



RED FISH HEALING CENTRE FOR MENTAL HEALTH & ADDICTION

by NATALIE BRUCKNER

The Red Fish Healing Centre for Mental Health & Addiction in Coquitlam, B.C. is so much more than a treatment facility: from the site on which it stands, its design, and the artwork inside, to its technology and systems, and innovative care model, the sensitive approach taken with each and every aspect of this project has resulted in an outstanding first-of-its-kind healing centre that celebrates a highly unique model of care – one based on decades of research, experience, and expertise in treating the most complex forms of mental health and substance use relating specifically to this complex population.

“With Red Fish, we were able to design our programming first, and then build the centre around it. That means we have facilities and design concepts throughout the site that really contribute to healing,” says Kathryn Embacher, senior director of complex concurrent disorders at Red Fish.

The new three-storey, 105-bed Centre is located on 244 acres of Riverview Lands in Coquitlam, also known as səmiq̓wəʔelə, meaning the Place of the Great Blue Heron, and sits next to what was the old Riverview Hospital, originally opened in 1913.

“These are our ancestral grounds, and they are very sacred,” explained Chief Ed Hall of the Kwikwəʔəm (Kwikwetlem First Nation), on whose land the Red Fish Healing Centre is located (and with whom BC Mental Health and Substance Use leaders have been working closely on outdoor and other program development so that clients can benefit from the healing properties of the land). “Riverview has always been a place of transformation, and we welcomed the opportunity to walk alongside our partners at the Red Fish Healing Centre to help make this a place of healing once again.”

The Centre’s location, surrounded by approximately 1,800 mature trees, very much influenced the design of the facility, as can be seen by the unique angles that maximize its connection to outdoor spaces – providing an immersive interior/exterior healing environment.

“The building reflects the beautiful natural landscape on which it sits,” says Shane Czypyha, principal at Parkin Architects. “During the design development phase there was extensive design collaboration with representatives of Kwikwəʔəm, which involved a terrific education on customs and artistic traditions of the people native to the site, such as cedar weaving, traditional Salish wool robes, and house post carving.”

The project team, that includes EllisDon as general contractor, worked closely with Kwikwəʔəm to identify opportunities to integrate wellness aspects of community design wherever feasible, such as exterior facade design and colour palette, landscaping, public art, and community and wellness gardens.

For the exterior cladding, the colours took inspiration from the nature around and the building’s purpose, as Czypyha explains: “The extensive white field wraps around the inpatient wing, echoing wrapping of traditional wool robes as a gesture of protection. The blues and greens are nods to the skies, waters of the river, trees, and flora of the forest floor, and ochre tones are a nod to the red cedar and the salmon of the river. The unique angles of the wings of the building are a direct response to the importance of maintaining significant existing trees on the site.”

In fact, everything about the design has meaning and purpose, while paying respect to the rich history of the

site: “The main entry and lobby celebrate significant wood structural elements and stone, and is flanked by a stunning house post, carved from a 600-year-old cedar,” says Czypyha.

Heading inside the facility, clients’ histories of trauma informed the design, which puts client safety, security, and comfort first. “We have applied the latest principles in design for healing and recovery here,” says Embacher. “Everything about the centre from the lighting and colours to the furniture we chose is very recovery-oriented and trauma-informed. This represents a new phase in mental health treatment, one where we have moved on from older style secure facilities where patients were locked away. The Red Fish Healing Centre is welcoming and doesn’t have an institutional feeling.”

Indigenous artwork throughout the facility in its many forms, not only honours the lands on which it is situated, but adds to that home-like feel, as do the private bedrooms and ensuite bathrooms available to each client.

“Many clients have come from shared accommodation where they didn’t have privacy or security. Providing clients with their own space is a big part of the recovery process – it brings dignity and respect, and helps clients to feel safe and comfortable,” says Embacher.

Mary Chernoff, interior designer at Parkin, adds that the design was also led by a desire to foster community in shared/common spaces and amenities, while maximizing that connection to the outdoors. “This has been achieved with comfortable seating and natural vistas, all while maintaining security and safety,” she says.

The Centre has seven small units that foster that family feel and prevents clients from feeling

LOCATION

2745 Lougheed Highway, Coquitlam, B.C.

OWNER/DEVELOPER

Provincial Health Services Authority

ARCHITECT

Parkin Architects Western Ltd.

GENERAL CONTRACTOR

EllisDon Corporation

STRUCTURAL CONSULTANT

RJC Engineers

MECHANICAL/ELECTRICAL CONSULTANT

WSP

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

M2 Landscape Architecture

TOTAL SIZE

217,000 square feet

TOTAL COST

\$131 million

overwhelmed. To ensure clients don’t feel trapped, and to help keep staff and physicians safe, each treatment room has two exits rather than one. Additionally, all the units feature a number of wide-open spaces and large windows that let in natural light and look out onto the beautifully landscaped grounds.

The Kwikwəʔəm has co-designed a treatment room devoted to cultural and spiritual healing treatments such as smudging. This will help ensure that Indigenous clients can receive care that is culturally relevant, sensitive and safe.

Another highly impressive element of the Centre is its state-of-art technology. The entire Centre, thanks to IMITS, will be virtually enabled, paving the way for built-in videoconferencing tools to help clients, loved ones, and care providers around the province. An interconnected network of around 300 computers will allow health-care providers to perform tasks with efficiency and ease.

Thanks to a passionate team and close collaboration throughout, the centre truly is quite a step forward to providing a recovery and healing space to those in need and addressing B.C.’s opioid crisis. “I love that people’s first comments are often, ‘It’s so calm and soothing and warm.’ I am also proud of the end result of a great collaboration with our Indigenous partners and the integration of their artwork throughout,” says Chernoff. Czypyha adds: “I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to a project that focuses on a connection to the land and the people who have inhabited it for generations, and using that connection to create a healing environment that takes major steps forward in the approach to mental health well-being.” ■