
Designing for Dignity

Why Treatment Environments Matter

When we talk about behavioral health care, especially in correctional and juvenile facilities, the conversation often starts with staffing, security, and programming. But what's just as critical—and too often overlooked—is the environment where treatment happens.

Dr. Deanna Dwenger knows this reality intimately. With over 12 years of experience in correctional psychology—both on the clinical floor and in leadership roles—she's seen the consequences of spaces that strip away autonomy, natural light, and dignity. “People disengage. They shut down,” she says. “Or worse, they escalate. Self-harm. Aggression. Antagonism.”

These behaviors don't arise out of nowhere. They're shaped by the surroundings. When a room feels hostile, confusing, or sterile, it reinforces a sense of being unsafe. And when people don't feel safe, they don't heal.

The High Cost of the Wrong Environment

In facilities with harsh lighting, loud echoes, blank walls, and few personal touches, Dwenger saw patterns:

- Disorientation and distress from lack of natural light
- Increased self-harm and use of restraints in chaotic or cold spaces
- Antagonism and resistance in environments designed purely for control
- Disconnection and reduced staff safety, especially when there was no effort to make spaces feel welcoming or humanizing

It's not about luxury. It's about respect. As Dwenger puts it, *"People need spaces that affirm their autonomy, reflect their dignity, and allow them to be seen as more than a diagnosis."*



CARE ENVIRONMENT

What healing can look like

An expert perspective

Dr. Dwenger highlights how “creating environments that respect autonomy and dignity actually improves engagement in care.” In her experience, even simple changes—like spaces that allow personal items, soothing colors, or soundscapes—can dramatically reduce incidents of self-harm or aggression. And that doesn’t just benefit the patient. Safer environments also protect the providers working within them.

What Healing Can Look Like

That’s where CareAffirm comes in.

Traditional construction can take years to complete—time that communities don’t have.

Our prefabricated behavioral health rooms are designed to replace hostility with humanity. Featuring natural light, calming finishes, built-in sound therapy systems, and privacy-conscious layouts, each unit creates an environment that supports emotional regulation and meaningful engagement.

Our solutions address the very deficits Dwenger has encountered for years:

- Natural light for orientation and circadian regulation



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- Sound therapy systems to reduce agitation and promote calm
 - Soft finishes and thoughtful furniture that feel safe—not institutional
 - Safety features that protect both patients and providers
 - Modular construction that opens faster, with customizable, trauma-informed layouts

Environments That Reflect Worth

Dr. Dwenger emphasizes that for healing to take root, individuals must believe their life has value. When environments remove the shame and sterility so often baked into institutional settings, something shifts—both consciously and subconsciously. The message becomes clear: your progress matters.

That’s the power behind every CareAffirm build. These aren’t just prefabricated rooms—they’re environments crafted to affirm autonomy, dignity, and the inherent worth of each person inside. Because growth doesn’t happen in a vacuum. Especially in mental health care—and particularly for justice-involved populations—progress depends on the space making healing feel possible.

CareAffirm’s environments do exactly that. They offer more than functionality. They offer a chance to be seen, to feel safe, and to move forward.

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DR. DEANNA DWENGER



Thank you

Discover how CareAffirm's modular healthcare solutions enhance access, equity, and outcomes in behavioral health. Explore how CareAffirm environments create space for healing at careaffirm.com or contact us directly:

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