

Designing Change at Archway

He now looks forward to Mondays, says **Naji Mourani**, Senior Interior Designer with NORR Limited, and one of the volunteers working with ARIDO (Association of Registered Interior Designers of Ontario) to redesign a healing environment at CAMH's Archway Outpatient Clinic.

Since the majority of the work by the painters and other workers is being accomplished over the weekend, Monday is when he and his colleagues on the Archway design committee have the opportunity to take a look at how the space is evolving and improving.



*Pictured above: Archway Designers (L-R): **Elsie Cheng** (ARIDO); **Naji Mourani** (ARIDO); **Anna Stranks** (ARIDO); ARIDO Registrar **Sharon Portelli**; **Sherry Bilenduke** (ARIDO); and **Mahesh Baboram**, a member of the Planning Committee. Missing from the photo is Dayna Bradley, Planning Committee member.*

Monday is also the day **Sharon Portelli**, Registrar for ARIDO, says that they receive emails from the Archway staff expressing what a huge difference the changes to the space are making for them and their clients. "Knowing we're playing a part in improving the lives of clients at CAMH who are engaging in Archway for support in dealing with their day-to-day struggles with schizophrenia makes us feel good about what we're doing," she says.



Sharon Portelli, Registrar for ARIDO

Design Community and Construction Industry Climb On Board

Sharon became involved with the project after meeting with **Jim Davey**, Coordinator of CAMH's Corporate Volunteer program, who introduced her to **Joan Loughran**, Recreation Therapist at the Archway Clinic.

Originally, Sharon says, the Archway staff asked if there was any advice or guidance that ARIDO members could give to help them best use the small budget they had to improve the space. But Sharon, whom Jim describes as a woman with compassion who understood the importance of creating a space of recovery and wellness, thought they could do more. She discussed the request with colleagues and members of the interior design community including **Mahesh Baboram** and **Dayna Bradley**. They had been looking for a cause to which they could make a contribution. She then recruited ARIDO Registered members for a design committee.

"One thing I've learned with this association is that our members and the industry are very generous in giving back to really important causes," she says. "We really took a shining to the Archway staff's dedication to their clients. Every time you meet with them they are always so positive. We wanted to do something to improve the environment not just for the clients but also for the staff for helping to support the clients of the Archway Clinic," she says.

The response for volunteers was so overwhelming that Sharon had to turn some people away and select those who had past experience with CAMH and understood the needs of the health care environment, as well as designers with office design experience.

Elsie Cheng of Elsie Cheng Design, another member of the design committee, says, "Of course, designers are so passionate about design, when we go into any space, we want to tackle everything." Rather, they looked at what could be accomplished within tight timelines to minimize disruption for clients and staff and was achievable within the health code regulations for the space.

The other aspect to consider was that the design committee set out to accomplish the project on the basis of completely donated labour and materials. They each sent out emails to their contacts and were surprised by the immediate and generous response. Naji says "The amount of people involved in this project is overwhelming, especially knowing that everybody is donating their own personal time on a part-time basis." (For a list of supporters see the [ARIDO website](#).)



Naji Mourani



Elsie Cheng

Involving the Clients in the Design

One of the first things the design committee volunteers did was meet with the clients to get their input into the redesign. When they visited the clinic, Elsie says, "We noticed that the clients were very excited to know who we were. When we said, 'We're volunteers, we're here to make your space beautiful,' their smiles were beaming." Elsie has been interested in mental health, watching documentaries and reading everything she can on the subject, since a graphic designer she knew died by suicide.

"The accent color that we came up with was in response to the user meeting that we had with the Archway clients who had expressed that they wanted something to do with nature. That's why we picked this particular green, which is quite muted, but bright enough that it's very calming," she says.

They are also going to be selecting some art depicting nature with the help of an arts consultant from Denison Gallery. "When clients go into the space, if it's winter outside some of the images will look like it's still summer or something bright rather than dull, which is really important," Elsie says.

The design committee also made some suggestions about the layout of the space in the clinic. "Just doing simple things like organizing the space and making it more uniform with colour, you feel lighter and more comfortable. If it's cluttered, you feel stressed out," says Naji, who has worked with CAMH projects in the past.

The ARIDO volunteers are also planning to give the staff more efficient work space and change the counters in the upstairs kitchen and meeting space. Naji says they had already secured a laminate counter when a supplier wrote to tell them that they would donate a stone Quartz countertop. They will also be installing new blinds in the downstairs program room that will let more light in, while retaining the privacy of the clients attending the programs.

The work is scheduled to be mostly completed by September with some smaller ongoing enhancements after that. Sharon says, "Every fall ARIDO has a gala where we celebrate excellence in design across Ontario. We actually want to use that opportunity on September 25th to bring some more exposure of Archway Clinic to our membership, to the industry and to share and celebrate the progress of the initiative with the industry."

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What a great story!

Sonia on August 15, 2013 1:05 PM



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