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Abstract

This paper was written following the author's attendance at an Accommodation seminar by Michael Kendrick, the Director of the Institute for Leadership and Community Development, Massachusetts. It discusses the difference between homes generally where support is being provided - how these homes are usually 'empty' and cold - and that service workers need to think about aspects of a person's physical surrounds which make a home a real home. **Keywords:** **Accommodation**

The following article was submitted spontaneously by Robert Wilson following Michael Kendrick's Quality Issues in Accommodation Seminar. Thank you Robert for your thoughts.

HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

The recent Michael Kendrick workshop 'Quality Issues in Accommodation' really emphasized the importance of '**Home**'.

Home means many things to people, not the bricks, doors, windows that make the house but where I can be me, safe, comfortable and in control. These are but a few from a list of many of those things that make our houses, homes. When I think about my home, I think about a major part of my life. My home is the place I live and share with my wife all the joys and sorrows that our lives bring. It is the place where I come home, take off my shoes, make a coffee and sit down and feel good about my life and surrounds.

For most people with disabilities this is far from truth or reality. For many people their home is a house, a place to share with an endless progression of paid workers who pass through their life like carriages in a train station. Unlike most carriages these are mainly empty, very rarely stopping to pick up passengers.

When we talk about homes, we often describe things that make our homes special and important to us, our gardens, that latest plant we purchased, the friends we recently entertained and that place where I know I belong. When we talk about the homes of people with disabilities we often talk about a place where we work, communication books, staff rooms, medication records, staff cupboards etc. These are just a few of the things we, do in the name of supporting people to have homes.

I only need to look around my home or any of the homes of the people close to me to see the vast differences from those homes of people receiving support, which are usually empty, cold and institutional like. In those homes there are bare walls, no family pictures and the central most noticeable attraction is the staff pin-up board or roster.

Where do we lose it? Somewhere between the time we leave our homes and arrive at the home of the person we are paid to support we lose it. It makes me question why is it different for the people we support? Michael Kendrick suggests it's how *we view others*. Are the people we serve not the same as other people, as us? Doesn't everyone have similar needs? Is home less important because I have a disability? There are people who receive services for many years and from many different agencies.

They are people who have moved house on more than one occasion and have always moved into a *house*. I use the word "house" because on nearly every occasion there haven't been any real attempts to help the person make a home. There have been attempts to make some peoples' houses home - like (or like their home). Home-like is a cover up. It's an attempt to make us feel better about what we do in the name of support. The effort and commitment that is required in helping people to have a home is seriously lacking. More effort is generally made in making it a "home" that best supports the agency/worker needs. Very often the house needs to be comfortable and workable for the worker e.g. notice boards, an office etc.

If we are going to get serious about helping people to have a home that provides all the things that we know make a home, then we need to be committed to helping people build their home with their own personal touch, which says this house is my *home*. Encouraging home life, where someone can invite family and friends and feel good about where they are, who they are and where they fit, should be the primary focus of any good support we offer people.

Home can be the basis for feeling good about yourself as well as a place to retreat when things aren't going all that well. When supporting a person to have a home, consider what best would make this house a *home*.

What personal touches could I help someone bring to his or her home? What roles will I play and how much of me will there be in any decisions made?

Helping someone choose such things as pictures, curtains, where the lounge will go or how the bedroom will be set up can be difficult. It is those personal touches that reflect and are imbedded in 'Who I am'. Ask yourself - 'In what ways could I minimize my influence? One way would be to put the person first, so that any influence would be directed by your understanding of who the person is, likes, dislikes. More important is an awareness of when you need to be actively involved and when to have a background role. Once someone is off and running then your background role might be in assisting someone in inviting family and friends to share their home or in maintaining it's appearance etc.

Home is where the heart is and it is in home making that we open up to the possibilities of sharing our lives.