

# Organisational Culture in Group Homes for People with Intellectual Disabilities

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## What's the problem?

In Australia, group homes are a main form of supported accommodation for adults with intellectual disabilities. Group homes typically accommodate 3 to 8 people with intellectual disabilities, with 24 hr staff support. Research shows there is variability in service quality and quality of life (QOL) outcomes for group home residents. To explain this variability, researchers have examined a range of variables, including staff qualifications, training, support practices, motivation, practice leadership and aspects of organisational management. The two most strongly associated factors are service user characteristics and staff support practices.

Many researchers have identified culture as an important factor influencing staff support practice and thus QOL outcomes for people with intellectual disabilities. Qualitative studies by La Trobe researchers identified dimensions of group home culture and features that differentiated underperforming and better group homes (Bigby et al., 2016; 2012). However, the nature and influence of culture on outcomes for residents of group homes remains unclear, and there is no easy way of measuring it.

## Research Aims

The first aim of this PhD research (Study 1) was to address a research gap by developing an instrument to measure dimensions of culture in group homes – named the Group Home Culture Scale (GHCS) – and to evaluate its psychometric properties. Using the GHCS, the second aim (Study 2) was to examine the dimensions of group home culture that predict QOL outcomes.

## Study 1: Development of the GHCS

### What we did

Development of the GHCS involved four sequential stages.

**Stage 1 Item Generation:** 197 items were generated, which were developed by drawing on qualitative research conducted by Bigby and colleagues into group home culture (Bigby et al., 2016; 2012).

**Stage 2 Expert Review:** To refine and reduce the items, four academics with expertise in group homes reviewed the content and clarity of the items, resulting in 164 items identified as tapping dimensions of group home culture.

**Stage 3 Cognitive Interviews:** To test the items, 16 interviews were conducted with people who had experience of working in group homes. Participants completed questionnaires and were asked during interviews how they understood and interpreted the items. After this stage, 86 items remained.

**Stage 4 Questionnaire Administration:** The 86-item GHCS was administered to frontline staff who worked in group homes. In total, 343 staff from 10 nongovernment organisations completed questionnaires. The statistical method of exploratory factor analysis was used to identify the underlying structure among the variables.

### What we found

The exploratory factor analysis indicated that the GHCS comprises 46-items and measures group home culture according to seven dimensions. The dimensions, their names and descriptions are presented in Figure 1. Cronbach's alpha for the dimensions ranged from .81 to .92, indicating very good internal consistency.

### Acknowledgements

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### References

Bigby, C., & Beadle-Brown, J. (2016). Culture in better group homes for people with intellectual disability at severe levels. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 54*(5), 316-331.  
Bigby, C., Knox, M., Beadle-Brown, J., Clement, T., & Mansell, J. (2012). Uncovering dimensions of culture in underperforming group homes for people with severe intellectual disability. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 50*(6), 452-467.



Figure 1. Dimensions of the GHCS

## Study 2: Dimensions of Group Home Culture as Predictors of QOL Outcomes

### What we did

As part of the larger longitudinal study of Active Support in group homes, the GHCS was used to measure staff culture in 23 group homes, managed by five organisations. QOL data were available from 98 people with intellectual disabilities. Multilevel modelling was used to examine the associations between the GHCS subscales and QOL outcomes for group home residents.

### What we found

Two GHCS subscales - Effective Team Leadership and Alignment of Staff with Organisational Values - significantly predicted residents' engagement in activities. Supporting Well-Being significantly predicted residents' community involvement.

## Conclusion

This research has developed the GHCS, an instrument to measure dimensions of culture in group homes. The findings suggest that strategies to improve Effective Team Leadership and Supporting Well-Being dimensions of culture can contribute to enhancing certain QOL outcomes. However, data currently being collected with a much larger sample is likely to identify other dimensions of culture associated with QOL outcomes.

The GHCS can be used by organisations to measure staff perceptions of their work culture. Information collected with the GHCS can be used by organisations to understand culture in group homes and identify opportunities to improve it. Researchers from Canada and Germany have already shown interest in using this scale as well as a number of disability organisations.