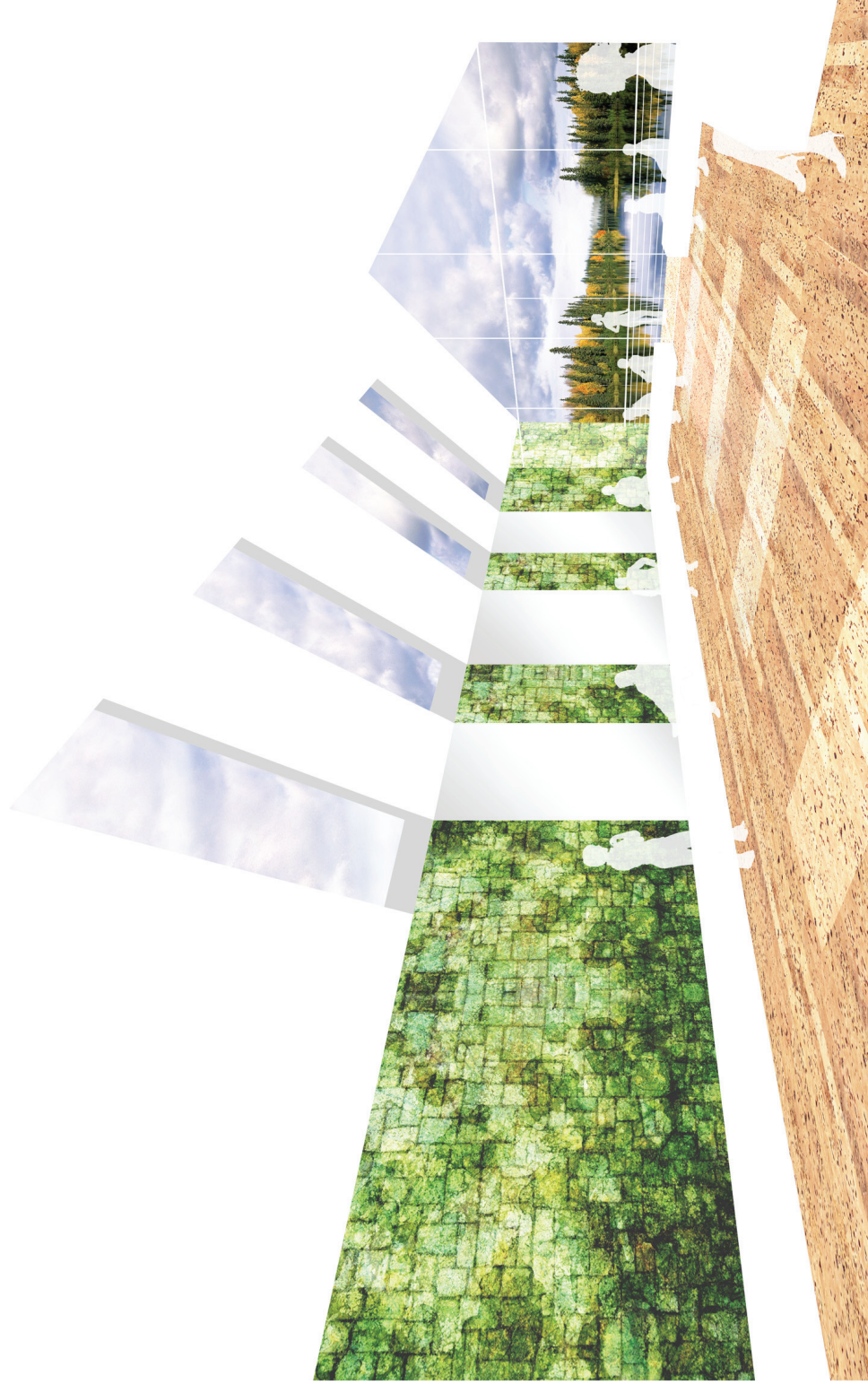


Fig. 38 - Character drawing of the retreat centre, highlighting the main feature wall: a combination of skylights, whiteboards for activities and an extensive green wall, which brings nature inside to create a healthier and more calming environment.

Planting the Seeds

Mental Health Support Program Meets Oak Ridges Corridor Park

The second stage in developing this thesis is to plant the parent seeds into the ORCP where they will adapt to the local culture and environment. The particular locations for each program are prescribed in the DNA of the parent seeds, and are placed by identifying similar markers in the landscape of the site. The term “markers” refers to existing conditions or natural features, such as roadways or bodies of water, which are necessary for the program to germinate. This process also enables several programmatic elements to be connected into cohesive buildings, while others settle independently. The four existing heritage buildings in the park are considered to be a part of the groundscape of the site, and will be re-inhabited by the parent seeds (fig. 39). The idea of preserving the traces of our past and rehabilitating buildings is also supported by the *Oak Ridges Corridor Park Management Plan*, a document that was the result of extensive studies of the ecology and culture of the site.⁴⁶

Site 1

At the north end of the park the J.H.C. Durham cobblestone cottage sits abandoned at the edge of a new suburban housing development. Located on Yonge St., this building is the most visually connected to the local community of Oak Ridges and is the ideal location for the trail centre (fig. 40). Once a lone building in a vast agricultural field, the cottage was originally a dwelling for the farm manager of the estate.⁴⁷ Made out of locally sourced natural riverstone, the thick masonry walls and prominent hearths still stand as a testament to their quality craftsmanship from almost a century ago; however, the light timber frame roof and back addition have deteriorated, causing extensive damage to the interior of the building. Removing the roof and gutting the interior walls is the first stage in re-inhabiting the building. The trail centre needs to serve as a new covering for the remaining masonry walls. This creates the opportunity for the second storey office space, as well as the ability to have an open ground floor plan for the information area and exhibition space.

46 Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, *Oak Ridges Corridor Park Management Plan* (Richmond Hill: AMEC Earth & Environmental Envision, 2006), 26.

47 Richmond Hill Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee, *Heritage Building Summary John H.C. Cobblestone Cottage* (Richmond Hill: Town of Richmond Hill, 1998), 1.

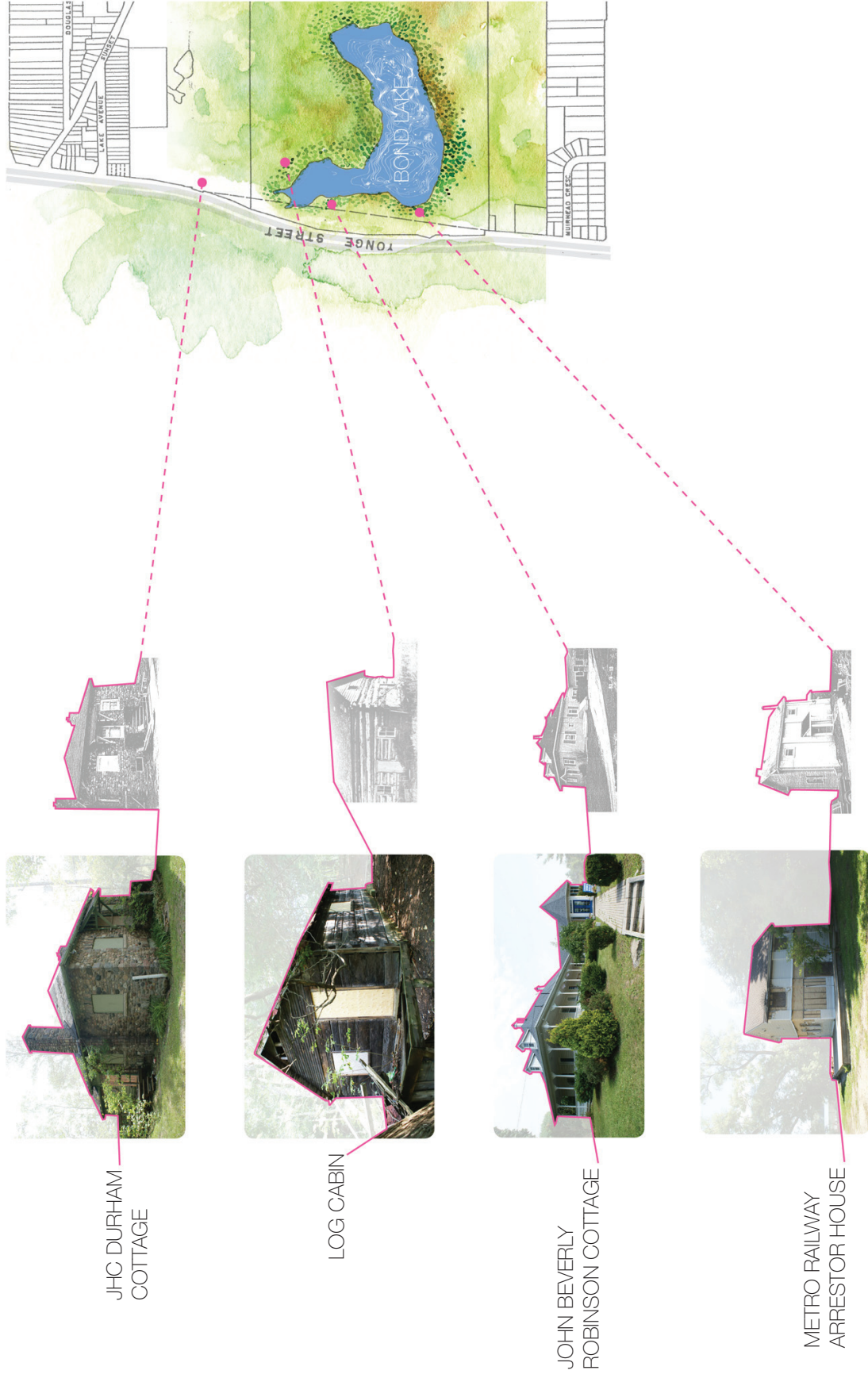


Fig. 39 - The existing heritage buildings and their locations in the Oak Ridges Corridor Park.

Site 2

Located 0.3 km south of the cobblestone cottage, on the shore of Bond Lake, is a small log house estimated to be built in the early 20th century. The cabin was possibly used as a summer cottage and remains in good condition, as it was well detailed and constructed.⁴⁸ The siting and scale of this building are optimal to house the mental health centre (fig. 41). This is done by re-inhabiting the heavy cabin with the public information area, as well as creating a lighter addition that attaches to the side of the building for the private counselling room. The idea is to preserve and showcase the heritage of the cabin, while making it accessible and giving it purpose.

Site 3

Overlooking the water sits the John Beverly Robinson cottage (currently known as the Lebovic Sales Pavilion). Located 0.2 km south of the mental health centre on the east side of Yonge St., the building currently serves as a showroom for a private housing developer. The light-frame wood structure was built in the early 19th century as a modest house and underwent extensive renovations before it received its heritage designation.⁴⁹ The building has been well maintained but underutilized, and is an ideal space for the retreat centre (fig. 42). It has an open and visible face to the public, but also a quiet and private back-yard area for retreat participants. The retreat centre, added onto the back of the house, continues the double-height space of the current great room closer to the edge of the lake. Support spaces, such as an office and meeting room, will re-inhabit the rest of the building, which does not need alteration. The current gazebo-like entrance building which was built in the 1990s will be removed, opening up an axis to the water. Directly adjacent to the retreat centre on Yonge St. is a large, underutilized piece of asphalt parking and grass, which will become the site for Treasures. The building is comprised of several programs: the production room, sales floor, breakroom and café, connected by support spaces (washrooms, means of egress). This location creates a visible storefront edge along Yonge St., allows for vehicular access and also acts as a buffer to the traffic noise. It also creates a softer edge on the east side of the building which enables the programs to open up to the natural environment. Right next to Treasures, the workshop sits independ-

48 Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, *Oak Ridges Corridor Park Management Plan*, 57.

49 Ibid., 56.

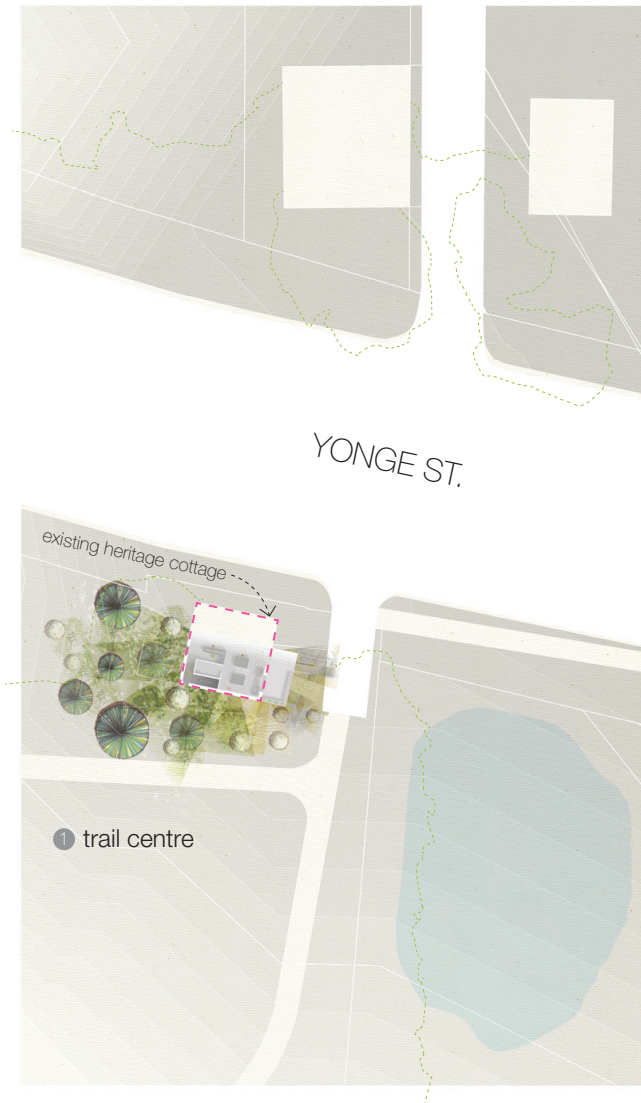


Fig. 40 - Site 1: the trail centre, planted in the existing J.H.C. Durham cobblestone cottage.

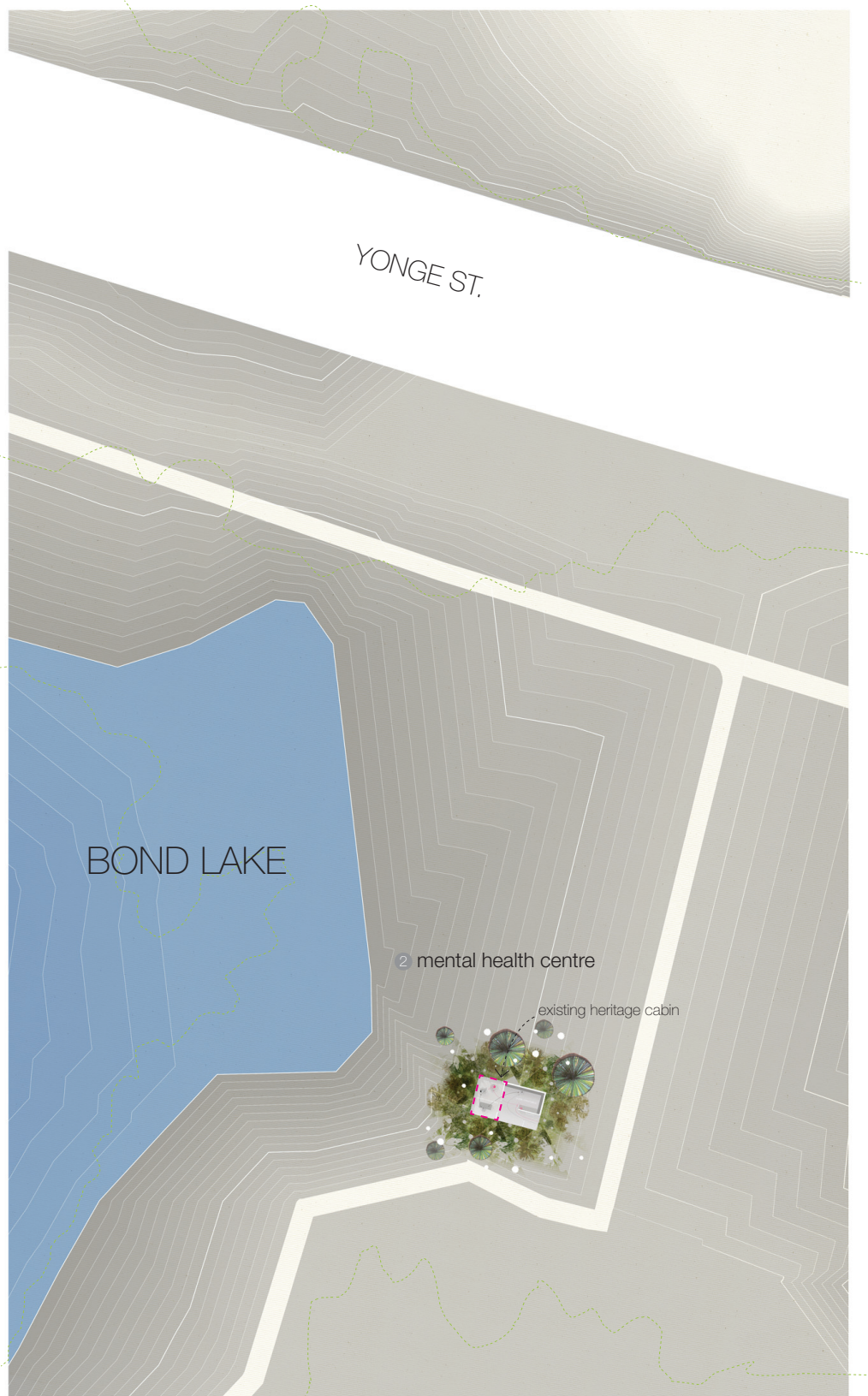


Fig. 41 - Site 2: the mental health centre, planted in the existing log cabin.

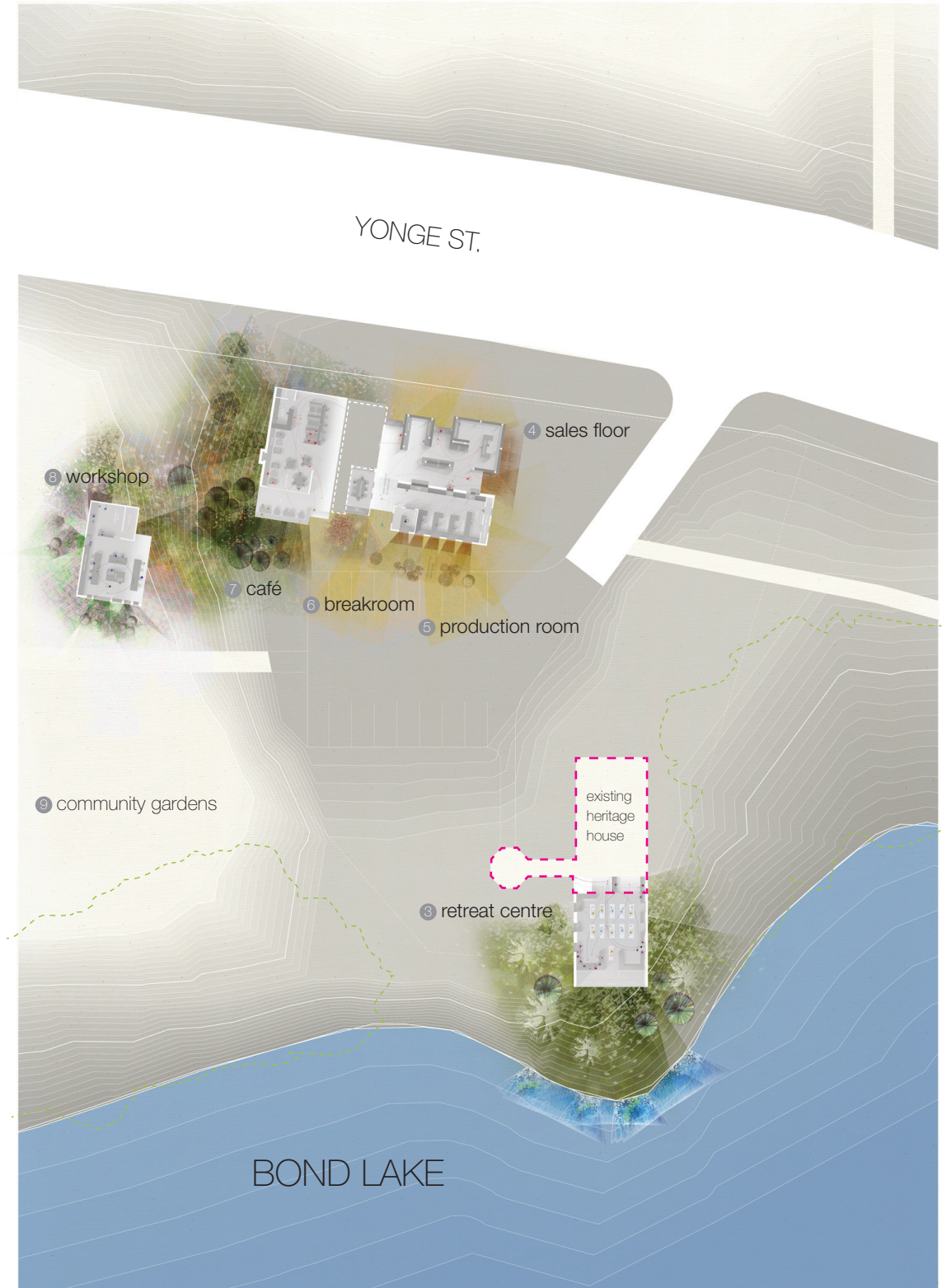


Fig. 42 - Site 3: the sales floor, production room, café, breakroom, workshop, community garden, planted on the site next to Yonge St. The retreat centre, planted in the existing John Beverly Robinson cottage.



Fig. 43 - Site 4: the recreation hub, planted in the existing Metro Railway Arrestor House.

ently on the hilltop, overlooking the community garden plots. This allows it to be accessible to both the store and the road, but also to develop a closer connection to nature.

Site 4

Bookending the south end of the site is the last heritage building, the Metropolitan Railway Arrestor house, a late Victorian industrial building constructed out of a locally sourced white brick. Located 0.3 km from the workshop and sunken lower into the landscape, the lone structure sits abandoned on the edge of the water in the middle of several tail crossings, and is the ideal location for the recreation hub (fig. 43). Originally the annex of the main steam-operated electrical generating station, the building once housed a large dynamo.⁵⁰ When the main power house was demolished in the 1930s, the Arrestor house remained intact and was converted into a dwelling. A fire that occurred a few years ago gutted the interior of the building and caused extensive damage to the roof, so these elements will be removed, leaving only the solid masonry walls to stand as they have for the last century. The recreation hub will be plugged into the remaining shell of the building, returning the original double height space of the house. This opens up the interior of the building up to create a flexible space for display and demonstration, as well as a mezzanine level to access and store seasonal equipment.

Seeds Take Root

Connecting the Seeds

As the parent seeds continue to germinate, they sectionally begin to push and pull the earth. The existing conditions surrounding the seed also change as the program settles, conforming to meet the needs of the program. Connecting the seeds on the four different sites, a new walking trail runs parallel to Yonge St., which adds to the existing trail system that meanders east-west (fig. 44). Several other trails are also established to run along the backyards of the housing developments in order to provide access for the residents to the MHSP, and to support the increased number of users on site. The trails will have crossing points at Yonge St. (traffic lights), which serve as transit stops as well as pedestrian links. This will help mitigate the fast and busy road by slowing down traffic. The second way to moderate the hard streetscape is to integrate strips of the natural environment landscape

⁵⁰ Richmond Hill Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee, *Heritage Building Summary Metropolitan Railway Arrestor House* (Richmond Hill: Town of Richmond Hill, 1998), 1.



Fig. 44 - Oak Ridges Corridor Park site plan, showing the current and proposed trail system linking the four sites together.

back onto the road. This means continuing the row of trees which begin at the north edge of the park down Yonge St. to the south end, which reduces the optical width of the street and creates a more attractive condition.

Community Courtyard Design

The intention is to develop site 3 into a community courtyard which will be open to both the local community and mental health community as an informal and formal meeting place. The courtyard will be maintained and supported by Beginning Again; however, the town and MHSP can use the space at any time to host events which could include weekend markets, outdoor movie screenings and group barbeques (25-200 people). On a smaller scale, families can come to enjoy a languid summer picnic and elderly couples can set up their lawn chairs to relax and bask in the afternoon light. The design looks at creating a series of smaller courtyards which are linked by a pathway that stretches from the west side of Yonge St. into the site and out onto the water. The first courtyard is formed at the intersection of the trail crossing and Yonge St., creating a more prominent entrance to the site as well as a visible new transit stop. Vehicular traffic is looped into the entrance of the site by a semi-circular driveway which serves as an accessible donation drop-off/loading zone. Drivers who are visiting the store or site can continue to the parking area which is located north of the driveway and runs parallel to Yonge St. (second courtyard).⁵¹ The pathway continues into the site, becoming a raised boardwalk which allows the site to breathe, and then conforms into the framework that has been set up by the natural edges of the site and the buildings. From this third courtyard, the pathway begins to break off and releases into the landscape in order to connect to the other programmatic elements. The rooftop of Treasures becomes the fourth courtyard space, continuing the datum of the hilltop to become a greenroof. It perches over the site and offers views of the lake.

Detail Design

To explore the concept of how the seeds respond to meeting the site, two different building connections were looked at in detail (fig. 59 and 71). These details tell an explicit story about the germination of the seed and the blending of natural and artificial environments. Considering the heritage building as a part of the groundscape, the first detail explores

⁵¹ The parking lot acts as a bioretention swale which prevents runoff from the roadway polluting the site and uses permeable pavement to allow rainwater to absorb into the ground.

the condition of a seed planted into an existing built structure (fig. 45). The best example of this occurs where the recreation hub is plugged into the remaining shell of the Arrestor house. In order to emphasize this connection and to preserve the old brick, there is air space between the new and the old structure.⁵² The second detail looks at the condition of how the building meets the natural landscape. This was explored on site 3, at the threshold where the hill transitions into the greenroof of the store (fig. 46). The idea is that this transition happens gradually; keeping the ground surface the same (long grass and brush), a person would begin to see markers in the landscape, such as handrails and skylights, which signify they have left the natural ground and are embarking on the artificial roofscape.

The following set of drawings and models (fig. 45 to 71) illustrates the design of the MHSP in the Oak Ridges Corridor Park.

⁵² This is a building detail known as dynamic buffer zone, which is used on historic structures.



Fig. 45 - Section through the trail centre, highlighting the contrast between the heavy stone base rooted into the landscape and the lighter second storey addition which covers it.

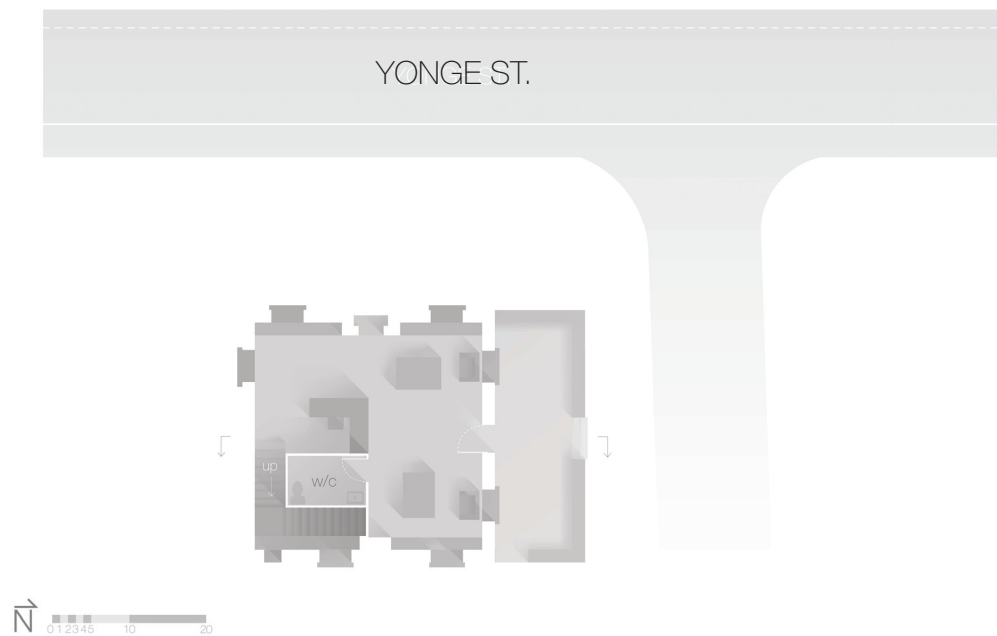


Fig. 46 - Ground floor plan of the trail centre, showing how the parent seed adapts to the cottage and forms into existing features such as window opening and fireplaces.



Fig. 47 - Photograph of the trail centre model, looking east across Yonge St., through the trees.



Fig. 48 - Aerial photograph of the trail centre model, showing the dialogue between old and new materials, as well as the access stairway to the viewing platform.



Fig. 49 - Section through the mental health centre, showing how the counseling room attaches to the existing log cabin.

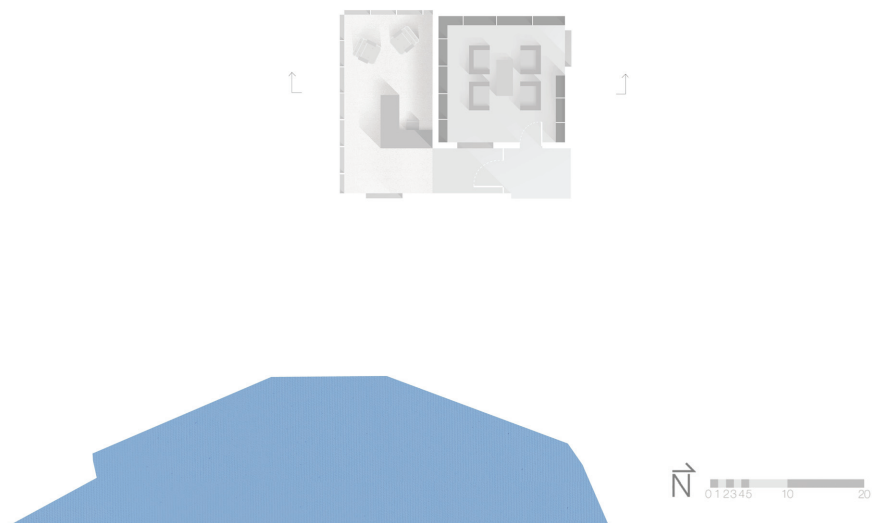


Fig. 50 - Plan of the mental health centre, showing how the log cabin is re-inhabited.



Fig. 51 - Photograph of the mental health centre model, from the view of how one would approach the building from the trail.



Fig. 52 - Photograph of the mental health centre model, from the vantage point on the water.

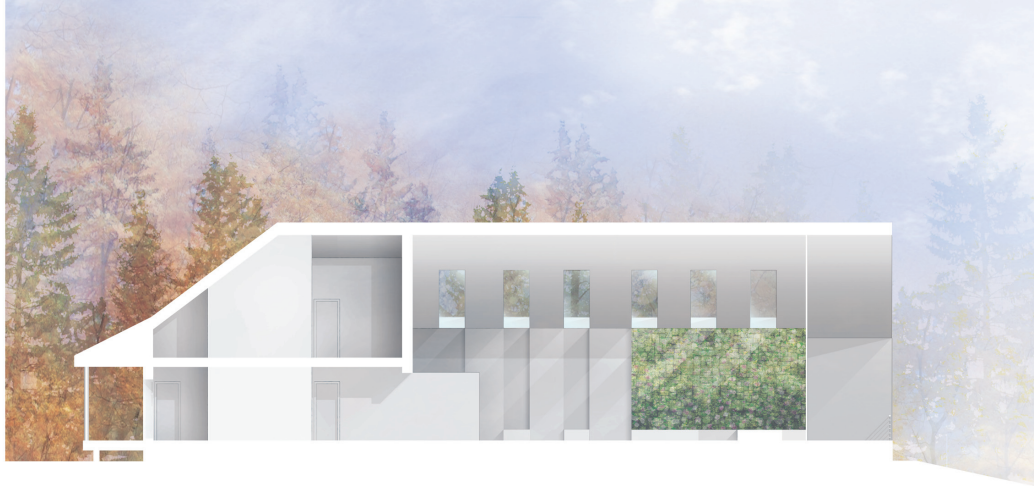


Fig. 53 - Section through the retreat centre, showing the extension onto the back great room.

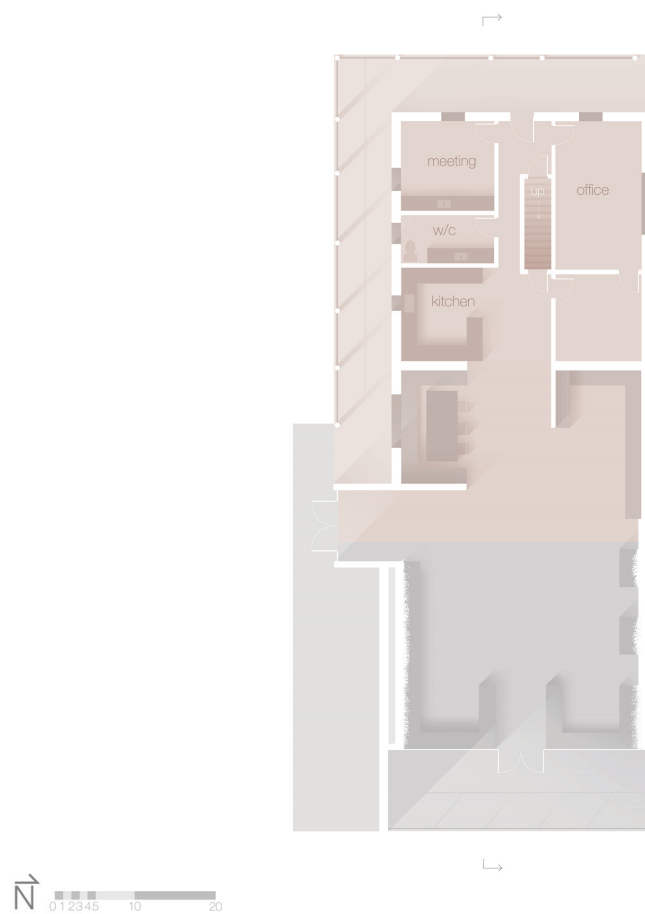


Fig. 54 - Ground floor plan (level 2) of the retreat centre, highlighting the new entryway to replace the current gazebo and the locations of the green walls as transitional elements for the addition.



Fig. 55 - Photograph of the retreat centre model from the greenroof of the store, looking at the new south side entrance.



Fig. 56 - Photograph of the retreat centre model from the vantage point on the water, highlighting the dock and viewing deck as the ending of the pathway.

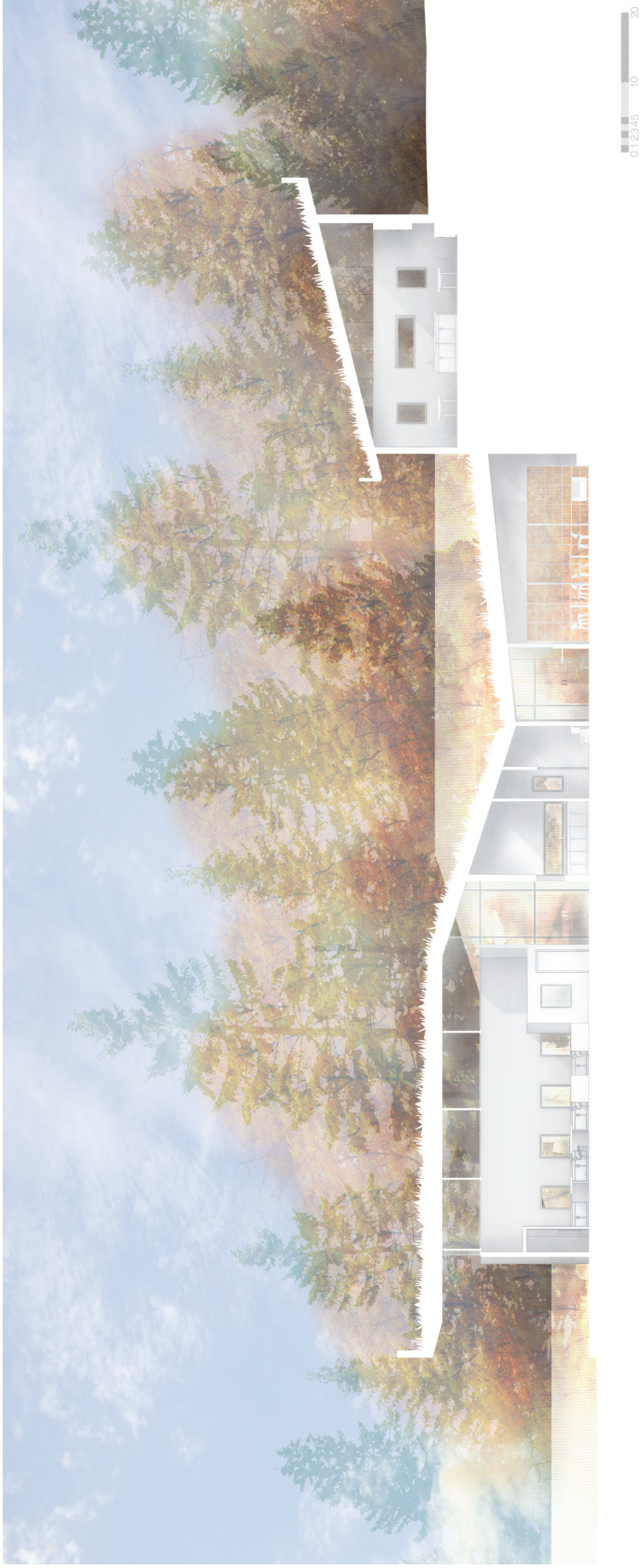


Fig. 57 - Section through Treasures (production room, break room, cafe and workshop), showing how the building tucks into the hillside.

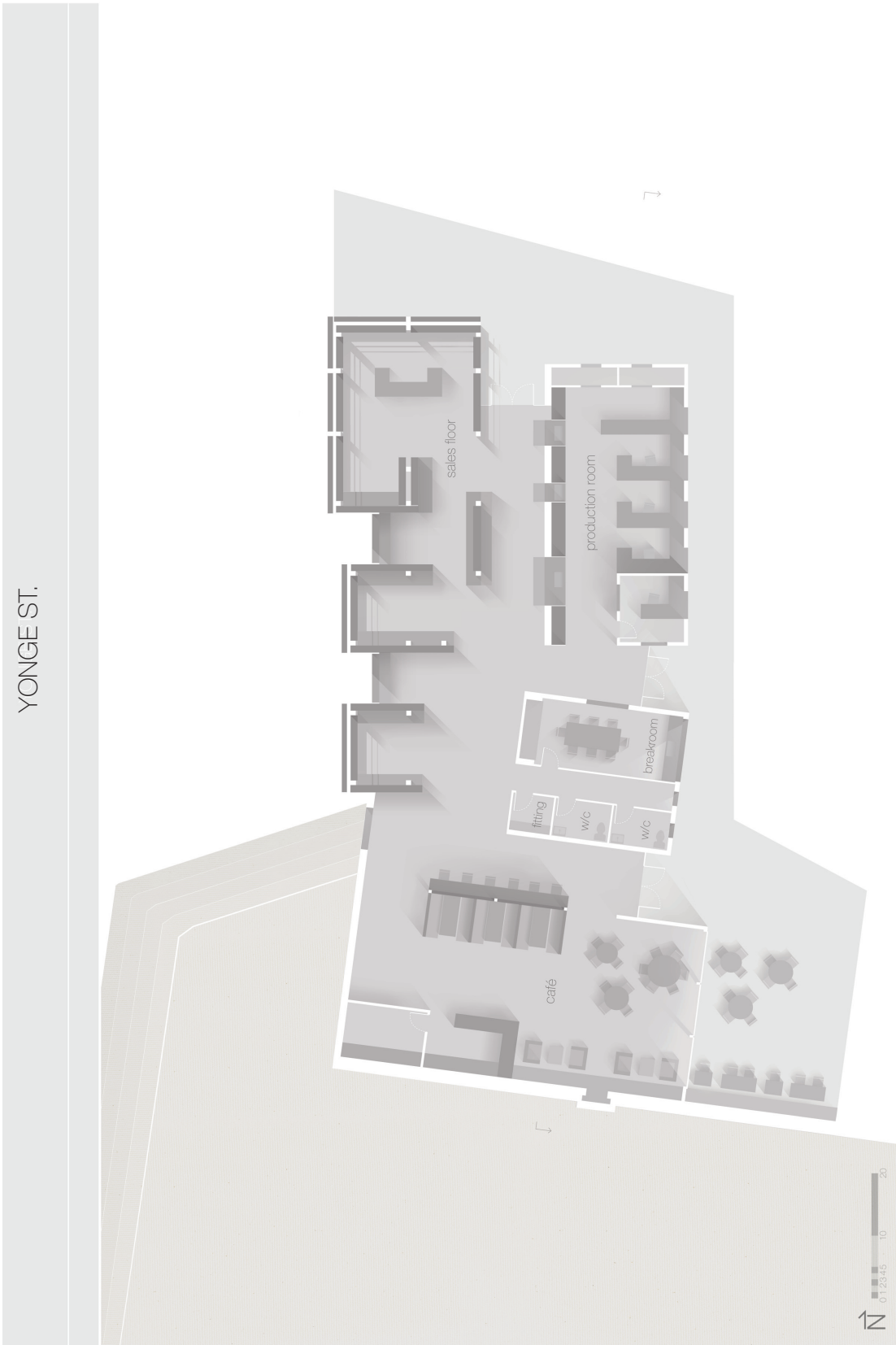


Fig. 58 - Plan of Treasures (level 1), showing how the production room, sales floor, break room and cafe connect to each other and the site.

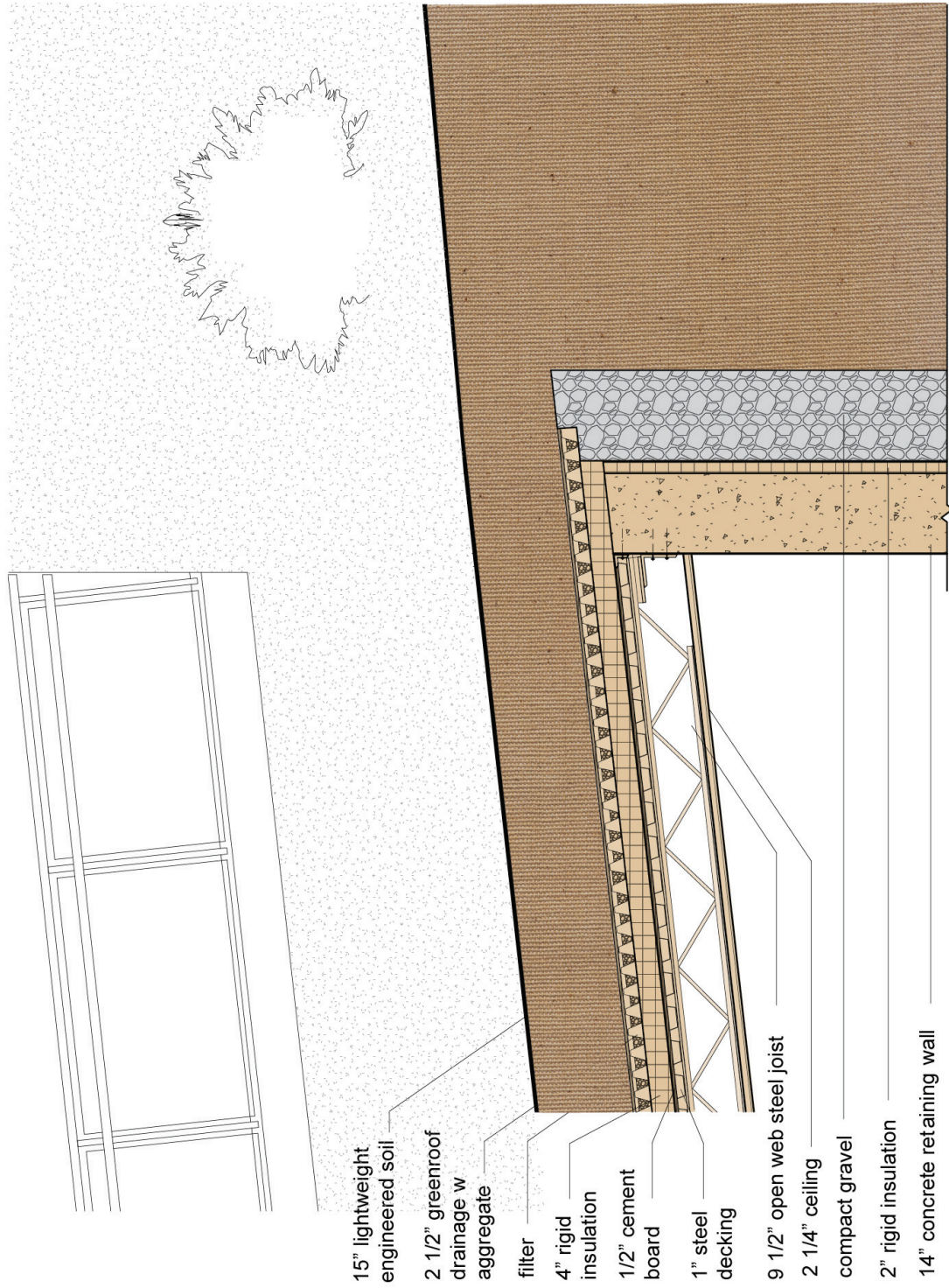


Fig. 59 - Section axonometric detail of the hill as it transitions into the greenroof of the store.



Fig. 60 - Aerial photograph of the model of site 3, showing how the community courtyard is formed between Treasures and the retreat centre.



Fig. 61 - Photograph of the model of Treasures, showing how the building opens onto the courtyard.



Fig. 62 - Photograph of the model of site 3, looking from the west side trail entrance to Yonge St.



Fig. 63 - Photograph of the model of site 3, looking south down Yonge St., with the parking area in the foreground and the front entrance of the store.

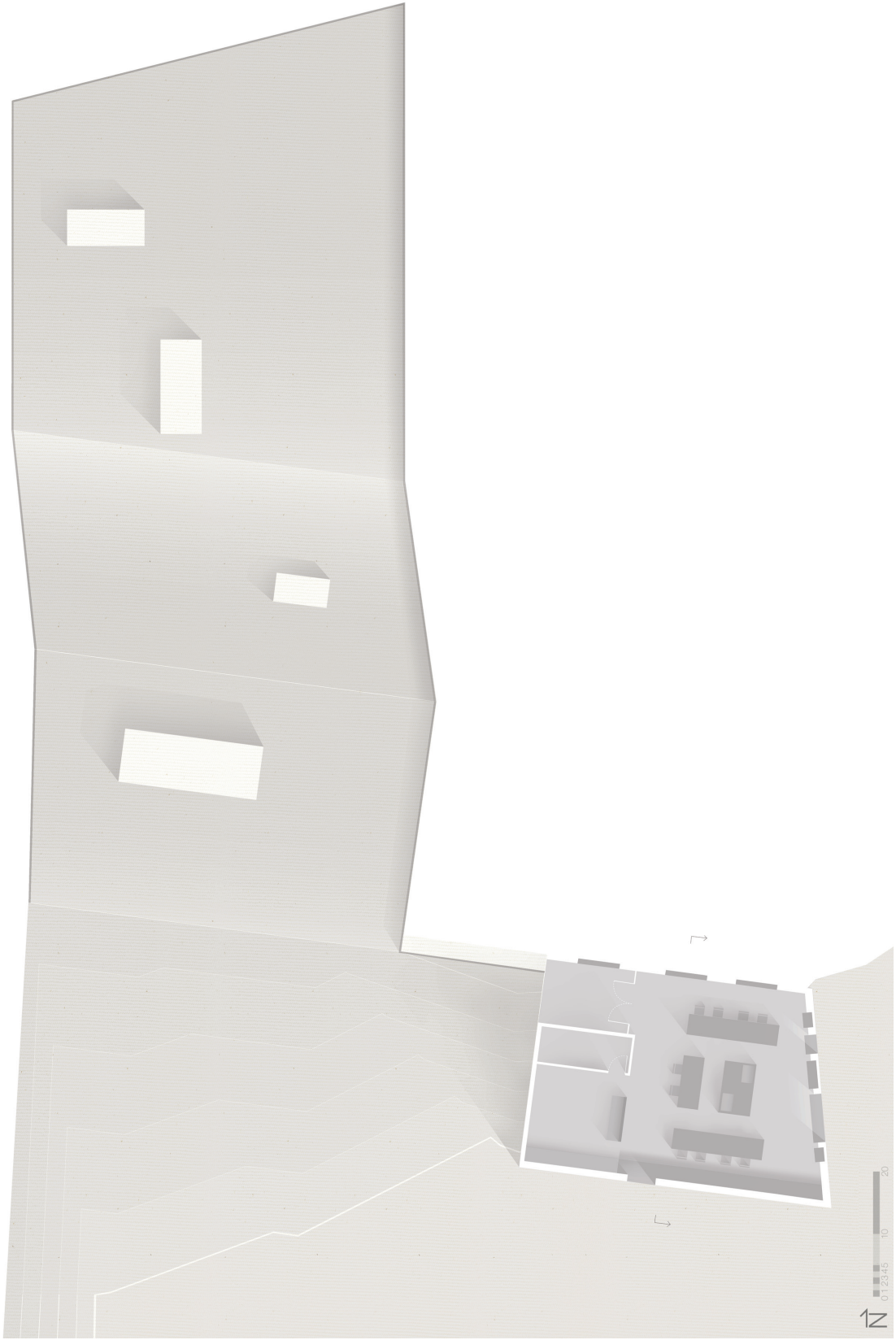


Fig. 64 - Plan of the workshop (level 3) and greenroof of the store.



Fig. 65 - Photograph of the workshop and community courtyard from the south trail entrance.



Fig. 66 - Aerial photograph of the model of site 3, looking southeast at the intersection and entrance.



Fig. 67 - Section through the recreation hub, showing the double-height space and mezzanine level for additional storage and display.

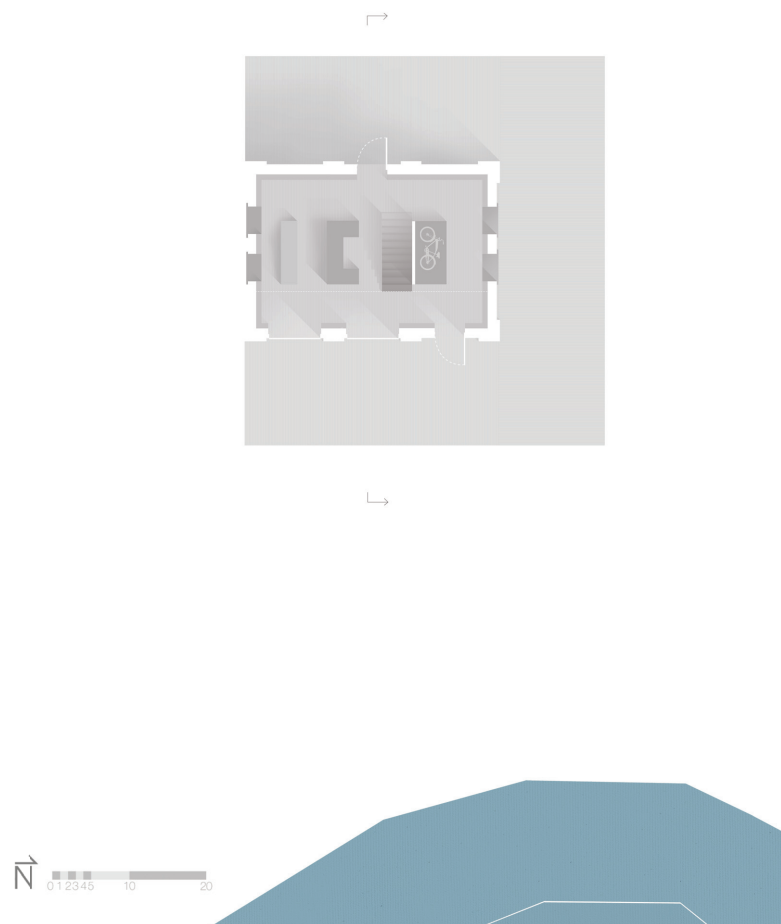


Fig. 68 - Plan of the recreation hub, showing how the parent seed adapts to the existing structure.



Fig. 69 - Photograph of the recreation hub, looking east from the vantage point of Yonge St.



Fig. 70 - Photograph of the recreation hub model from the water, showing the potential for a slide.

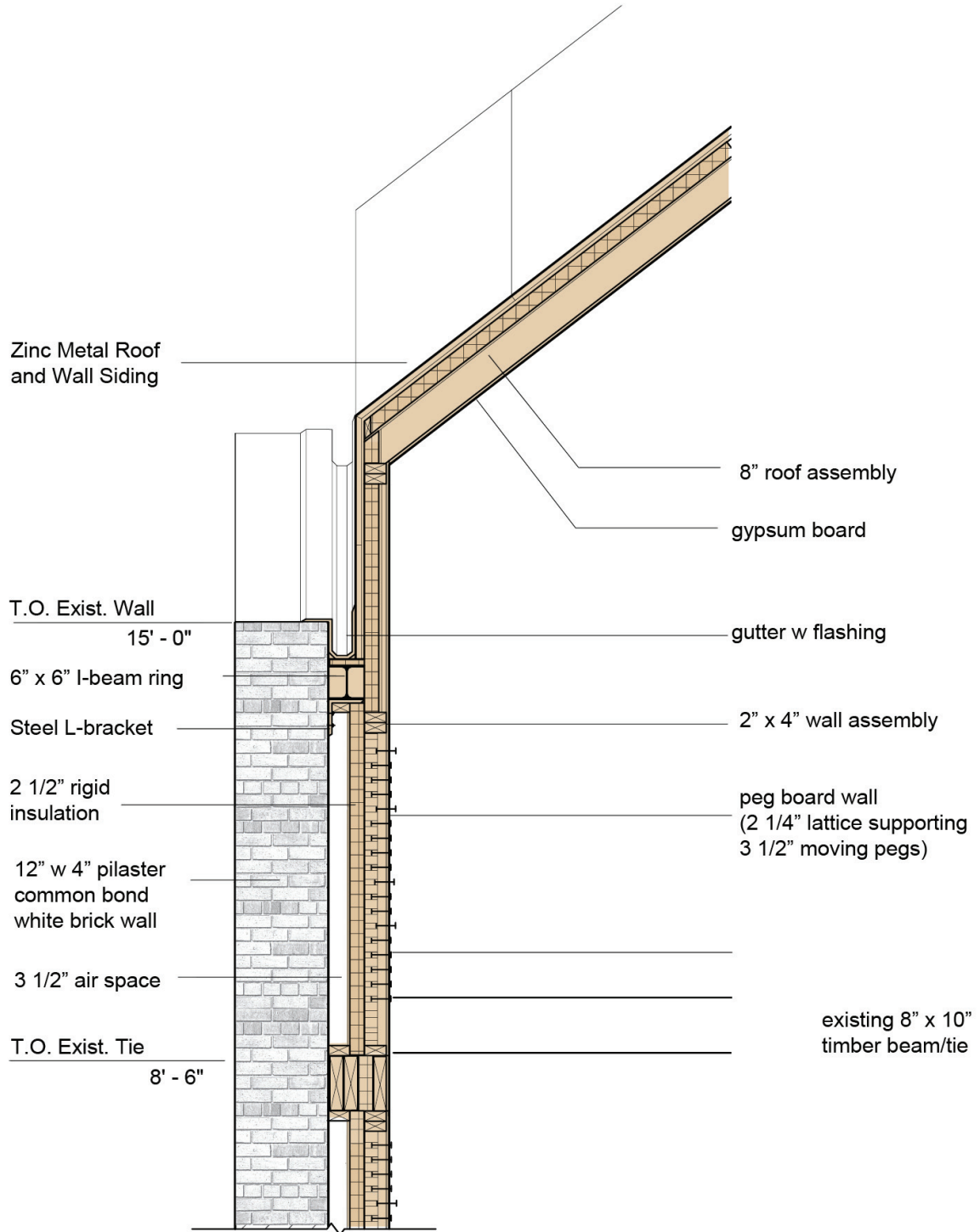


Fig. 71 - Section axonometric detail through recreation hub where the old brick wall meets the new structure.

CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSION

In pursuing the question, How can integrating a Mental Health Support Program in a natural recreational environment increase the opportunity for rehabilitation and interaction with the local community?, this thesis explored the potential for many different places and programs to serve as a framework for support. Drawing from historical precedent, as well as similar social models such as L'Arche Daybreak, was beneficial to understand what has already been accomplished on a local and global scale. It also motivated this thesis to challenge the current state of mental health support, to look for the ideal environments for rehabilitation to take place. Since the change in attitude and perception of mental health issues from the public will not occur overnight, it is more likely that the MHSP will be implemented in stages over time. The design for the Oak Ridges Corridor Park shows how all the final pieces would fit together; however, the first step in the sequence would be to implement the programs in the heritage buildings because they are already in consideration for being rehabilitated. Programs like the trail centre and recreation hub are ideal to begin with because they serve a purpose: to provide much needed amenities to the users of the site, and at the same time they create the opportunity for a mental health support program. These recreation programs will be the first gesture or handshake to the local community because they are closely related to the inherent nature of the site and they are not overwhelming as a first introduction to the mental health community. Looking at how the MHSP would be implemented also raises the question of who would need to be involved to make this happen. The natural recreation model involves co-ordination and collaboration of many occupations, organizations and levels of government; however, it is most important that Beginning Again, the Town of Richmond Hill and the local community of Oak Ridges share the same vision, as they have the means and authority to implement the project. They will also benefit the most. As with any design driven project, there are numerous avenues this thesis could have taken; however, because of the nature of the parent seed concept it is even more true. Exploring how the seeds could be planted in a completely different landscape, perhaps one without an existing built culture, would be interesting to develop further. This would not only cultivate a different local design but would further test the design of the parent seed in order to create a stronger and more viable natural recreational model.

REFERENCES

- Annette, Sister M. *Salute to Canada: A History of Oak Ridges*. Winnipeg: Canadian Student Yearbooks Ltd., 1967.
- L'Arche Daybreak. 2011. <http://www.larchedaybreak.com/about-us>.
- Beveridge, Charles E., and Paul Rocheleau. *Frederick Law Olmstead: Designing the American Landscape*. New York: Universe Publishing, 1998.
- Canadian Association of Occupational Therapy. 2012. <http://www.caot.ca/default.asp?pageid=1344>.
- _____. Recovery. 2012. http://www.ontario.cmha.ca/about_mental_health.asp?cID=7667.
- _____. Stigma and Mental Illness. 2012. http://www.ontario.cmha.ca/fact_sheets.asp?cID=2795.
- Canadian Mental Health Association. The Connection Between Mental and Physical Health. http://www.ontario.cmha.ca/fact_sheets.asp?cID=3963, 2012.
- Davis, Elizabeth. *Treasures Executive Summary*. Richmond Hill: Beginning Again, 1986.
- _____. The Inspiration for Treasures. 2011. <http://treasuresofrichmondhill.blogspot.com/>.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Madness*. Translated by Jean Khalifa and Jonathan Murphy. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Gardner, Sarah. "The Impact of Sprawl on the Environment and Human Health." In *Urban Sprawl: A Comprehensive Reference Guide*, edited by David Soule, 251-253. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006.
- Gatje, Robert F. *Great Public Squares: An Architect's Selection*. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2010.
- Halpern, David. *More Than Bricks And Mortar?: Mental Health and The Built Environment*. Bristol, PA: Taylor and Francis Inc., 1995.
- Health Canada. Environmental and Workplace Health. Environmental Contaminants Bureau Annual Report 2002-03. 2012. http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/contaminants/2002_03-report_rapport/environ-indoor_inter-eng.php.
- Jencks, Charles, and Edwin Heathcote. *The Architecture of Hope: Maggie's Cancer Caring Centres*. London: Frances Lincoln Ltd., 2010.
- Kellert, Stephen R. *Building For Life: Designing and Understanding the Human-Nature Connection*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2005.

- Lawson, Laura J. *City Bountiful: A Century of Community Gardening in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
- Ministry of Natural Resources. *Inventory of Five Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest on the Oak Ridges Moraine, Town of Richmond Hill, Ontario*. Aurora: Ministry of Natural Resources, 2001.
- Moller, Clifford B. *Architectural Environments and Our Mental Health*. New York: Horizon Press, 1968.
- Ontario Art Therapy Association. About Art Therapy. 2010. <http://www.oata.ca/arttherapy>.
- Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Public Information. Mental Health. 2012. www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/pub/mental/faq.html.
- Pallasmaa, Juhani. *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons Ltd., 2005.
- Richmond Hill Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee. *Heritage Building Summary*. Richmond Hill: Town of Richmond Hill, 1998.
- Robinson, Marney Beck, and Joan M. Clark. *Later Days in Richmond Hill: A History of the Community from 1930 to 1999*. Richmond Hill: Richmond Hill Public Library Board, 1991.
- Sealy, Patricia, and Paul C. Whitehead. "Forty Years of Deinstitutionalization of Psychiatric Services in Canada: An Empirical Assessment." Canadian Psychiatric Association. April 2004. <http://www.cpa-apc.org:8080/publications/archives/cjp/2004/april/sealy.asp>.
- Sewell, John. *The Shape of the Suburbs in Toronto Sprawl*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009.
- Soule, David, ed. *Urban Sprawl: A Comprehensive Reference Guide*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006.
- Stamp, Robert M. *Early Days Richmond Hill: A History of the Community to 1930*. Richmond Hill: Richmond Hill Public Library Board, 1991.
- STORM Coalition. *Oak Ridges Moraine*. Erin, ON: The Boston Mills Press, 1997.
- Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. *Oak Ridges Corridor Park Management Plan*. Richmond Hill: AMEC Earth & Environmental Envision, 2006.
- Vanier, Jean. *An Ark for the Poor: The Story of L'Arche*. Toronto: Novalis, 1995.
- Wernick, Jane, ed. *Building Happiness: Architecture to Make You Smile*. London, UK: Black Dog Publishing, 2008.

Whyte, Willam H. *The Last Landscape*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.

Wise, Lou. *This Beautiful Land: Photo Essay*. King City, ON: The Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation, 2004.

Yanni, Carla. *The Architecture of Madness: Insane Asylums in the United States*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2007.