
 IMPROVING THE ENVIRONMENT OF HOSPICE CARE

The Reflection Room – a spiritual place

Marie Curie Hospice, Newcastle, used a Department of Health grant to create a space for reflection, prayer, meditation or recovery from stress and strain.

Joanne Garrett, principal social worker, and **Helen Sanderson**, designer, explain

Marie Curie Hospice in

Newcastle-upon-Tyne opened in 1995 with a small chapel on site. While the chapel met the religious needs of a small proportion of our patients and families, the hospice management team were concerned that there were many people whose religious or spiritual needs were not being met.

We were keen to create a space where patients and their families, regardless of whether or not they had a faith, would feel comfortable and welcome – a space where people could sit in quiet contemplation and reflection, either alone or in small groups. We wanted the focus of the room to be spiritual rather than religious. We did not want to create just another quiet room; instead we wanted a unique space that had the ‘wow’ factor and would provide an uplifting and nurturing environment.

Consultation

We consulted widely with patients, visitors, staff and volunteers on how they would like the room to look. Some common themes arose: use of water, opportunity to listen to calming music and light a candle, use of stained glass, softening the room and maintaining the view of the outside garden. Before work



The Reflection Room: a specially commissioned glass and metal wall sculpture, a water feature and simple, stylish furniture provide a calm and nurturing environment

started on the chapel, we erected a display board in the reception area that explained what we were doing and why we were doing it. We invited people to make suggestions for a name for the new room – ‘Reflection Room’ was suggested by several people and fitted into the designer’s theme of ‘water’.

Specialist advice

Although we had an idea of the elements we wanted in the room, we felt that we had neither the expertise nor the time to pull them together to make a cohesive whole. We contacted Helen Sanderson, who runs a design practice called Quiet Room Designs; Helen’s specialist knowledge and experience in designing

quiet and prayer spaces enabled us to turn our ideas into a reality.

When we first started talking about the project we were unsure how much our budget would be. As we were determined to create a unique space that incorporated a commissioned glass artwork and a water feature, we required more funds. In April 2010, we were delighted to learn that we had been successful in securing a grant from the Department of Health, through Help the Hospices.

What the Reflection Room means to users

The Reflection Room has been well received within the hospice. The water feature has

sand built into its structure with a candleholder at each corner. Relatives appear to take comfort in lighting a candle for their loved one, and on several occasions we have found the name of someone who has died written in the sand. The room also houses a memorial book containing the names of patients who have died in the hospice. Relatives often return to the hospice on the anniversary of a loved one’s death to view the book and spend some time in quiet reflection.

Two relatives sum up what the Reflection Room means to them:

“Peaceful and relaxing, giving you the chance to reflect on the life of your loved one.”

“A unique, serene haven of tranquillity that delights the senses. The room has a beautifully calming atmosphere. Congratulations.” ■

Links

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