

Supported Accommodation Group Homes Are they providing Quality of Life Care

La Trobe and the Tizard Centre UK are looking for those group homes which provide real quality of life care for people with high support needs

The culture of group homes has long been recognised as being important in realising a good quality of life for people with intellectual disabilities, but has been little researched.

The School of Social Work and Social Policy at La Trobe University, Australia, and the Tizard Centre, University of Kent, United Kingdom, have been awarded funding from the Australian Research Council to learn about the culture of highly performing group homes for people with high support needs. We want to understand what the staff culture in good group homes looks like, how it emerges, how it changes over time and what supports it. Our findings will help to inform organisational development, policy and practice in group homes.

The project brings together key researchers in this field, Professor Jim Mansell, Professor Chris Bigby, Dr Julie Beadle Brown, Dr Marie Knox and Dr Tim Clement. Together we have much experience in investigating quality of life in group homes.

Do you know a group home for people with severe and profound intellectual disabilities that you regard as being one of the best of its kind? You may work in such a setting or know one that you consider to be a flagship service. If you are able to recommend such a service in the broadest terms, (i.e. without breaching confidentiality) that might be invited to participate in this research, please contact Professor Christine Bigby, phone: (03) 9479 1016 or email: c.bigby@latrobe.edu.au. Alternatively, you could bring this newsletter item to the attention of a manager in the relevant organisation.

LISA Comment: This is certainly a wonderful initiative by the Australian Research Council - Research which is long over due!

We are, however, concerned the *Department of Human Services, Disability Accommodation Services (Victoria)*, will attempt to promote its direct care services. Any of which are well known for inconsistencies in their care level and quality, despite departmental care policies, standards and values being, generally, very good.

Some of the prime factors which drive poor service are: (a) the failure of management above house supervisor to set, monitor and maintain staff work values to provide service

within the direction, intention and spirit of care policies, standards and values, (b) the failure of management above house supervisor to properly man-manage direct care staff, to ensure they provide quality of life care within care, policies, standards and values. Whilst reducing direct care staff peer pressure, lore and disruptive behaviour and, (c) direct care staff work rosters compiled with the main focus on staff, not residents.

Some prime factors which drive good service are: (a) direct care staff who work pro-actively as a united team with common purpose and goals, (b) staff who work a balanced role interact with the residents whilst doing domestic duties, (c) staff who work well with, and respect families, (d) staff who treat the residents like they were their second family, (e) management who praise good staff, and correct and help those staff who are not so good, (f) a management and staff culture where the group home is first and foremost considered the residents home, not a staff workplace and, (g) moderate behaviour compatible residents, so direct care staff are not continuously doing very difficult behaviour management at the expense of quality of life care.

Finally, we would like to hear your views on what you consider are the good and not so good about group homes for those with high support needs.

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NOTE: We are always interested in feedback and information; general, specific, good or bad. if you wish anonymously: Our mail address is 73 Nepean Street, Watsonia, 3087