

Fortress or Sanctuary? Enhancing court safety by managing people, places and processes

Project Progress update November 2009

Project Summary

Courts, like other public buildings, are increasingly becoming fortresses as public anxieties about security are translated into barriers, electronic screening systems and enhanced surveillance. At the same time court administrators are trying to create environments that reduce stress, avoid intimidation, and respect cultural diversity. Restorative and therapeutic styles of justice have emerged to provide greater cultural and psychological safety. The project provides a comparative analysis of safety processes, practices and designs in five jurisdictions, documents the safety experience and expectations of stakeholders and develops best practice guidelines for providing safer court environments.

- Data on court safety and security will be collected from the five operational partners: Victorian Courts, South Australian Courts, Western Australian Court, Family Court, and New Zealand courts.
- Comparative analysis will be conducted to identify problems and offer solutions on how to provide a “sanctuary” for all court users instead of a “fortress.”

Progress to Date

- Summary of visits and preliminary interviews that have taken place so far in SA, WA, and NZ and to the Family Court.
- Summary of materials already collected from the Family Court.
- Industry partners have been encouraged to send administrative data to the Justice Research Group at University of Western Sydney.

Emerging Issues

Initial issues to emerge include:

- a tension between perimeter security and psychological safety and comfort of court users.
- striking a balance between improving design and enhancing client services.
- meeting safety and security needs both of staff and of court users (as well as the judiciary, police, and other stakeholders).

Future work

Proposed methods include:

- **Analysis** of administrative data provided by the courts. We will use a combination of incident reports, annual reports, safety procedures, and other relevant data to identify problems and points of comparison between jurisdictions
- **Interviews** with key stakeholders in each jurisdiction. This includes judges, security officers, and court support staff. We will identify the major problems and strategies stakeholders use to deal with security issues
- **Focus Groups or “User Juries”** of users of court space. Professional users of court space (such as court staff, security officers, lawyers, support staff, and judges) as well lay users (e.g. people from the jury pool) will be invited to tour various court spaces. These visits will be followed by a chance for a facilitated “deliberation” where feedback on their experience will be documented. The aim will be to explore how people experience court spaces, with a specific focus on perimeter security, accessing services, navigating the building, and managing private/public space.

Further Information:

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- **Activity maps** of court building will be completed by Professor Graham Brawn. Professor Brawn will tour court areas focusing on the interaction of people, objects, and space. Courts will be evaluated from an architectural perspective in terms of dynamics and flow.
- **Analysis** of client services practice, with an emphasis on courts that service vulnerable populations. Through a combination of interviews, surveys, and analysis of secondary data, we will examine reforms to client services that seek to improve safety and security for staff and clients. In particular, we will focus on how these reforms reduce stress and waiting time, and enhance privacy and comfort.
- **Satisfaction Surveys** will be completed by expert (staff and police witnesses) and lay users (jurors) of the court. These surveys will collect data on perceptions of safety and security as they move through court space. When courts change their procedures, we will attempt to collect data before and after changes.
- **Stakeholder consultations** and reporting back sessions. The purpose of this is to facilitate sharing between jurisdictions and develop best practice guidelines.

Input from Partners

In order to achieve these goals, we request the following support from partner organizations:

- Provision of administrative data as documented in the list provided to partners
- Support for user juries. This includes:
 - making available court staff and a judicial officer to take part in user juries
 - offering advice on suitable court buildings to visit
 - making meeting room available for user jury to deliberate
- Facilitate satisfaction surveys (see attached). Partners are asked to
 - Obtain agreement from relevant authorities, including ethics committee
 - Identify participants to complete survey (e.g. police witnesses and jurors)
 - Administer and collect survey
- Facilitate meetings with staff and stakeholders across jurisdictions. More specifically, we ask our partners to:
 - Identify times and places of relevant training events or other meetings to which staff from other jurisdictions might be invited
 - Make available staff to attend meetings in other jurisdictions.

Reporting Back

The Court of the Future Network is running a Justice Environments Conference on 20-22 May 2010 in Sydney. This will include a stream on court safety and security, with papers by members of the court safety team. We will also visit recent court buildings in Sydney to highlight some of the issues regarding court space and security. We will provide opportunities for feedback from our industry partners.

Ethics

The ethics application has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Ethics Committee.

Further details can be found at the Justice Research Group website: www.uws.edu.au/justice

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