## **Enriched Environments Enhancing Psychiatric Care Facilities for Transitional Youth**

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## I. EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The number of transitional youth affected by mental illness is growing at an alarming rate. This group, between ages fifteen and twenty-five, often undergo personal, interpersonal, and social trauma that result in chronic stress and anxiety. Tragically, transitional youth often fall through the cracks of the mental health care system. We argue that this is due in large part to a conceptual gap between the architecture of existing facilities and the methods of treatment. In this paper, we will discuss a reformulation of psychiatric facilities for transitional youth through an examination of 'enriched environments'. In the context of our discussion, an enriched environment is understood as an architecture that nurtures both the physiological and the psychological aspects of being - creating a neurological union of body and mind.

This understanding of enriched environments will be presented through a case study developed as a part of a professional M.Arch thesis. Beginning with a synopsis of current literature concerned with healing and neuro-architecture, we will discuss how research in the neurosciences can inform the design of psychiatric facilities for transitional youth. This discussion will be presented through a speculative architectural project. Recognizing that the causes for psychiatric disorders are the result of complex relationships between environmental, psychological, and physiological factors - making the condition of each patient essentially unique - an understanding of how the brain functions and reacts to given stimuli within the built environment is taken as a starting point for design. The project is not understood as a general proposition to 'cure' mental illness, but a specific exploration of how architecture could play an important – even crucial – role in the treatment and recovery of transitional youth.

## 2. REFERENCES

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## 3. AUTHOR BIO

Lara Chow is a graduate student in the PhD program at the Azrieli School of Architecture at Carleton University. Lara's ongoing research focuses on how humans experience architectural space and the effect on both physical and psychological well-being – specifically within mental healthcare facilities. Her masters thesis Enriched Environment: A Psychiatric Facility for Transitional Youth translated emerging biological and neurological research into a design intended to promote both physical and psychological well-being. The research thesis was awarded the Azrieli Scholars Award and also featured under Current Notable Work on the Academy of Neuroscience for Architecture (ANFA) website.

