

Is there such a thing as a Good Group Home?

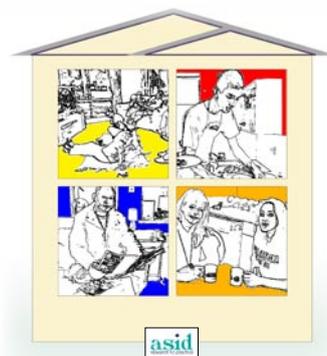
Commentary by Coral Farr

ASID Vic committee member

on a presentation by Prof Chris Bigby

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Melbourne



It was with great interest that I attended this workshop as both a practitioner in the disability sector as well having a family member living in shared supported accommodation. Recent media coverage (such as the Four Corners episode “Fighting the System” aired on the ABC on 27th March 2017) has revealed the negative consequences of abuse perpetrated on people with intellectual disabilities living in group homes. Professor Bigby’s research explored both the positive and negative factors that influence the quality of services delivered in the residential sector.

It was evident that Professor Bigby’s presentation attracted the attention of disability service organisations, carers and interest groups as the workshop was booked out. Attendees arrived from both interstate and rural areas.

Prior to the workshop, Chris sent an email with a dropbox containing workshop materials and class activities. This invaluable resource enabled participants to consider the different residential models and the quality of care outcomes for participants in these services.

Professor Bigby based her research on the Active Support model devised by Jim Mansell and Julie Beadle Brown (2012). Researchers observed and recorded the levels of engagement of participants in the activities of the house. These measurements were then applied to human rights standards as determinants of outcomes for people with intellectual disabilities.

Interestingly, Professor Bigby found that staffing levels did not influence the standard of care provided to group home participants. It was the culture of management and work practices of group homes that contributed to the quality of service provision. Professor Bigby asked participants to consider the mission statements of the organisations they work

for. How do these mission statements influence the policy and procedures, and implementation of work practices in the daily lives of people living in group homes?

Professor Bigby identified a number of key findings from her research which defined the differences between well run and poorly operated group homes.

1. Management is in touch with what happens at the level of direct service provision.
2. There is a culture of training, mentoring, monitoring and review applied at all levels of management and daily work practices in the group home. Regular opportunities provided for reflection on staff practice and participant outcomes during staff meetings and supervision sessions.
3. The quality of documentation did not necessarily indicate what happens in direct service delivery.
4. All stakeholders are on the same page and focused on achieving positive outcomes for the people they support.

Professor Bigby’s workshop was thought provoking with attendees contributing their experiences and perspectives on the issues raised.

The results of Professor Bigby’s research serves as a timely reminder that it is possible to achieve quality of life outcomes for people residing in group homes through a positive and committed approach to daily routines and continual appraisal of outcomes. Having an open, transparent and inclusive approach can build confidence and capacity for providing quality services to the people who are directly impacted by it.

The Victorian branch of ASID is planning to produce a podcast interview with Professor Bigby on this workshop. Keep a lookout for the link on the ASID website. ●