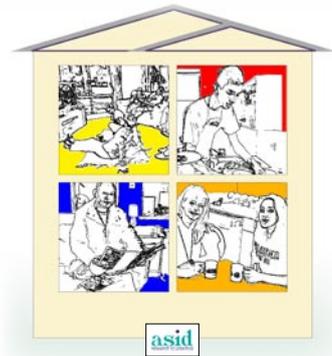


Is there such a thing as a Good Group Home?

The South Australian Experience

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South Australia (SA) is an interesting landscape with the underfunding of many group homes. Sometimes funding only just covers basic rosters and in some situations not even the basic roster. For many service providers the introduction of the NDIS will see reasonable and fair funding for the first time in many years.

As someone who has been involved in managing group homes for most of the last 28 years I am aware of the complexity of group homes and often feel that most funders had no concept of the complexity. Coupled with this is the disrespect and devaluing of the Support Workers (who are often called carers) and who are sometimes frowned upon if they are not willing to do the extras such as use their car for transporting a client or put in extra hours to ensure the person they support has access to time away from the home.

I am aware, again like many of my colleagues, that Group Homes are a flawed model. Compatibility issues alone make the model flawed but at present, even under an NDIS, there are not financially sustainable models for individuals with complex needs who live with an intellectual disability.

There has been a movement within SA to introduce Active Support, however this had varying results. As a Service Provider I have looked for solutions to assist in ensuring we were operating Good Group Homes. These solutions usually involve ensuring Support Staff understand their role, have the right values and the training. Active Support appeared to be the solution and over the last 8 years I have worked to implement Active Support alongside many of my colleagues from various organisations.

So it was with great anticipation that we awaited Chris Bigby's workshop.

It was an enlightening experience for us to hear from Chris the integration of

many research studies related to Group Homes. I had been following the studies, some of which have been going for over five years but the workshop gave a great opportunity to bring them all together, discuss them and be challenged.

I like many of my colleagues in SA are very thankful that someone has taken the bull by the horns and undertaken such comprehensive research on the least "sexy" area of disability research.

The take home messages for us were:

- It is complicated
- One thing alone will not work eg Active Support
- It takes a whole of organisational approach, for example HR practices are key
- There are now a range of Organisational Cultural factors that research tells us make a difference
- Your best performing group home can become the worst performing due to a single change such as a key Team Leader leaving
- Local leadership plays a key role in success
- The effort is constant and no can afford to take their eye off the ball so to speak

It is great to be able to utilise the research in conversations with staff, funders and Boards of Management.

Thank you Professor Bigby for a great enlightening workshop. It is reassuring that we are not alone and our experiences are similar both within SA and Australia. ●