

SEEING GROUP HOMES DIFFERENTLY

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Outline of the Paper

- A brief overview of the literature on home
- Conceptualising group homes as homes, rather than a form of service delivery
- Presenting preliminary findings from PhD study

Home

- Home is a multi-dimensional concept, much more than bricks and mortar (Sixsmith, 1984; Despres, 1991; Annison, 2000; Tanner et al 2008)
- Home has social and relational elements at its core (Mallett, 2004); this is often called the essence of home
- Home is conceptualised in the literature as a refuge from the outside world, a sanctuary that is secure and stable (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998) and where self-expression is not constrained

Dimensions of Home

Psychological – security, emotional attachment and belonging

Physical – the built environment

Social – relationships and interactions within the home

Spiritual – a sense of belonging, sanctuary from the outside world

Descriptions of Home

- Giorgi et al (2007) describe home as

It is a place, a space, a set of feelings, customs, meanings, experiences or representations (p. 147).

- Mallett (2004) notes that meanings of home are constructed and negotiated both individually and with the people who share the home

Home For People with Intellectual Disabilities Who Live in Group Homes

- An immediate disparity occurs when comparing the literature on home, with the literature on group homes
- Home has been explored very differently for people with intellectual disabilities who live in group homes
- An absence of consideration of the dimensions of home identified for people without intellectual disabilities
- Strong links with institutional histories

Group Homes

- Group homes are the dominant form of contemporary accommodation and support for people with intellectual disabilities
- Service provision and research conventionally compares group homes to institutional living standards – this comparison is inadequate
- Group homes can no longer be defined as simply the antithesis of institutional living
- Group homes could/should be explored or examined as homes, and not as ‘non-institutions’

Focusing on House, Not Home

- The disability literature tends to be preoccupied with notions of homeliness and homelikeness, which focus on the physical aesthetics
- This, perhaps, arises from the institutional history of disability ‘services’
- The focus is on house – appearance, similarity to neighbourhood houses, physical space, furnishings – external applications of ideologies of ‘home’

Group Homes

- O'Brien (1994) identified 'non-home characteristics' – elements of group homes that were negatively influenced by organisational (institutional) routines, policies and procedures
- In 2010, group homes have failed to be 'transformed' as homes – Mansell (in Clement & Bigby, 2010) calls for a “...second wave of deinstitutionalisation from group homes to supported living is now required.” (p. 12)

Perhaps It's The Way We “See” Group Homes

- The literature on group homes clearly identifies group homes as ‘service delivery’ (the presence of rostered staff, routines, organisational policy and procedures)
- But...how do people who live in group homes see things?

The Study

- The group home (Lake House) is a home shared by 8 people with intellectual disabilities and is managed by a large organisation
- 6 people have consented to be part of the study, 2 people have declined to participate but have provided their permission for the research study to occur in their home
- 2 participants are male, 4 participants are female. None have lived in institutions previously
- Ethical approval has been granted

Methods of Inquiry

- Participant observation
- Photo voice techniques and visual ethnographic activities
- Conversations
 - Participant photography
 - “I told Mum that I’m a photographer now.”
 - “It’s just a laundry, love.”
 - Personal scrapbooks
 - “I showed my sister. She said it was awesome. Can I send her a copy?”
 - “Can I take my scrapbook to work to show my friends?”
 - Personal histories of ‘home’
 - “I don’t know love. Sam, do you know? Ask the staff, they have my file.”
 - “Oh we don’t have that information on file, it must be archived.”

Preliminary Findings

- Within the service delivery structures of Lake House, a home exists – as created by the residents – and a shared meaning of home is emerging
- Participants don't think of themselves as living in a service, even though they recognise the routines and procedures that are a result of living in a group home
- Extrinsic and intrinsic factors influence how meanings of home are constructed, and how home is experienced. The effect of staff is evident.

Preliminary Findings

<i>Rights & Responsibilities of Lake House Residents</i>	<i>Meanings of Home</i>
Don't hit other clients Don't leave the property Don't eat chips in the lounge room	Look after each other Don't dob!
Chores Roster	Sandy makes the best spaghetti
Staff Roster	Be quiet when [staff X] is on Yay [staff Y] is here!

Preliminary Findings

- Lake House is currently structured around the presence of rostered staff, routines required to meet organisational policy and procedural guidelines.
- *An informal service culture* as described by Clement & Bigby (2008) has been observed in Lake House. This culture can enhance or detract from the participants' experience of home.

Seeing Group Homes Differently

- The participants have challenged the view of group homes as ‘service delivery’. Instead, they are clearly saying ‘This is our home’ – they already have a home.
- What are the implications for researchers and service providers?

Seeing Group Homes Differently

- Comparing group homes to institutions is inadequate. Comparing group homes to 'ordinary homes' may also be inadequate.
- Focusing on the superficial, physical elements of home fails to acknowledge the other dimensions of home.
- People with intellectual disabilities need to be included in future research.
- Group homes are homes, in every sense of the word, and further research is required to understand how meanings of home are constructed.

The Challenge

- Imagine if we started seeing group homes differently?
- It doesn't cost any money
- We don't need new legislation or funding
- You can do it right now!
- It might not solve all the systemic problems but what would it mean if we started seeing group homes as homes, and what could we do if we started today?