

students learning with communities

Design For All

An Interior Design Intervention



Students Learning with Communities



Designing for Disability

This year a Community Based Research project took place between DIT students studying the Colour & Perception module in the BA Interior + Furniture Design Programme, and St. Michael's House staff and service users in Glasnevin. St. Michael's House provides services for around 1,600 children and adults in Dublin and Navan, Co. Meath. These include clinical and counselling, individualised support, early intervention, educational, vocational, employment, residential, respite, social, sporting and recreational services. It also provides specialist Alzheimer's services for people with intellectual disability.

Co-Design

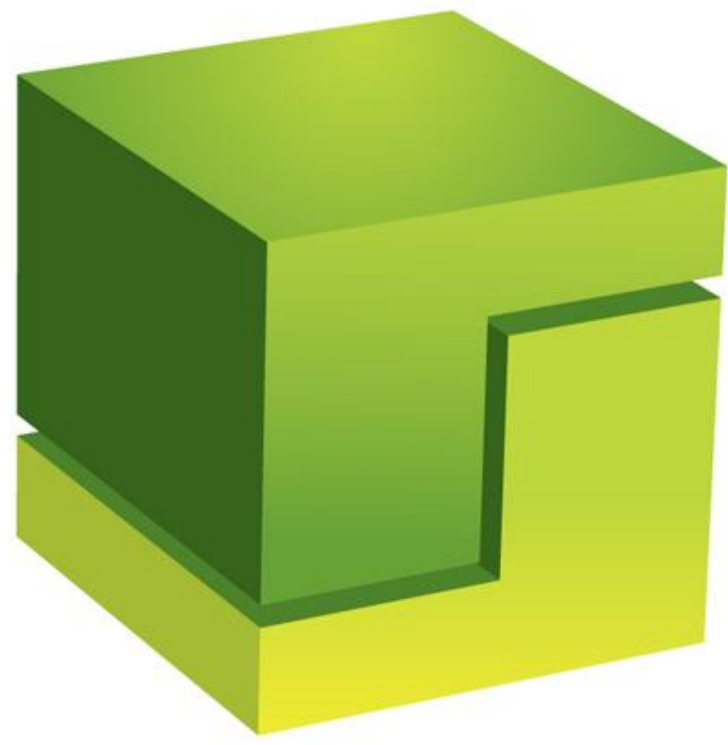
The DIT Programme for Students Learning With Communities (SLWC) supports staff and students engaging in community-based learning and research (also known as service-learning) projects, like this one, and builds links with communities. The project aimed to give design students the opportunity to reach out to organisations and to help them to understand how to use design effectively and economically, as well as learning how to apply their specialist skills in a community setting.

Universal Design For All

Working in teams, the students were challenged to research, develop and design a contemporary colour palette and new seating arrangements for the St. Michael's House dining and garden area, as well as learn about the specific design needs of the service users. Students needed to take into account various restrictive considerations for the space, remembering that it was multi-functional and used by over 60 people per day as well as being used for cooking classes, parties, social gatherings and dining.

The majority of service users suffer from some type of intellectual disability, memory loss, dementia and other related illnesses and therefore the shape, structure, durability and longevity of the furniture were a priority. The students visited the site twice, in the first instance to measure, take photos and meet the service users, in the second instance to present the designs to the service users for their feedback. The final presentation, in which the students unveiled their concept design presentations, was delivered in Rathdown House in the DIT Grangegorman Campus. The cost of each design was fully calculated and final presentations needed to be understood by a non-specialist audience.





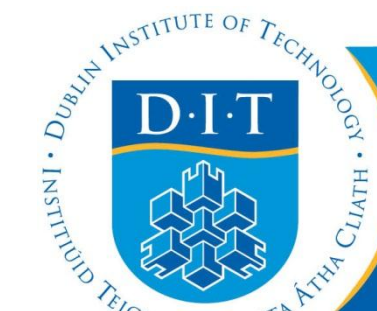
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DIT Access & Civic Engagement

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Final Designs

Approximately 30 service users and staff from St. Michael's House attended the final presentations. They also had an opportunity to socialize with the students and staff afterwards over tea, coffee and sandwiches. 3 Groups gave proposals; 1 group proposed using block colours (Red, Blue & Yellow), another group had a "Nature" theme with relaxing colours and bird design, while another group had a "Tropical" theme, with floating shelves, palm trees and bamboo panels. Feedback was given by the service users, as they gave their opinions to the students about their thoughts on the colours used, design features and voted for their favourite design.

The winning design was by the group who placed an emphasis on warm colours and took their inspiration from nature. They incorporated well-chosen health care facility furniture appropriate to the environment, but with a playful and contemporary feel. The students maintained the needs and requirements of the service users and the principles of colour theory and universal design as paramount, accommodating the varying uses required of the space. The service users themselves were particularly keen on the wall stencils of birds and nature.

By integrating the principles of universal design and co-design at an early stage in their education, the students were introduced to designing inclusively, with care, and with an instilled 'social responsibility' from the outset of this project. In order to accomplish this, the students required a real world opportunity to make a change for the common good, and understand its importance in the interior design process.

St. Michael's House were so happy with all the presentations, they will choose specific elements of each team's design proposals to implement in their new dining room. The event was a huge success and everyone thoroughly enjoyed the experience.



BA Interior & Furniture Design

Lecturer: Órla Keane

