Making life good in the community: The importance of practice leadership and the role of the house supervisor

‘I believe the house supervisor’s role is the key role in DAS [Disability Accommodation Services]….It’s the most important role. If you look at your direct care staff, house supervisor and the team manager, I think the house supervisor counts for 50 per cent of it, 25 per cent direct care staff and the team manager even less. It’s the most important role, that’s what I believe’. (M/23/I)

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La Trobe University
School of Social Work and Social Policy

November 2007
Making life good in the community: The importance of practice leadership and the role of the house supervisor

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Foreword

Making life good in the community is a three year research project that is examining how best to support people with an intellectual disability living in group homes to lead fulfilling lives. It is being conducted by researchers from La Trobe University, on behalf of the Department of Human Services.

The focus of the first stage of the project was an action research study where the researchers spent time in a selected group of houses established as part of the Kew Residential Services Redevelopment. The results of this stage are documented in the earlier study, Making life good in the community: the story so far.

The early findings highlighted the importance of the house supervisor’s role and identified it as an important research area to be explored in its own right. This report is the product of this research.

We know that house supervisors can have a profound impact on the lives of the residents. We also know that their role, while rewarding, is complex and demanding. They define the culture and establish the environment through their practice leadership which influences staff and in turn directly influences the quality of life of the residents in their care.

This important research assists us to more clearly define the knowledge, skills and abilities needed for success in the role of house supervisor. It provides advice and guidance on how the role of house supervisor can best be supported within the Department.

This is a very informative report. It draws heavily on interviews with house supervisors and participant observation. The strong commitment to provide the best possible lifestyle for the residents is a common theme in many of the quotations from the interviews. The research findings also draw from leading international research findings in this field.

The findings of this report are consistent with the themes of other recent work within the Disability Services Division. The critical nature of the house supervisor position is often highlighted, and the need to build the capacity of individuals performing this role, along with other managers overseeing residential services, is a priority for the division. This report will be included as an important reference for business improvement initiatives that the Division is planning for the disability accommodation workforce.

I wish to thank the researchers, Christine Bigby and Tim Clement, for their high quality report and all the house supervisors and other staff along with the Steering Committee who have framed and guided this research.

I commend this report for your consideration.

Arthur Rogers
Executive Director, Disability Services, Department of Human Services
Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

Background

*Making life good in the community* is a three-year research project which is examining better ways to support people with intellectual disabilities to lead fulfilling lives. Its primary focus has been to explore how the lives of former residents of Australia’s largest and oldest institution for people with disabilities, Kew Residential Services, have changed since a major redevelopment in which more than 360 residents have moved to smaller group homes. Early findings highlighted the significance of the house supervisor’s role and identified it as an important research area to be further explored within the project.

This report discusses the findings in relation to this specific research area, which had the following broad aims:

- **To clearly define what is expected of house supervisors**
- **To make clearer the meaning of the practice manager/leader term**
- **To examine the question: ‘How can people in the role of the house supervisor best be supported and developed by the Department of Human Services?’**

Methodology

Four methods were used to gather data: semi-structured interviews, diaries, documentary analysis, and participant observation. Sixteen house supervisors and five managers within Disability Accommodation Services took part in interviews. The sample was selected by senior managers within the Department of Human Services, who were asked to nominate individuals who they saw as performing at a high level. The selected supervisors also completed timelogs so that a picture of activity patterns could be collected and analysed. Additionally the research analysed selected policy documents produced by the Department, and drew upon earlier work in which the researchers worked alongside staff in five selected houses that had opened as part of the Kew redevelopment, observing interactions and styles of support.

Key findings

A list of 141 house supervisors’ competencies has been developed (see *Appendix A*); this outlines the knowledge, skills and abilities required to be a successful house supervisor. This list of competencies can be used for recruitment, performance standards, and the training and development of house supervisors.
Executive summary

Several common factors were identified in house supervisors’ personal orientation to their role. The 16 supervisors typically expressed a passion for their role, a sense of ‘vocation’ and a desire to make a positive difference to the lives of those they are supporting. They also were attracted to the opportunities for autonomy and control that are available in the house setting, and enjoyed the chance to be immersed in residents’ lives at a ‘hands-on’ level. The house supervisors in the study also cited the requirements of stamina and flexibility – the ability to move seamlessly between various roles – as being important to successful performance. They believed that the shift-work suited their work-life balance and fitted in well with their lifestyles. These findings about house supervisors’ values and attitudes could benefit future recruiting processes.

The research highlights variability in the workplaces in which house supervisors operate. Some of these stem from the personal characteristics of the individuals living in the houses, who vary widely in their level of intellectual disabilities, physical impairments, health issues, and behaviours. There are also structural variables — differences in the number of residents in each home, and the number of staff employed to support them, can impact significantly on a house supervisor’s workload. Resources are sometimes allocated quite differently (examples are whether a house has its own transport or a scheduled meeting on the roster). The skill mix of staff working in houses (such as their literacy and computer competence) can also have wide variations.

The concept of ‘practice leadership’ in relation to the house supervisor’s position is developed. Use of this concept emphasises the demanding nature of the direct support job and reinforces the importance of good support to those people engaged in supporting people with intellectual disabilities. Practice leadership was defined by everyday terms, such as coaching, directing, role-modelling, supervising, and supporting. House supervisors’ practice needs to be competent and it must be seen by direct support staff. Practice leaders need to actively, consciously and deliberately make clear to direct support staff what they should do and how they should do it.

Organisational constraints and the house supervisor role

The findings suggest significant variability between settings in the organisation of services and resources, which has resulted in an uneven playing field for each supervisor’s chances to excel in the role. For some house supervisors the service is not resourced or structured in a way that makes it possible for them to effectively fulfil the role. The paper suggests that the workload of many house
Executive summary

The role of house supervisors is out of balance, and aspects of the job that are specifically related to practice leadership need to be brought centre-stage.

Opportunities for effective supervision, coaching, feedback and role modelling are limited by current rostering structures; house supervisors’ chances to model good practice, or observe their staff in action, are restricted if they work infrequently with other staff members, especially part-timers or casual staff. House supervisors may not be aware of the day-to-day work of their employees and so many direct support staff are performing with limited help.

The frequency of planned formal supervision meetings and house meetings varies from house to house. House supervisors are too often reliant on the good will of some staff members to attend house meetings or rearrange their rostered hours to attend planned formal supervision meetings. The Department needs to actively emphasise the importance of house meetings and planned formal supervision by factoring them into roster arrangements, to demonstrate that these are ‘non-negotiable’ aspects of the direct support role rather than optional extras.

A number of house supervisors have experienced significant and regular turnover at team manager level, which is detrimental to the good support of house supervisors and the development of quality services.

The paper discusses four supervision modes (based on two dimensions, planned and unplanned supervision, formal and informal supervision); planned informal supervision appears to be the least frequently used by house supervisors. Greater use of this mode of supervision (‘on the job’ coaching) could have significant benefits for service quality and further opportunities for it to be developed should be explored.

The ‘practice leader’ aspect of the house supervisor role could be further strengthened by allowing house supervisors a bigger say in recruiting staff, and more control and responsibility over the management of poorly performing direct care staff. While this expansion of the role could have implications for workload, changes to the structure of the job to allow for non-contact time, and organisational support in time-management and resource allocation, could allow for the job balance to be more appropriately aligned.
Executive summary

Developmental work

The following recommendations are made about future directions in which the Department could move to strengthen the house supervisor’s role:

- Resources should be allocated to clarify and embed the Department’s Professional Development and Supervision Policy.

- Training to enable house supervisors to confidently use different modes of supervision should be developed and delivered.

- Incorporating planned informal supervision into a house supervisor’s repertoire of interventions is an important developmental area and a potentially useful research project.

- A more academic piece of work should be undertaken which develops a better theoretical understanding of practice leadership.

- The Department should look to create a level playing field so that regardless of where house supervisors work, they have similar chances of being an effective house supervisor.

- Specific resources should be allocated for planned formal supervision meetings and house meetings.

- It needs to be recognised that part-time and casual staff have an equal need to benefit from good supervision.

- The Department should look for ways to create stability in the relationship between house supervisor and team manager.

- The Department should consider ways in which the house supervisor’s managerial position can be strengthened.

- Each house supervisor’s workload should be reviewed.

- The role of DDSO2 (Disability Development Support Officer 2, commonly known as a deputy house supervisor) should be clarified.

- The team manager’s role should be reviewed.
1. Introduction

Making life good in the community is a three-year research project that is broadly concerned with discovering ways of supporting people with intellectual disabilities to lead the best possible lives. This is consistent with the Victorian Government’s vision for all people with disabilities, outlined in the Victorian State Disability Plan 2002-2012 (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2002b).

Although the primary focus of Making life good in the community is the lives of former residents of Kew Residential Services, feedback regarding our earlier report The Story So Far (Clement, Bigby, and Johnson, 2007) suggested that our provisional findings resonated more broadly. One of the reasons for this could be that, regardless of where people with intellectual disabilities live or work, their opportunities to enjoy a good lifestyle in supported accommodation are, in most cases, not fully exploited. Amongst other things, the research evidence suggests that many people living in group homes spend much of their day waiting for activities to happen; there are few chances to make choices in day-to-day matters; little community presence; and few relationships with people without intellectual disabilities or paid staff (Emerson and Hatton, 1994).

This report focuses on the position of the house supervisor in the Department of Human Services’ ‘community residential units’, hereafter referred to as ‘group homes’, ‘supported accommodation’, ‘houses’ or ‘homes’. The house supervisor’s job description states that it is their duty to ‘manage a component of a residential program providing direct care services to clients’ (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2002a, p.1). The house supervisor’s post and its equivalent in other organisations are often identified as being key to the delivery of high-quality services in any supported accommodation setting. The Department of Human Services operates more than 500 group homes and there are at least another 400 supported accommodation settings managed by Community Service Organisations in Victoria¹. We believe that the findings presented in this report have relevance beyond the redevelopment of Kew Residential Services and are therefore of interest to anyone working in, living in, or managing supported accommodation services.

¹ These figures include houses that provide respite care (Alma Adams, Manager of Kew Residential Services, personal communication, May 14 2007).
2. Research context and key questions

The story so far: Claims from our earlier work

Hewitt and Larson (2005) claimed that the house supervisor’s position is one of the most complex and difficult jobs in the field of community human services. On the basis of their research they concluded:

*We are now beginning to appreciate that for direct support professionals, it is the frontline supervisor who defines the job, provides the training, mediates the stresses, creates the culture, helps people find the personally satisfying rewards of direct support work, and establishes a well-functioning work environment (p.133).*

That the house supervisor is crucial to the effective management of the Department’s supported accommodation is also reflected in our earlier writing.

*Supervisors, as managers, should live and believe in the values of the organisation, promote them amongst the staff he or she manages, and monitor how they are put into practice. Supervisors should help direct care staff to understand policy, rules and procedures in a way that is consistent with a client’s best interests and give feedback to his or her manager when they operate in the opposite way (Clement et al., 2007, p.85).*

These views about the position of the house supervisor suggest a strong link between the management role and service quality. Yet in her recent review of the literature Gifford (2006) writes that:

*Literature identifies front-line managers as playing an essential role in determining quality of care in residential services, and highlights their considerable influence upon support staff. Despite the centrality of their role, their work and experiences largely have been neglected within the research arena (p.3).*

Given the paucity of research literature it is not our intention to load the front-end of this report with more general literature that can be found elsewhere, but to locate the research rationale in our earlier work. *The Story So Far* (Clement et al., 2007) highlighted the importance of the house supervisor’s position and also contained a number of claims about the role. These claims are repeated here as a means of contextualising this study and stating its purpose (see Clement and Bigby, 2006). In addition to the claims embedded in the earlier quotation from *The Story So Far*, we also claimed that:
2. Research context and key questions

- House supervisors have an influence on the attitudes and behaviour of the people they manage.
- House supervisors who practise a permissive style of management contribute to variability in the practices of the direct care staff they manage.
- House supervisors would benefit from support and training for the position based on a training needs analysis that considers the organisational context, the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to perform in the supervisor’s role, and an analysis of the individual people in those positions.
- Different understandings and usage of the ‘management’ and ‘leadership’ terms suggest that it is unclear how and when supervisors are expected to fulfil a management or leadership role.
- Ambiguous and conflicting messages about the Department’s policies impact on the ability of house supervisors to carry out their role effectively.
- There is not always a clear link between what house supervisors are expected to do and the organisation’s values and strategic direction.
- The house supervisor’s job description may not clearly describe what it is supervisors are expected to do.
- The rosters determine how much time house supervisors spend with the staff they manage and their time is unevenly spread across the staff team.
- Removing the house supervisor (or the staff he or she manages) from a house for significant periods of time impacts on the ability of house supervisors to manage the house effectively.
- Vacant positions that remain unfilled for lengthy periods impact on the ability of house supervisors to manage the house effectively
- The dispersed nature of the service, that is, small houses spread over urban and rural Victoria, creates relatively autonomous work groups within those houses.
- House supervisors provide low levels of formal supervision to the direct support staff they manage.
- House supervisors are more or less competent in relation to the core competencies required to do the job and this has an impact on their ability to manage effectively.²

² We are not using the notion of competent/incompetent in a derogatory way. The knowledge, skills and abilities required by people to do a job are often stated as employment-
2. Research context and key questions

We used the term ‘claim’ consciously, following Hammersley’s (1988) distinction between ‘claims’ and ‘conclusions’. They were based on the evidence we had gathered to date, which was data gathered from a small number of houses, and acknowledged that it was too soon to draw any more general conclusions about the position of the house supervisor.

Discussions at a workshop which was arranged to discuss some early findings with a range of stakeholders, and ongoing dialogue with the research steering committee, reinforced the belief that the house supervisor’s position was an important research area and should receive priority within the Making life good in the community project.

The primary research purpose: What is expected of house supervisors?

Our exploration of the issues in our earlier paper identified the primary purpose of this research, which is to clearly define what is expected of house supervisors (Clement and Bigby, 2006).

Of the literature that we reviewed in preparation for this study we are indebted to the work of Sheryl Larson, Amy Hewitt and their colleagues at the University of Minnesota in the United States of America. Although there have been some initiatives to identify the competencies of direct support staff, Hewitt et al. (2004) found that there had not been a similar effort to identify the competencies required by frontline supervisors in community settings. Their research attempted to fill this gap through a comprehensive job analysis to identify ‘the competencies required of frontline supervisors to work effectively in community services to support the community inclusion, self-determination, and other contemporary support goals for persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities’ (p.123).

Using focus group techniques (146 participants comprising 97 direct support staff, 40 frontline supervisors, and 7 managers) they identified 142 competency statements, which were organised into 14 competency areas. They encouraged other organisations to review this list of competencies, that is to validate their findings in other contexts. Chapter 3 details how we went about this.

Competency and job analysis

Competency-based approaches have been used by the Department of Human Services. For example, a competency-based model underpins the Certificate IV in Disability Work. In 2005 the Department reported that 900 employees had either completed or were currently studying this qualification (Victorian Department of

*led competency statements. As we shall see the position of house supervisor can be defined by a large number of competencies.*
Human Services, 2005b). Although the concept of ‘competence’ has pervaded just about every environment where training and education takes place, it has received its fair share of criticism (Hyland, 1993; Lum, 1999). Two key criticisms that we want to briefly address here are: that there is no agreed definition of ‘competence’; and that some approaches focus on what people ‘do’, thereby marginalising what they ‘know’.

Indeed, Hewitt et al. (2004; 1998) do not provide a definition of how they are using ‘competence’. We suggest that their approach is closest to an ‘outcome model’, which defines and describes what a person in a particular job role is expected to achieve (Boag, 1998). This approach therefore meets the stated purpose of this research.

The more complex a competency, the more important it is for a person to know why he or she should behave in a particular way: that is, *knowledge* and *understanding* are important. Given the complexity of the house supervisor’s position, underpinning knowledge is essential. Hewitt et al. (1998) go some way towards addressing this requirement by identifying performance indicators for each competency, some of which involve the need to assess knowledge and understanding. Time constraints meant that it was never our intention to provide performance indicators, but this could be one way of utilising our work.

Framing the validation of the North American competencies as a ‘job analysis’ allows us to move beyond surface behaviour and ensures that we consider underpinning knowledge and understanding. Berman, Bowman, West, and Van Wart (2001) define a job analysis as, ‘A systematic process of collecting data for determining the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform a job successfully and to make numerous judgements about the job’ (p.142). Completing this job analysis is the first step in informing many of the issues that we have raised during the course of the *Making life good in the community* research.

We have chosen to make links to the relevant literature towards the end of the report when presenting and discussing our findings. We hope that this study may go some way towards filling the gap in the research literature identified by Gifford (2006) by providing some empirical evidence about the house supervisor’s role.

2. Research context and key questions

Supervision and Management in Nonprofits and Human Services, as well as following up sources given in the list of references.

**Looking upstream: Maintaining a systemic orientation**

An important idea that is reflected in our writing about *Making life good in the community* is that staff practice is influenced by the organisation in which they work. We borrowed the term ‘upstream issues’ from Egan and Cowan (1979) to suggest that some of what we uncovered in the houses will need a more systemic focus.

The quality of house supervisors is only one element in establishing and maintaining high quality services; we also need to pay attention to the context in which they are managing (Henderson and Atkinson, 2003). A good house supervisor can be thwarted in her efforts to manage effectively. As Burton (1998) writes, ‘It is rare for the manager of the Home...to be sufficiently determined (and lucky) to resist the management failures of the organisation which runs the Home’ (p.xv).

Some of the factors that need to be present to establish and maintain a high-quality service are articulated by Emerson and Hatton (1994):

- Service resources (such as material resources, staff resources and skills, and location of service)
- Internal organisation of services (for example, managerial structures and support for care staff, and a structured and skilled learning environment)
- Leadership and management.

Our systemic orientation led to a second research focus, which is: **How can people in the role of the house supervisor best be supported and developed by the Department?** Asking this question helps to ensure that the responsibility for delivering quality lifestyles is distributed throughout the organisation.

**‘Practice management’ and ‘practice leadership’**

Table 1 shows that house supervisors are *directly engaged in practice* and are responsible for the *management of the day-to-day practice of others*, a distinction made by Causer and Exworthy (1999).
Table 1
Duties listed in the DDSO3/(House Supervisor, Community Residential Unit) Job description (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2002a).

- Manage a component of a residential program providing direct care services to clients in a range of settings according to the principles of relevant legislation.
- Participate in the selection, recruitment, orientation, in service training and appraisal of staff.
- Develop, implement and monitor the effectiveness of Individual Program Plans.
- Co-ordinate, and directly provide where necessary, skills training in daily living activities.
- Ensure clients receive appropriate support with daily living and self care activities and directly provide that support where necessary.
- Ensure the provision of general household management functions including assisting with household tasks and maintaining appropriate records.
- Participate in the development of General Service Plans for clients.
- Liaise and negotiate with associated community agencies to ensure the continuity of care for clients and that program goals are met.
- Provide advice and information to clients, their families and other service providers.
- Provide client prescribed medication in accordance with Service guidelines.

What is expected of house supervisors is nicely captured by Reynolds (2003) suggestion that frontline managers are required ‘to face in more than one direction’ (p.16). House supervisors are responsible for developing and maintaining good services but also need to be sure that action is in line with the Department’s policy, legal requirements and available resources. The frontline manager is therefore an important channel between direct support staff, service-users, family members and more senior managers.

Reynolds (2003) applies the term practice-led management to the frontline manager’s position, where the demands of practice situations need to be kept in focus. She writes:

*These links between practice and management are very important in considering the role of the frontline manager. Whatever the layers and length of lines of accountability and management in an organisation, the frontline manager is the closest person in the managerial hierarchy to the delivery of the service or practice.... It gives the frontline manager a unique perspective on the needs of service users, the responses they receive and the extent to which responses meet needs.... the frontline manager is in*
2. Research context and key questions

*touch with the action ‘at the sharp end’, and this carries particular responsibilities (p.7).*

The acknowledgement that house supervisors are practice managers (after Reynolds, 2003) or practice leaders (after Mansell, Beadle-Brown, Ashman, and Ockenden, 2004), who have a key role in supporting the effective performance of the direct support staff, was highlighted by members of the research steering committee as a concept that needed further explication. In the process of bringing out what is expected of house supervisors and articulating how the post can be supported, we have kept in mind this additional broader research aim, that of **making clearer the meaning of the practice manager/leader term.**

*Summarising the research focus and questions*

In writing this report we have kept a threefold focus. Our research has been guided by the notion of the house supervisor as practice manager/leader, and that bringing out what may be implicitly contained in this concept can be answered by our two primary research questions:

- What is the role of the house supervisor?
- How can people in the role of the house supervisor best be supported and developed?
3. Methodology

In undertaking this research we have used four methods to gather data: observation, documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews, and diaries. Combinations of these methods are commonly used in completing a job analysis (Berman et al., 2001). We deal with participant observation and documentary analysis briefly and write at greater length about the other two research methods.

Ethics

*Making life good in the community* received ethics approval from the ethics committees of La Trobe University, RMIT University and the Department of Human Services. As this project was a departure from the original research proposal, approval was sought and given from the Department’s Ethics Committee. Consenting participants were given separate consent forms for the interview and diary elements.

Participant observation and documentary analysis

Participant observation has been undertaken in five houses. This research method and the provisional findings from three of those houses have been written about elsewhere (Clement et al., 2007). As has already been made clear in Chapter 1, this earlier work was the genesis of this study and as we shall see is an important reference point that increases its ‘credibility’ (see Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Readers who are interested in reading more about how we used this particular research method should refer to *The Story So Far* (Clement et al., 2007).

We have made selective use of the Department’s documents (see Forster, 1994), typically being alerted to look at specific documents when gathering other types of data. For example, in discussing house supervisors’ use of formal supervision meetings we make links to the Professional Development and Supervision Policy and Practice Guidelines (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2005e). Given the volume of documents that the Department produces it would have been impossible to read and analyse them all. Where necessary we have referred to documents to reinforce the accuracy of our findings and have used selected documents to illustrate certain points. The documents we have referred to are cited in the text and appear in the list of references.

Semi-structured interviews

We used the 142 competency statements identified in the job analysis undertaken by Hewitt et al. (1998) as the basis for semi-structured interviews with house supervisors and more senior managers. The interview was piloted with two house supervisors from the original *Making life good in the community* sample. The aim
was to affirm the relevant statements, eliminate any irrelevant statements, add in additional competencies that are required for the Department’s context in Victoria, and ensure the wording was clear.

Semi-structured interviews make use of questions that are set in advance, but also give the interviewer the flexibility to probe responses and explore particular areas of interest (Brewerton and Millward, 2001; Robson, 1993). Participants were prompted to share examples of good practice and asked for their views about things that facilitate or impede house supervisors from fulfilling the 14 different competency areas. The interviews also afforded the opportunity to ask specific questions about issues that had emerged from the earlier fieldwork. Each interview lasted about two hours and was recorded except for two cases, where the respondents requested that the interviews should not be recorded.

**Interview sample and details**

We interviewed an extreme sample (Miles and Huberman, 1994) of 16 highly performing house supervisors from three metropolitan regions, three team or cluster managers, one sector manager and an area manager (N=21). This sample was selected by Departmental managers in the different regions and was loosely defined as ‘People who were putting the Department’s vision into practice’. Conversations on a number of occasions over the first year of the Making life good in the community project suggested that managers within the Department know who their highly performing house supervisors are. The reporting arrangement between these different post-holders is represented schematically in Figure 1. In presenting our findings we make a simple distinction between house supervisors and managers, the latter being used to refer to the team, cluster, sector and area managers.
Figure 1. Schematic representation of the managerial hierarchy.

It had been our intention to interview 25 respondents. However, one house supervisor from a metropolitan region was unavailable to be interviewed, and we did not receive the names of three participants from one rural region before the data collection cut-off date. Only the house supervisor participant details are given in Table 2.

The data in Table 2 shows that the house supervisors have a significant amount of experience, both as managers of group homes and in working with people with intellectual disabilities. On average our sample had been house supervisors for just over nine years. All post-holders had full-time positions. The average length of time people had spent working with people with intellectual disabilities was about 18 years, and most of this had been working for the Department. Half the 14 respondents had qualified as a Mental Retardation Nurse (MRN) and the other half had the Certificate IV in Disability Work. Three people were in the process of completing a Bachelor's degree or the Advanced Diploma in Disability. Fifteen of the house supervisors were female. A comparison of this sample can be made with the information available in the Disability Services Workforce Study (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2005b).

DAS stands for Disability Accommodation Services

The title of these positions varies from region to region. As a rough guide a team manager will supervise seven house supervisors and an area manager three team managers.

The number of direct support staff varies from house to house.

DAS

Manager

Area or Sector Manager

Team or Cluster Manager

House supervisor

House supervisor

House supervisor

House Supervisor

House Supervisor

House Supervisor

House Supervisor

House Supervisor

House supervisor

House supervisor

House supervisor

House supervisor

House supervisor

House supervisor

Direct Support Staff

Direct Support Staff

Direct Support Staff

Direct Support Staff

Direct Support Staff

Direct Support Staff

Direct Support Staff

Direct Support Staff

DAS stands for Disability Accommodation Services

Figure 1. Schematic representation of the managerial hierarchy.
3. Methodology

Table 2
Supervisor Characteristics³

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age (N = 14)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 – 35</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>36 – 45</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>46 – 55</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 – 65</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender (N = 16)</strong></td>
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</tr>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Education (N = 14)</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate IV in Disability Work</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Diploma in Disability</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Retardation Nurse</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific qualification (N = 14)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experience in the field (N = 14)⁴</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean tenure in supervisor position in years</td>
<td>9.2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean tenure in DHS⁵ in years</td>
<td>17.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean length of time working with people with intellectual disabilities</td>
<td>18.3 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2003 DHS employed 460 people as house supervisors, 9.8 per cent of the nine Disability Development and Support Officer (DDSO) classifications. The nine classifications go from DDSO-1 to DDSO-6, with house supervisors being the DDSO-3 and 3A categories (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2005b). The average length of service for people in full-time DDSO-3 position (N=221) was 11.3 years and 14.7 years for the DDSO-3A post holders (N=190). Forty nine people had part-time house supervisors posts. Sixty nine per cent of the entire Department’s workforce were women and the majority of staff were aged between 35 and 54 years. Men held just under one third of the house supervisor positions. Men are therefore under-represented in our sample. Information about house supervisor qualifications was not given.

³ Data is missing from two house supervisors who did not return the information. One is no longer working for the Department and the other is on extended recreational leave.
⁴ These figures are based on respondents’ approximations.
⁵ DHS is an acronym for the Victorian Department of Human Services.
3. Methodology

Interview analysis

The interviews produced two intertwined ‘types’ of data, which were dealt with differently. There was specific targeted information about the competencies. In addition to the interview recording, handwritten notes were recorded on the interview schedule, which were written up in more detail on the same day as the interview. These notes recorded the respondent’s confirmation of each competency, suggestions for any rewording, elimination or addition of any competency. Each interview informed the subsequent interview. A new interviewee could be asked about the previous respondents’ suggestions for rewording, elimination or addition, in a cumulative manner. Recording the interviews was useful as it allowed the researcher to check exactly what respondents had said if this was necessary.

This iterative process produced a number of revised versions of the competency statements. After a number of interviews there was often a consistent view that a particular wording was better, or that a certain competency statement was not relevant. A revised competency document was produced, which became the basis of the next semi-structured interview and still allowed for the interviewer to probe about the changes that were made. A record of this interview was kept on the interviewer’s copy of the schedule. This progressive tightening of the competency document has produced six different versions. The final version is given in Appendix A.

The interviews also produced rich qualitative data that was handled differently. The interviews were transcribed so they could be analysed. The final 141 competencies were used as ‘start-list’ of codes with which to analyse the interview data. Codes are simply labels that are attached to chunks of data. Depending on the type of study, a chunk can vary from a single word to much longer pieces of text (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

For example, the first house supervisor competency area is ‘Enhancing Staff Relations’ and the first of eight competency statements is, ‘1a) House supervisors effectively communicate with staff by listening to their concerns, supporting and encouraging their ideas and work, thanking them for their contributions, and providing positive feedback regarding performance’. A respondent’s comments about this competency were given a shorthand code ‘1a) Effective Communication’.

Atlas.ti (Muhr, 2005), a qualitative data analysis tool, was used to facilitate data analysis, in particular to assist the coding and storage of data, searching and retrieving information from the data, and memo-ing, a term for analytic writing.
3. Methodology

(Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). All the house supervisors’ comments about ‘effective communication’ could be retrieved from the data set, or all the comments about ‘enhancing staff relations’ could be extracted and analysed.

Additional *a priori* codes were established from the claims that we made about the house supervisor in our earlier report *The Story So Far* (Clement et al., 2007), which are summarised in Chapter 2. Although there is a competency about the development of staff rosters, we also claimed that the rosters determine how much time house supervisors spend with the staff they manage, so we wanted to ask the respondents about this and whether it was an issue for them. As was highlighted earlier, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to explore particular areas of interest. Within the ‘start list’ of codes was a provisional code, ‘Roster constraints’. Most of these *a priori* codes became superfluous, as it was neater to code all the comments under the relevant competency code.

The same piece of interview transcript can be given multiple codes. For instance, when a house supervisor outlined how she provided positive feedback to a staff member about his performance, she also talked about how she used formal supervision meetings as one way of doing this. As well as being coded ‘1a: Effective Communication’, it could also be coded, ‘5d: Formal supervision’.

The transcripts were also read in a way that did not close off the possibility of other themes from ‘emerging’ from the data in an inductive fashion. For example, we were struck by the passion with which some house supervisors spoke about working with people with intellectual disabilities, a theme that we had not anticipated in advance but which emerged from the interviews and reading the transcripts. A code, ‘Passion for the role’, was created.

**Timelog study**

We thought it would be useful to find out how supervisors were spending their time at work. Structured ‘diaries’ are a common research method employed to get people to describe their work activities (Joyce, Mansell, and Gray, 1989). A pilot study using an unstructured timelog was completed with three house supervisors from the original *Making life good in the community* sample.

Participants were not given a coding system, but were asked to record what they did in detail and the amount of time that each ‘task’ took every half-hour. The participants were given clear written guidance about how to complete the timelog, and were provided with a model example of a completed timelog. The

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*See 11 a in Appendix A.*
written guidance was modified for the full study, taking into account the feedback received from the pilot study.

The 16 house supervisors were asked to keep an unstructured timelog over a seven-day period, completing a time-sheet for the shift he or she worked on a particular day. Nine house supervisors returned the completed timelogs (56 per cent). The data from the three pilot participants was added to the sample. These twelve respondents completed 59 time-sheets, representing 526.5 hours of house supervisor activity.

Our initial aim of broadening the sample from our interview respondents to 50 house supervisors was abandoned for three reasons. Firstly, it required a number of prompts to achieve the 56 per cent return rate. Secondly, even with clear written guidance a number of respondents did not complete the timelogs in the manner in which they had been asked. This caused some minor concerns about the reliability of the data and required a rethink about how we were to analyse it. Thirdly, an early analysis of the timelogs suggested that we had enough data to be able to make some cautious claims, and greater reliability and validity were unlikely to be produced from using a larger sample.

One of the advantages of using multiple sources of data is that it allows data from one source to be used to assess the validity of findings from another source. Participant observation data gave us confidence that the timelog data was reliable enough to use. Our own observations of house supervisors closely reflected the way they recorded their time in the timelogs.

**Timelog analysis**

Timelog respondents were asked to record what they did in detail and the amount of time that each ‘task’ took every half-hour. Not all participants recorded the amount of time that each task took, which meant that we were unable to analyse the data or present the findings in the way that we intended. An alternative method of analysis was given in Gifford’s (2006) study.

Our initial intention had been to present the amount of time (in minutes) that house supervisors reported spending on different tasks. We were unable to do this as not all respondents allocated times to the recorded tasks, but simply noted what they were doing during the 30-minute periods. An example of a completed timesheet is given in Appendix B. Gifford (2006) got around the same problem by reporting a measure of the extent to which respondents recorded that they engaged in tasks on each timesheet. The same procedure was used here. (See *Chapter 4.*)
In order to give greater coherence to the different elements of the study, participants’ verbatim entries were coded to fit the supervisor competency areas. A dataset was prepared using Microsoft Excel. Given that we need to be cautious about what we can reliably say about how house supervisors spend their time we have used simple descriptive statistics to present our findings.

**House supervisor activities that are not reflected in the competencies**

Two areas of activity did not fit into the competency areas, so two new codes were created: ‘Activities that residents could be involved in, but were not’ and ‘Trips to the area office’. Neither of these codes are competencies, but reflect how house supervisors accounted for some of their time.

The supervisor competencies reflect certain principles, one of which is that the residents should have *ownership* of the house and will be supported to the fullest extent in the day-to-day running of their own home. There were a number of entries where house supervisors had undertaken household activities by themselves, rather than supporting the residents in these tasks. Examples were grocery shopping, loading the dishwasher, watering the garden, ironing, preparing food, and cleaning the house.

House supervisors also recorded that they spent some time driving to the Area Office to pick up or drop off mail, replenish stationery, or do photocopying. These visits were often a time to network with other employees, or to have an informal meeting with a manager.

Neither of these codes appears in the final competency document.

**Research methods: a summary**

The four methods that we have used for gathering data about the role of the house supervisor represent a substantial data set. A summary of the data sources is given in Table 3.

An advantage of using multiple research methods is that it allows *triangulation* (Robson, 1993), which refers to the process where data from one source can be used to assess the validity of findings from another source (Brewerton and Millward, 2001). Multiple sources of data help to confirm or contradict one another. This helps us to have a good deal of confidence in our findings that are presented and discussed in the sections that follow.
### Table 3

**Data sources**

Adapted from: *Designing and Conducting Ethnographic Research* (p.128-130) by M. D. LeCompte and J. J. Schensul, 1999, Walnut Creek, CA, Altamira.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Data source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant-observation</td>
<td>• Record situations as they happen.</td>
<td>• Written fieldnotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Record the meanings of these events at the time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document analysis</td>
<td>• Extraction of content and meaning.</td>
<td>• Documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>• Gather information on specific topics, such as, personal histories and job knowledge.</td>
<td>• Semi-structured interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diaries</td>
<td>• Gather information about activity patterns.</td>
<td>• Unstructured timelog</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Findings

House supervisor competency document

The primary purpose of this research was to clearly define what is expected of house supervisors. In many ways this is the simplest aspect of this research to report on, but perhaps the hardest aspect of the research to discuss.

Appendix A lists the 141 competency statements, which we think capture the complexity of the job and provide a thorough outline of the house supervisor’s role. They are a substantial reworking of the 142 statements that the validation process began with, which is not reflected in a simple comparison of these bald numbers. Some of the original competencies have been deleted, new ones added, and every statement has been reworded. Reflected in the competencies are the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to be a successful house supervisor and for incumbents and others to make different judgements about the job. The competencies are organised into 14 areas, which are shown in Table 4.

At this point in our report we are content to present the house supervisor competency document with limited discussion. Producing the competency document was a lengthy, but discrete task, which addresses the primary purpose of this research. The competency document clearly defines what is expected of house supervisors. The competencies are fully discussed in Chapters 5 to 18.

In Chapter 2 we stated that identifying the supervisor competencies was a first step in informing a range of other important issues. This particular research outcome could be used to:

- Clarify for the Department of Human Services what house supervisors should do
- Help the Department decide what to look for in recruiting house supervisors
- Identify and detail the gaps between identified competencies and the competencies of current house supervisors
- Define clear performance standards
- Provide a thorough basis for revising the house supervisor’s job description
- Provide the basis for the training and development of house supervisors.

This is developmental work that was always beyond the scope of this research project and we recommend that it is taken further by the Department.
## 4. Findings

### Table 4
**Competency areas for DHS house supervisors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency Area</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Enhancing staff relations</td>
<td>House supervisors enhance staff relations by using effective communication skills, encouraging growth and self-development, facilitating teamwork, employing conflict resolution skills, and providing adequate supports to staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Providing direct support</td>
<td>House supervisors provide direct supports to residents and role model such supports to direct support personnel by assisting with living skills, communicating and interacting with residents, facilitating community inclusion, maintaining an appropriate physical environment, providing transportation, maintaining finances, developing behaviour support plans and demonstrating the importance of residents becoming active citizens in their neighbourhoods and local communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Building inclusive communities and supporting residents’ networks</td>
<td>House supervisors facilitate and support the development and maintenance of resident support networks through outreach to family members, community members, and professionals and through coordination of personal planning sessions in collaboration with the individual served.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Support planning and monitoring</td>
<td>House supervisors oversee support planning and monitoring by planning and developing individual goals and outcomes with residents, coordinating and participating in support network meetings, monitoring, documenting, and reporting progress toward meeting outcomes, and communicating with other service organisations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Managing personnel</td>
<td>House supervisors participate in processes to hire new staff, provide professional development and supervision, facilitate team work and staff meetings, delegate tasks and responsibilities, encourage effective communication, defuse crises/conflicts between staff, and in conjunction with his/her manager respond to grievances and offer, monitor, and review fixed-term contracts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Leading training and staff development activities</td>
<td>House supervisors coordinate and participate in direct support staff training by orienting new staff, ensure that staff to attend training sessions, document staff participation in training events, and support on-going staff development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Maintaining homes, vehicles, and property</td>
<td>House supervisors coordinate and participate in maintaining homes, vehicles, and personal property in proper order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Promoting public relations</td>
<td>House supervisors promote public relations by educating community members about people with intellectual disabilities, advocate for the rights and responsibilities of people with intellectual disabilities, contribute to in-service promotional materials and accept students on educational placements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Protecting health and safety</td>
<td>House supervisors ensure that residents are safe and living healthy lives by monitoring safety issues, coordinating, monitoring and documenting medical supports, practicing appropriate emergency procedures, responding to emergencies, and promoting residents’ rights regarding health and safety issues. As the home is also a workplace, house supervisors ensure that the house is a safe and healthy workplace for staff, contractors and visitors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Managing financial activities</td>
<td>House supervisors ensure financial responsibility by managing the Client Expenditure Recording System (CERS), supporting residents in the management of their finances; reviewing, managing, and implementing household budgets; arranging payment for specific bills, and completing audits of household and resident finances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Rostering and payroll</td>
<td>House supervisors ensure direct support professionals are rostered, paid, and receive time off when requested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Coordinating Weekday Daytime Supports</td>
<td>House supervisors monitor residents’ involvement in external activities (for example, day programs) and/or ensure that schedules are created for residents who are ‘at home’ on weekdays that are based on their individual preferences and needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Coordinating policies, procedures, and rule compliance</td>
<td>House supervisors understand and implement current state rules and regulations, Department of Human Services’ policies and practices, and the protection of individual rights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Office work</td>
<td>House supervisors communicate effectively in writing and via the telephone; complete various office tasks; and utilise the computer effectively for word processing, developing spread sheets, and managing databases.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Findings

**House supervisor competencies: An alternative version**

During the course of the research we were given a document entitled *House Supervisor Tasks and Functions* (Victorian Department of Human Services, n.d.-a) by a house supervisor. She had received it with *The Professional Development and Supervision Policy and Practice Guidelines* (DHS, 2005e) and had been asked to complete a self-assessment. It seemed necessary to us to compare and contrast our work with a similar initiative that has been undertaken by the Department. Our critical comparison of the two documents is given in Appendix C.

The Department and house supervisors need a document that clearly defines the job. At the moment we believe that the house supervisor competency document is the better document, but the *House Supervisor Tasks and Functions* could be reworked to be its equal or even exceed it.

**Timelog findings**

Figure 2 shows the days on which individual time-sheets were completed by 12 house supervisors. This shows a reasonable data spread and suggests that the reported activities are unlikely to be skewed, which might have been the case if, for example, all of the time-sheets were completed on the same day.

Figure 3 shows the time when house supervisors started their shifts on weekdays and at weekends. This shows that house supervisors are more likely to start work in the morning. We believe that this has implications for how house supervisors carry out their job, which is discussed in Chapter 15.
When all shifts are considered the average length of shift was 8 hours 55 minutes. However, three house supervisors completed a sleep-over, which is often sandwiched between shorter shifts. When four short shifts were removed the average shift length increased to 9 hours 19 minutes. The longest shift worked was 13 hours\(^7\). Nine of the house supervisors reported working in excess of their rostered hours, with the average length of time for these nine respondents being 84 minutes (range: 15 – 250 minutes) over the seven-day period that they kept records. We do not know whether the intention was to take this extra time worked back as ‘time-in-lieu’.

There were 15 vacant roster lines across the 12 houses (range: 0 – 6, Mean = 1.25), which is just under 19 per cent of the total number of roster lines in these houses (N = 80, Range 5 – 12). House supervisors reported using 52 casual staff over the seven-day recording period (Range 1 – 11, Mean = 4.3). In 2003 casual employees made up 12.5 per cent of the staff in the Department’s shared supported accommodation (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2005b).

Table 5 shows the number of 30-minute time periods that each respondent completed, the total number of tasks recorded by each house supervisor, and the average number of reported tasks engaged in during a 30-minute time period.

\(^7\) House supervisors are entitled to take meal breaks during a shift.
4. Findings

The least number of reported tasks during one time period was one and the most was six.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Total number of time periods completed</th>
<th>Total number of ‘tasks’ recorded</th>
<th>Mean number of tasks per time period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>1.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>1.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>1.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (N = 12)</strong></td>
<td><strong>1095</strong></td>
<td><strong>1674</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.53</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The activities listed by house supervisors were coded to fit the supervisor competency areas. Table 6 shows the percentage of ‘time’ spent by all participants (N = 12) by competency area. This is not ‘real time’, but the extent to which respondents recorded that they engaged in tasks on each timesheet.
### Table 6

**Extent to which respondents recorded activities were coded to house supervisor competency areas.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency Area</th>
<th>N=1674</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Enhancing staff relations</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>10.04</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Providing direct support</td>
<td>723</td>
<td>43.19</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Building inclusive communities and supporting residents’ networks</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Support planning and monitoring</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Managing personnel</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>9.62</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Leading training and staff development activities</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Promoting public relations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Maintaining homes, vehicles, and property</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Protecting health and safety</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>6.45</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Managing financial activities</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>6.99</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Rostering and payroll</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Coordinating Weekday Daytime Supports</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Coordinating policies, procedures, and rule compliance</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Office work</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>8.30</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The same data is given in Figure 4, which allows a better visual contrast.
Providing direct support to the residents accounted for more than 40 per cent of the house supervisors recorded activities. Two competency areas related specifically to the management of staff, ‘Enhancing staff relations’ and ‘Managing personnel’. They accounted for 20 per cent of recorded activities.

Seventy eight per cent of the activities coded to ‘Enhancing staff relations’ related to a single competency, ‘House supervisors provide formal communication to staff through communication books, memos, and e-mail and by facilitating effective meetings, handovers, and purposeful interactions’. Most of these timelog entries related to ‘handovers’ between incoming and outgoing staff.

Four competency statements accounted for 76 per cent of the activities coded under ‘Managing personnel’. We flag them here because they relate to issues that are discussed in greater length in Chapters 5 to 18. Facilitating staff meetings accounted for 32 per cent (competency 5k); managing one’s stress, 26 per cent (5v); discussing issues with a line manager 10 per cent (5s); and conducting formal supervision 8 per cent (5d). When considered against the total number of recorded activities, three important activities — facilitating staff meetings (three per cent), getting support from team managers (one per cent) and conducting formal supervision (less than one per cent) — accounted for a small proportion of these house supervisors’ ‘time’.

The three least recorded competency areas — ‘Coordinating weekday daytime supports’, ‘Coordinating policies, procedures and rule compliance’, and ‘Promoting public relations’ — accounted for less than one per cent of the coded activities.
Table 7 shows the 20 most frequent individual competency areas that were derived from this analytic process. It contains a lot of information and we have chosen to describe the main features here. These 20 competencies account for 78 per cent (N = 1309) of the total entries (N=1674).

Six of the most frequently coded competencies relate to ‘Providing direct support’. House supervisors spend a significant amount of their time working directly with residents.

Five competency areas do not feature in the top 20 competency areas. In addition to the three competency areas previously mentioned (‘Coordinating weekday daytime supports’, ‘Coordinating policies, procedures and rule compliance’, and ‘Promoting public relations’), the other two are ‘Building inclusive communities and supporting resident networks’ and ‘Maintaining homes, vehicles and property’.

Table 7. The 20 most frequently coded house supervisor competencies derived from the activities recorded in the timelogs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Individual competency description</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Examples from timelog</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Enhancing staff relations</td>
<td>e. House supervisors facilitate teamwork, positive interactions and attitudes among staff.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>18=</td>
<td>1 – 10</td>
<td>Discussed cutting client toenails [with staff].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>g. House supervisors provide formal communication to staff through communication books, memos, and e-mail and by facilitating effective meetings, 'handovers', and purposeful interactions.</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4 – 22</td>
<td>Handover with night staff. Wrote in communication book. Greet second staff member and handover.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Providing direct support</td>
<td>b. House supervisors interact with residents by listening to their issues, responding to their requests and concerns, sharing ideas and humour, and participating in meals and other activities.</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0 – 12</td>
<td>Clients arrived home from programs – greeted them. Individual time spent with clients looking at photos, chatting re: family/friends. Chatting with [residents].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. House supervisors use active support approaches to assist residents with daily living skills, meal preparation, self-care, health care, and other tasks that maintain resident well-being as needed.</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5 – 43</td>
<td>Helped clients make beds and clean rooms. Assisted client to make their lunch. Supported resident to complete vacuuming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>g. House supervisors support residents in identifying, planning for, and participating in community events and activities.</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>12=</td>
<td>0 – 10</td>
<td>Supervised ladies in cinema. Picnic lunch at Badger Weir park. Went out on the bus to the Dandenongs with all residents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>k. House supervisors support residents in purchasing household supplies, personal items, and groceries.</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0 – 11</td>
<td>Escorted client to local shop to purchase items for dinner. Quick trip to Bunnings with client for new towel rail. Resident outing to buy personal items.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i. House supervisors support residents in identifying, securing, and utilising transportation based on their individual preferences and needs.</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0 – 24</td>
<td>Bus run. Dropped clients off at ATSS. Assist resident with taxi to placement. Drove to [client's] grandmother's house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>q. Activities that residents could be involved in, but were not.</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 – 28</td>
<td>Mopped kitchen and dining room floors. Cleaned mirrors and windows. Washed clothes, hang clothes on line. Grocery shopping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Support planning, monitoring</td>
<td>m. House supervisors maintain resident records including completing necessary filing or assist direct support personnel in this process.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>15=</td>
<td>0 – 5</td>
<td>Progress notes. Document file notes. Write in progress notes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Managing personnel</td>
<td>k. House supervisors coordinate and facilitate staff meetings.</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0 – 11</td>
<td>Chaired house meeting. Finished typing up meeting minutes. Preparation for house meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>v. House supervisors manage their own stress by balancing personal and professional lives, taking recreational leave, meal breaks, and utilizing stress management practices.</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0 – 9</td>
<td>Coffee break. Lunch Have a coffee and snack.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Individual competency description</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>Examples from timelog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>6. Leading training and staff development activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>a. House supervisors attend in-service training, participate in continuing education, and work with their managers on the development and implementation of a Professional Development and Supervision (PDS) plan.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0 – 16</td>
<td>OH and S training. Read information of national bowel cancer screening program. Wrote up evaluation questionnaire on house supervisor workshop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>9. Protecting health and safety</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>d. House supervisors ensure that residents receive routine medical, therapeutic, and dental care; and coordinate transportation and staffing or take individuals on related appointments.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>10. Managing financial activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>a. House supervisors manage the Client Expenditure Recording System (CERS) in accordance with policy and procedures (for example, reconcile monthly ledgers against bank statements, respond to financial audits).</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>86</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3 – 12</td>
<td>Wrote up CERS and checked CERS. Completed CERS receipt entries/change re: cinema, afternoon tea, groceries for tonight. Setting up clients CERS categories and printing them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>11. Rostering and payroll</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>d. House supervisors secure staff to fill-in when necessary due to staff illness, resignation, holidays, vacant lines, etc..</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0 – 10</td>
<td>Checked and signed off staff time sheet. Checking timesheets. Started doing variations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0 – 6</td>
<td>Roster planning and staffing for residents. Rang staff to fill shifts. Leave replacements for next two months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>14. Office work</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>f. House supervisors effectively complete various office tasks (for example, copying, filing, typing, and maintaining a clean and tidy office).</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0 – 9</td>
<td>Close computer and tidy desk. Administrative tasks. Paperwork.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Findings

As ‘Providing direct support’ accounted for 43 per cent of all recorded activities an additional breakdown was completed for this one competency area. This data is given in Figure 5 and Table 8.

Figure 5. House supervisor competencies coded by individual competencies for 'Providing direct support'

Again there is a significant amount of information in Table 8. The most frequently recorded competency relates to supporting residents to be involved in daily living skills in the home environment. This accounts for 45 per cent of the total number of activities. House supervisors also support people outside the house, supporting them in shopping for themselves or the household, and engaging in activities that we refer to as community presence (O’Brien, 1987).

In Chapter 3 we stated that we had to create two codes to categorise activities that did not fit into the competency areas. One of them is represented here, and accounts for just under 19 per cent of the total number of activities. This represents a significant amount of ‘time’, but more importantly represents a noteworthy practice given that we labelled the code, ‘Activities that residents could be involved in, but were not’. Given our stated intention of explicating the concept of practice leadership, it is worth noting at this point how few activities were coded as being related to modelling, teaching, and coaching direct support personnel in the most effective approaches to achieve the direct support competencies (Competency 2n). This accounted for 0.5 per cent of the total coded activities. When this figure is added to the ‘time’ given to facilitating staff meetings and formal supervision, about 4 per cent of our house supervisor sample’s time was spent on these key activities.
It is to the task of explicating the concept of practice leadership that we turn to in the next sections.

### Table 8

**Frequency of house supervisor activities**

_Coded by individual competencies for 'Providing direct support'._

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. House supervisors communicate effectively with residents using their primary method of communication (for example, speech, gestures, sign language, communication boards, with the assistance of interpreters).</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11=</td>
<td>0–1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. House supervisors interact with residents by listening to their issues, responding to their requests and concerns, sharing ideas and humour, and participating in meals and other activities.</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0–12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. House supervisors provide culturally appropriate support to residents, including support for religious beliefs.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15=</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. House supervisors use active support approaches to assist residents with daily living skills, meal preparation, self-care, health care, and other tasks that maintain resident well-being as needed.</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5–43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. House supervisors provide first aid and arrange for emergency medical appointments as needed.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0–1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. House supervisors assist residents in developing routines and activities which are of interest to them (for example, activity and support plans, opportunity plans).</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0–4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. House supervisors support residents in identifying, planning for, and participating in community events and activities.</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0–10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. House supervisors assist residents in developing and maintaining family relationships through various means such as correspondence, phone contact, visits, and assisting to plan and coordinate social activities.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0–7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. House supervisors support residents in making and maintaining friendships with community members.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11=</td>
<td>0–1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. House supervisors ensure that the physical environment in which residents live meets their style and needs and advocate for necessary resources with their managers.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0–7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. House supervisors support residents in purchasing household supplies, personal items, and groceries.</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0–11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l. House supervisors support residents in identifying, securing, and utilising transportation based on their individual preferences and needs.</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0–24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. House supervisors implement behaviour support plans, intervene with residents in response to challenging behaviour, and diffuse crisis situations as they arise.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15=</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n. House supervisors model, teach and coach direct support personnel in the most effective approaches to achieve these direct support competencies.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0–4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o. House supervisors identify necessary resources for residents and direct support staff, and advocate for these resources with their managers (for example, additional staffing in response to changed circumstances, special equipment).</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15=</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. House supervisors evaluate the quality of supports provided to the residents and continuously strive for improvement.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0–1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q. Activities that residents could be involved in, but were not.</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1–28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Enabling house supervisors to fulfil their role: Supports, structures and illuminating practice leadership

In Chapter 2 we cited Hewitt and Larson’s (2005) work and reported their claim that the house supervisor’s position is complex and difficult. Validating their work and that of their colleagues in a Victorian context has produced 141 competencies, which both reinforces their claim and adds weight to the proposition that whether you happen to be employed as a house supervisor in Melbourne or Minnesota, the positions will have much in common. In short, the job of house supervisor is underpinned by core competencies that are transferable from one group home to another.

Even though we may have clarified what is expected of house supervisors, there is no guarantee that house supervisors will behave in the way the competencies suggest. This may be for the obvious reason that a particular house supervisor may not have the knowledge and understanding that underpins a particular competency. In Chapter 6 we begin our discussion of the house supervisor’s role, by maintaining an individual focus, but move beyond the competencies to highlight the importance of the ‘orientation’ or attitude that a house supervisor brings to the job.

However, the major focus in the chapters that follow is whether house supervisors are being developed and supported in the role. This was our second research focus and relates to a more systemic orientation. In particular we highlight the resources and organisational structures that we think need to be in place to enable house supervisors to establish and maintain high quality services. In Chapter 7, we suggest that variation in the resources allocated to group homes contributes to an uneven playing field. We also argue that some competency statements will not appear to transfer so readily between settings. There is such significant variation between people with intellectual disabilities that there is a need to think through what the competencies mean in different houses. For example, if a competent house supervisor seeks opinions from residents when recruiting new staff, then what does this mean for a house supervisor working with people with profound intellectual disabilities?

We interviewed what we termed an ‘extreme sample’ of house supervisors, people who were thought to be putting the Department’s vision into practice. Our intention is to use the words of these house supervisors to achieve a number of aims. Firstly, we think there are some useful lessons to be gained simply by listening to what a group of experienced practitioners have to say about being a
5. Enabling house supervisors to fulfil their role

house supervisor. Their stories and perceptions bring the role to life and help to illustrate the house supervisor competencies. In one sense the chapters that follow are akin to a 'realistic job preview', an accurate picture of the job that may be helpful for people who are considering applying for the post (see Larson, O’Nell, and Sauer, 2005).

Secondly, we see our respondents’ words as a way of explicating the concept of practice leadership. This was our final broader research aim. The concept of practice leadership runs throughout the following discussion, but we formally introduce it in Chapter 9. We found that the house supervisors we interviewed spoke about their job with little reference to theoretical frameworks. They expressed what can be termed ‘practitioner knowledge’ (Pawson, Boaz, Grayson, Long, and Barnes, 2003). We have linked their words to theoretical frameworks, which may be useful to house supervisors and also helpful in designing relevant training. Although we think this research goes some way towards illustrating what is meant by practice leadership, we believe that it is a concept that has been inadequately theorised. This is an additional task to the goals we have set ourselves here and remains an undertaking that is more likely to be done as an academic piece of work. Without the possibility of a new theoretical construct we have fallen back on tried and tested frameworks.

We argue that practice leadership needs to be considered not only in the individual interactions between a house supervisor and a direct support staff member but also in a group context. Chapter 10 discusses the importance of house meetings, a space where house supervisors can demonstrate practice leadership.

There are various ways that the house supervisor’s managerial role can be strengthened or weakened. In Chapters 12 to 14 we discuss the issues of hiring staff, improving work performance and managing discipline. At the moment the house supervisor’s role is relatively weak in these areas.

Most of the chapters that follow are a mixture of data, analysis, and interpretation (see Wolcott, 1994). Whereas we present our data as ‘facts’ and have tried to show that we have treated that data systematically, interpretation needs to be treated with more caution as it reflects our views about the data we have collected and analysed. We believe there are advantages to strengthening the house supervisor’s managerial role. We acknowledge that there will be other views as to whether this is desirable or practical. Throughout we have tried to write in a style that makes it clear when we are expressing our personal opinions.
Chapter 15 discusses the house supervisor’s workload, particularly the balance of different activities that a house supervisor needs to complete to exhibit practice leadership. Chapter 16 discusses issues of support for house supervisors.

The final three chapters bring together the themes discussed in the report. Chapter 17 outlines how poor performance in house supervisors and direct support staff might be eliminated. Chapter 18 draws together some ideas about practice leadership and Chapter 19 contains our concluding remarks and suggestions for future work.

Throughout we have used the words of the house supervisors in one final way, to validate the claims that we summarised in Chapter 2. We referred to this as triangulation, in this instance using interview data to confirm or contradict the findings we outlined in *The Story So Far* (Clement et al., 2007).
6. House supervisor orientation: Temperament and attitude

In Chapter 2 we stated that the competency approach that we have used in this research is an ‘outcome model’ (Boag, 1998). We referred to the systematic process of collecting data about the house supervisor’s job as a ‘job analysis’ (Berman et al., 2001). A major achievement of this research has been to reach a reasonable consensus about how the house supervisor position can be represented and communicated to those people with an interest in the post, especially the incumbents, their line-managers, and other employees whose own work impacts on a house supervisor’s ability to carry out her job effectively.

A job analysis is the first step in deciding what to look for in recruiting to a job (Dipboye, Smith, and Howell, 1994). When this has been done you have to determine the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to perform these tasks (Goldstein and Ford, 2002). Given that ‘beliefs, attitudes and values’ are generally thought to be important to welfare organisations (see Emerson, Hastings, and McGill, 1994) we prefer the ‘model’ outlined by Dipboye et al. who expand the three aforementioned domains to include ‘Orientations’, which ‘refer to the specific temperaments or attitudes that are needed in the job’ (p.485).

The importance placed on a house supervisor’s personal ‘orientation’ to the job is summed up by this incumbent.

*It’s all of [those competencies] but I think the actual attitude of the house supervisor is the important thing.* (HS/10/I)

Some competency approaches include ‘values’ as competencies. Whilst Hewitt et al. generally steered clear of doing this in writing their competency statements, as have we, they went to great lengths to stress that contemporary community-based services are based on certain values and that their competency statements reflect these values (see Hewitt et al., 1998). The Department similarly publishes a number of value-based statements that relate to desired outcomes for service-users and modes of conduct for employees, for example, the *Victorian State Disability Plan 2002-2012* (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2002b), *Our Values* (in Victorian Department of Human Services, 2005f) and *Standards for Disability Services* (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2007c). We believe that the house supervisor competency statements are congruent with the Department’s values.

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8 Names and places have been changed in all quotations to provide a degree of anonymity. Quotations are followed by a reference number. HS stands for house supervisor and M for manager. Each respondent has been given an identifying number. I stands for interview data.
We want to begin our explication of practice leadership by presenting some ‘emergent’ findings about the orientations of the house supervisors that we interviewed. Although the expressed attitudes of our extreme sample are unlikely to be representative of all house supervisors, there are some useful lessons to be gained from listening to a group of people thought to be enacting the Department’s vision. Most of them had been in the role for a number of years (see Table 2); the majority had acted in more senior positions but had decided that being a house supervisor was where they wanted to be.

**Passion and vocation**

The passion that the respondents had for working directly with people with intellectual disabilities was apparent in the face-to-face interviews and is clearly embedded in the transcripts.

They were always great learning experiences up at the office, but I certainly missed the face-to-face and everyday contact with the people that we support. I think that’s definitely where I feel that my skills lie and I still feel that I have a lot to contribute in this area. I don’t think there’s been a day [in 20 years] that I’ve been unhappy to go to work. Every shift, if there was one thing that I can make even the smallest difference with them that day — that might be assisting someone to have an excellent shower, the best shower, or supporting them to mow the lawn because that’s something that a person really wants to do; if I achieve something every day, then I feel like I’m making some improvement, or supporting or assisting the person that I’m with, then that’s really exciting to me. I definitely missed that element of it when I was working up in the office. They were great opportunities but I wouldn’t want to do them long term. (HS/6/I)

The same house supervisor described this as a ‘vocation’.

I have a problem with some people looking at it as a job that anybody could [do], that it’s an unskilled job, that you don’t require skills to do it. Anybody working with other people needs to be incredibly skilled, and consciously want to keep learning from other people around them, from the people they support, and getting more information. It seems to be a dirty word to say it’s a ‘vocation’ to work with other people. I think we get hung up with language sometimes, that you’re not allowed to say it’s a vocation to want to support people with intellectual, physical, or sensory stabilities. You have

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9 Emergent themes are those that ‘leapt out’ of the data as being interesting or important rather than being related to ideas that we had established as being important before we had done any interviews.
6. House supervisor orientation

to be fairly passionate about wanting to work with people, to be doing the job. (HS/6/I)

Not only did the respondents project this passion for working with people with intellectual disabilities, but it was directed towards making a positive difference in their lives.

I’ve been given the job of overseeing four individuals’ lives, and my God I’m going to do it to the best of my ability, with or without [the help of the organisation]. I’m going to do it. I take that role very, very, very seriously. (HS/5/I)

For some this passion was fuelled by injustices that they had witnessed and a vision of something better. This quotation illustrates that some house supervisors face enormous challenges and require tenacity to address them.

When I got here I honest to God, I nearly had a nervous breakdown thinking that a place with so much resources and so much attention could be run so badly. It just tore at my heart, it tore at my spirit. I think I didn’t sleep for six months. A couple of times I was nearly suspended from duties ‘cos I said, ‘No, that’s not going to happen any more’. And the staff they’d go, ‘Well, no, this is how it’s always happened’. [I said,] ‘No, which part of ‘No’ don’t you understand? If it happens again you’ll be on conduct, you will be on conduct, it’s not acceptable, just not acceptable’. The office would come down because I was bullying [staff]. And a couple of times I was pulled out for bullying. I had to stop the bullies, had to stop the bullies. I think I was just trying to manage, but you know, when you’ve got somebody standing over the top of you telling you how it’s going to be, and it’s a great big man, really I like to stand up and go, ‘No!’ That can be perceived as bullying, you see. Now they, with their tail between their legs, go to the office and say. ‘This is how she treated me’, I sit there and laugh and go, ‘Well this is the full story, he’s put in the complaint, I now have to respond to it’. (HS/5/I)

For some people working with the residents was a positive counterbalance to what this house supervisor saw as less attractive aspects of the role.

I like [being a house supervisor] because you’re with the clients. There’s a lot of people who do the job because of the rewards you get from working with clients. They are a lovely diversion from the other crap we have to do. There’s a lot of stuff we have to do that’s mundane and boring, you know, paperwork. So, it’s lovely to be able to put all of that away and spend time
6. House supervisor orientation

with them and do music, race around the block with them, walk around the park. That’s a lovely way to be able to spend some time with someone, and you’re paid to do that. We’re paid to be able to assist them to be able to pick up a cup on their own. If you can see them take those little steps, that’s why we do all the other ‘crap’ for want of a better word. I enjoy the job because I do enjoy working with the clients. (HS/19/I)

Other house supervisors were more content with the balance of tasks.

What attracts me to supervising is I’ve got the best of both worlds. I’ve got client contact, so I’m working with clients. I’ve also got my admin, so I enjoy that. It’s not good when you have staffing issues. I like the variety. I can be on a bus and go for a country trip and have this wonderful day out, and then the next day I’m doing paperwork. I’ve got the best of both worlds. (HS/13/I)

The importance of the setting: autonomy

There is something about group home settings and the position itself that allows people to make a difference. Managing a group home has given this house supervisor the opportunity to realise goals that he felt had not been possible at Kew Residential Services.

I love my job. You know I always say, ‘A man who loves his job never works a day in his life’. I think part of it is ‘cos I worked in Kew for a long time, and I always thought these are the ways I’d like to do things, but never in that environment. It’s quite impossible to do, so now I’ve got this great opportunity to be doing it the way I always thought I’d like to be able to do it. (HS/4/I).

This respondent identified ‘control’ as an important feature.

As a house supervisor you’ve got real control. As a house supervisor you get to work with clients, you get to work with different staff, you get to go on social outings, you get to control your environment. You actually get to put quality of life into these people’s lives. You know that you’re making families more relaxed because you know that they’re feeling safe with their child in your care. You can do some really good stuff; you can see good stuff happening around you. (HS/5/I)

House supervisors who had acted as team manager typically compared their experiences of the two positions. A key belief was that house supervisors had more ‘power’ or ‘control’ to make things happen for the residents than these more senior managers.
6. House supervisor orientation

I’ve done the team manager’s job and I could do it quite competently. Once you become a team manager it’s really just a lot of personnel type issues. I’m a person who likes to make things happen and a lot of the stuff for team managers is just dealing with a lot of issues, so I don’t see a lot of outcome, and I think I’d become pretty bored and disillusioned with it fairly quickly. That’s why I probably tend to stay. I get a lot of job satisfaction out of say, getting Pauline that spa, whereas a team manager, if I was just sorting out the argument between staff member A and staff member B, you couldn’t solve it because their house supervisor wasn’t handling it competently. I would probably get a bit, oh sort of bored with it after a while. Also the Department’s, how would you put it, things do happen, but there’s a very slow accountability process and I get a little bit frustrated with that, I like to make things happen. I’m smart enough not to step out of my own boundaries, but it is quite slow and cumbersome. (HS/4/I).

The perception that house supervisors are better placed to make a difference in the lives of individual residents was endorsed by this manager.

I believe I could make a bigger difference to a person’s life as a house supervisor than as a team manager. No doubt in my mind. House supervisors have more control over what happens in a CRU [community residential unit]. We support the house supervisor. We’re not there 24/7. We may see them once a week, we probably talk to them often but we only see them formally once a month. I often see my house supervisors because they’ve come up [to the office] and we have a chat. We’re not in the house doing, working, and leading the staff team. (M/23/I)

For some, promotion means moving away from what people think they are good at and the activities that sustain them. Respondents also expressed the belief that being immersed in the residents’ lives keeps you focused on what is important.

I thought, ‘I don’t want to move away from that direct care, hands-on’, because I always felt that in order for you to do your job, well you need to have that constant, what’s the word, just always being there, on the floor. And if you move too far away from that, you lose all perspective of what’s really going on and what the people’s needs are. I don’t think I would go up further, because that would be defeating my thing of trying to be as hands-on as possible. So I wouldn’t apply for a cluster-manager position because then I’d feel I’m too removed from what’s actually happening. I think I do
my best work when I’m actually there, hands-on and doing the day-to-day things, rather than being in an office. (HS/18/I)

This view was supported by another house supervisor, who perceived that some of her former peers had lost touch with the reality of residents’ lives.

I’m a people-person. I need to work with [the residents]. That’s why I’m doing this job. I’ve seen people who’ve been fantastic house supervisors that have moved into [a middle management role] and they’ve just got more and more away from the people aspect. Do you understand what I mean? (HS/12/I)

We have described group homes as autonomous work groups (after Handy, 1993), which would appear to have advantages and disadvantages. House supervisors with the passion to work positively with people with intellectual disabilities in the way that we have described above, have a degree of freedom that enables them to develop high quality services; but the downside is that some staff groups can establish norms and goals that are not congruent with the Department’s vision.

**Stamina, flexibility, and calmness**

House supervisors need to have stamina and the flexibility to move between roles.

In this work you’re changing your hat all day long. It’s quite mentally tiring. Do you know what I mean? This minute you’re doing the personal care, and then you’re doing breakfast, and then you’re the driver, and then you’re doing shopping. For the whole day you’re doing lots of different tasks, you’re changing your mode and so it is tiring. (HS/15/I)

The same house supervisor identified calmness and the ability to respond to the non-routine as important attributes.

I think one of the greatest qualities in this industry is an ability to be calm and go with the flow. You need to be able to understand a wide range of people, from the residents to the staff you’re dealing with. It’s a very diverse industry in every way. You’re dealing with an incredible range of competencies in your staff; an incredible range of disabilities in your clients. You need to be very calm, just so you can deal with things as they come up, because there’s lots of things that are unpredictable. You have to be able to think on your feet all the time; it’s multi-skilling tasks, you’re doing different things throughout the day, you’re moving from one thing to another, to another, to another. (HS/15/I)
6. House supervisor orientation

Work-life balance

It should also be acknowledged that the particular conditions of service that go with being a house supervisor need to suit the individual. People may have the right orientation but may not like shift-work. This house supervisor likes working to a roster.

As a house supervisor, I get job satisfaction. I’ve got flexible working hours. I like roster work. I don’t like to work five days a week Monday to Friday. As a house supervisor you get more pay, more days off, and more holidays [than a team manager](HS/17/I)

Given that the house supervisors in our sample had been in the post for long periods of time this would suggest that the position can retain its appeal. This is not the case for everyone. The job is demanding and working a roster may not suit everyone’s domestic circumstances for all time.

The house I was in was an extremely challenging behaviour house. Even though I wasn’t involved in a lot of the physical assaults, it became tiring to watch others get assaulted and the processes around that in terms of the incident reporting and the DINMAs and the Workcover [claims] and that became exhausting. I was ready to make a change from that CRU. And it was more personal reasons. My husband’s nine-to-five, shift-work takes its toll, he’d leave for work very early in the morning, I’d be going off 12.30 for a sleepover shift and I wouldn’t be back ‘til five the next day so then I wouldn’t see him ‘til that time. You’re usually so shattered then anyway, that evening was a wreck. It was weekend work. Most nights of the week I was working through the evening meal time. (M/11/I)

| 10 | Embedded in the quotations are some interesting views about the team manager position. A rather strong example is given here: |
| 11 | DINMA is an acronym for Disease Incident Near Miss Accident reports. |

As a cluster manager you’re dealing with rosters 90 per cent of the time, the other 10 per cent of the time you’re dealing with problems. You don’t have fun. There’s no smiles, there’s no relaxed time. You’ve got the same work pressures; you’re constantly under work pressure. The only problems you’re dealing with are the things the supervisor can’t fix, which means they’re more complex. Often you’re dealing with staffing issues, or family issues, they’re ‘issues’, they’re always ‘issues’. There’s no fun in the job. As a house supervisor you’ve got real control. As a cluster manager you’ve got no real power, anything that you have to make a real decision about, you have to go to the sector or the program manager to make the decisions. You’re really just stuck in the middle. It’s a crap job; I don’t see how anyone would want to do it. I really don’t see why anyone would want to do it. Less pay, less days off per month, and less holidays. To me it’s not an enjoyable job. (HS/17/I)

It was beyond the scope of this research to explore the team manager’s position, but we did pick up enough information to suggest that this is another position that could benefit from scrutiny. (See Chapter 16 in addition).
These simple examples illustrate that how a job is structured has important recruitment implications. It will become apparent that we do not believe that the way in which the house supervisor’s job is currently structured, particularly through the roster and the balance of tasks, allows them to fulfil the role optimally. Changing the structure of the job may or may not suit current incumbents.

**Orientation: Implications**

We were inspired by the house supervisors that we interviewed. The collective attitudes expressed in the above quotations could be useful in recruiting people to the post if they are integrated into the hiring process. Services need to get and keep people who are passionate about working directly with people with intellectual disabilities; who are comfortable about the power and control that comes with the position and use it positively; and who have calmness, flexibility, stamina, tenacity, and embrace the diverse tasks and activities inherent in the role.
7. Being a house supervisor: An uneven playing field

Whilst we believe that the house supervisor competencies are transferable from one group home to another, we also want to highlight the considerable differences that we found between group homes, which add to the challenge of establishing and maintaining high quality services. This variability is due to a variety of factors, but in this chapter we want to highlight two: variability in the people with intellectual disabilities who live in the homes and the challenges this creates for managing services; and variability in organisational factors.

**Individual differences: Person-centred services**

Although human beings share a common humanity, we also have immense individual differences. This is acknowledged in the *Standards for Disability Services* (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2007c) where it states that: ‘Each individual has goals, wants, aspirations and support needs, and makes decisions and choices about their life’ (p.1); and ‘Planning and support is tailored, flexible, responsive and appropriate to the individual’ (p.2).

This personalised support should be at the heart of services, but a consequence of this is that house supervisors may need very specific knowledge, skills, and abilities to effectively support an individual. This may, for example, be related to the severity of intellectual disability, additional impairments, specific health issues, or the presence of challenging behaviour. In one group a house supervisor may need specific knowledge about Prader-Willi syndrome, diabetes, and self-injurious behaviour, but in another may need to know about Auslan and schizophrenia.

Another implication of personalised support is that there will be variation in the support plans for residents. This was particularly noticeable with regard to how house supervisors reported residents spend their weekdays. Some people have full-time external day programs; others attend on a part-time basis. Some residents have their ‘day program’ staff come to their home; others have no formal day program. This creates issues for house supervisors in how they should liaise with day program staff, the quantity of liaison, and the amount of direct support they have to provide to the residents who are at home.

*We’ve got a range of [day program arrangements]. We’ve got two [residents] who are full-time, we’ve got one who goes only one day a week and we do activities with him through the house; we’ve got one that goes five mornings a week, and we do some activities with him through the house in the afternoon, and we’ve got Emily, and she goes four days a week*
7. Being a house supervisor

when she’s going. She’s not going at the moment because we’ve got other issues. She [usually] goes four days a week so she has Wednesdays off at the moment. It’s quite a lot going on. We have to pick Steve up every lunchtime. He only goes half-day because of his unstable blood sugars, and we need to monitor and check him because the day service isn’t prepared to do that. We need to pick him up at lunchtime and measure his blood sugar; it’s just easier to bring him back here and give him his lunch. We know what he’s having, so we have a bit more control. (HS/15/I)

The importance of size: Resident and staff numbers

The most obvious difference between group homes relates to the number of residents that live in each setting, and the number of staff that are employed to support them. Table 9 gives some general information about the number of people who live in the group homes managed by the 16 house supervisors who we interviewed, and their supervisory responsibility. On average a house supervisor was responsible for managing about seven staff.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 9</th>
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<tr>
<td>Detail of residents and staff in the group homes (N=16)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean number of residents in setting</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>2 - 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of full-time staff</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0 - 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of part-time staff</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>2 - 10</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Having one extra resident increases the workload significantly. There is one extra Person Centred Plan to complete, another network of family and service providers to liaise with, extra progress notes to write, and so on. An additional resident adds to the administrative workload, which respondents suggested had already expanded significantly.

I think the administrative stuff has grown exponentially. When I was a house supervisor my non-contact time was eight hours, and that was low for anyone back then. Even now I think our houses that have got twenty [non-contact] hours, are struggling to get through the paperwork that’s required of them, the monitoring and the checking and the reporting. So to go from eight to twenty in six years...in another two or three years I can easily see that average being twenty-five, it’s huge. (M/21/I)
There can also be significant differences in the size of the staff team. In our sample the smallest staff team was five and the largest twelve. This means that house supervisors may not have a similar balance of tasks in their workload and different teamwork dynamics to manage.

I have twelve staff so I have twelve different ideas on the one subject. If I don’t effectively manage that, they start to squabble amongst themselves and they start getting allegiances and alliances with each other, and it becomes that survival thing. I think that we don’t equip our supervisors with communication skills and styles....Out of twelve staff, if I ask each one their opinion on a particular topic, chances are I’m going to get twelve different answers. I have to tread on some toes somewhere, but as a good supervisor what I do is I get the commonality that runs between the twelve, and there will be. When I’m having a conversation with somebody they’ll come up with five or ten ideas, which will thread to another staff person, which will thread to another staff person. In the end, instead of just saying, ‘Well no, that’s a bad idea’ I can say, ‘Well thank you very much, I’ll think about that and we’ll see what we can go with that’. I get everybody else’s opinion, I come back and I say to the first staff person, ‘Do you remember we were discussing such and such and you came up with the idea of so and so? It’s a fantastic idea and we’re going to run with that’. So out of the five answers that you’ve given, one would have touched on that subject. It’s about encouraging, supporting, but also providing positive feedback, and having the negative just left, really. Sometimes you’re in the position where you have to say, ‘Well, no, that’s not going to work, because...’, and you have to have your reasons, or if you don’t have them on the spot, say, ‘No, I need to think about that, that’s a very good idea, let me mull that over’. Jot it down somewhere and get back, because each person likes to feel that they’re important. If you empower people, they’ll run with it, they’ll run with the ideology. (HS/5/1)

In larger staff teams there is more formal supervision to undertake, more timesheets to complete, more shifts to fill, and so on. These houses have a Disability Development and Support Officer 2 (DDSO2) (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2005a) staff member. This is a quasi-managerial role, which we suggest would also benefit from greater role clarity. It was beyond the scope of this research, but we flag it as an issue.
7. Being a house supervisor

**Organisation and allocation of resources**

Other variation relates to differences in available resources and the organisation of those resources. Some houses may have their own transport, others may not. Some houses are sited in locations that have advantages over other settings. Some houses have a rostered house meeting, others do not.

*We don’t have a rostered meeting, which is a bit of an issue, because the staff have to come in on their time off. We do use time-in-lieu, but staff have families and so it is difficult to get everybody together at the same time. I try to have one every month. We were going to have one this afternoon, it has been cancelled because a couple of people can’t come now, so there’s no point in having it. This one’s a big one, there’s lots of decisions that need to be made so I’m going to have to reschedule it to a time where everyone can attend, otherwise it defeats the purpose of having a staff meeting and working together….It’s very hard to do your job properly without having [a rostered house meeting where everyone attends].* (HS/12/I)

Some houses have a full staff complement, others have vacant lines, which may have been vacant for a significant time. In discussing good recruitment practice the frustrations and challenges faced by this house supervisor are evident.

*I agree that it’s important [to seek opinions from staff, residents and their family members], but we’re lucky to get a casual to come in and do a shift. I’ve got seven vacant rows for Pete’s sake. We don’t care, so long as it’s a body. (HS/17/I)*

Some variability is unpredictable and services may be more or less flexible in being able to deal with this unpredictability. For example, a resident may become ill and need to be supported at home for an extended period of time. This house supervisor illustrates how a change in the overall service to the residents she supports has had an enduring effect on the amount of time she has for administration.

*Having an unassigned day, a real unassigned day, is excellent. I do believe that nearly every house supervisor has more than one unassigned day which is just for administrative work or meetings. Sadly I don’t have one. I have one unassigned day in my roster, [however], a day program has changed the way they do their bus runs and are trialling something different. That actually means that because we don’t have the hours to*
cover the roster I have to be here to support people. I haven’t had an unassigned day in eight or 12 months. (HS/6/I)

**Skill mix**
The houses are settings that are typically characterised by *inequality of competence* between staff and not *equality of competence*. For example, staff are not equally literate or computer literate.

*What I’m finding is in this house in particular is that [the direct support staff are] not into paperwork. They’re not as skilled in language, in paperwork tasks; they’re not skilled in computer. I don’t think any of them are computer-literate at a level where they want to be on the computer. That’s a disadvantage for me in terms of the support I’ve been able to receive from the staff in that sense. But the staff generally are fantastic with the residents, they’re really doing fantastic things with them, and really doing things to improve their life and make each day an interesting day for them.* (HS/15/I)

This has significant implications for the level of support that house supervisors have to provide and whether they can delegate tasks to direct support staff. The good practice described by this house supervisor may not be possible in another setting.

*There’s some things that you can get other staff to do, and that includes the whole admin role. It gives them another insight into what else is going on in the house besides just caring for the ladies. Suzette, for example, looks after the medication cupboard to make sure that all the medications are in, that we have backups if we run out, so that there isn’t a time that we run out, that all the prescriptions are up to date. That’s a huge responsibility. You can be down the doctor’s two or three times a month getting prescriptions and working with the chemist to make sure that everything’s right. There’s times when the meds come in and the chemist has been busy or they’ve had a different chemist on and things are packed wrong, so they’ve all got to be checked. That’s quite a big job, and that’s now something that Suzette looks after. I do a lot of the medical appointments, so that you can stay on top of what’s going on with the ladies and what they need, but there’s a lot of other tests and follow-up things that I don’t necessarily have to go to. So I always get the staff involved in that for the same reasons, (a) it helps me, and (b) it keeps them in a loop, it keeps them involved. If they’re going to be a part of the ladies’ lives, then they*
need to be able to be a part of all of their lives, not just the nice bits or the mundane bits. (HS/19/I)

**Easier houses: A misnomer**

Not surprisingly, because house supervisors meet and talk to one another, they are aware of their colleagues’ different experiences.

> From talking to other house supervisors and given what I experience myself, there’s a wide range of experiences. There’s some people for who the job is easy because the house is quiet, there’s plenty of time, and there’s other people, they have complex houses, complex needs, complex issues. Every day you come in you’re really dealing with what went on yesterday or the day before and managing those sorts of things, rather than moving what’s underneath, writing the reports, doing the updates, that sort of stuff. It’s a range of experience of what house supervisors do. Some say, ‘There is just so little time, I just never seem to get ahead’. Others say, ‘I don’t see how you can’t get the job done, I’m up to date’. (HS/15/I)

It is perhaps understandable, although not very helpful, and possibly not even true to suggest that some houses are ‘easier’ than others, although this perception exists. Often this notion of ‘ease’ is attributed to the residents. One manager said:

> We do have some more attractive houses where residents are quite capable and it’s fun, whereas we have some others that are quite heavy in nature because of the resident group and the support needs, or challenging in other ways, but they’re probably less attractive to staff. (M/22/I)

Possibly more people find it ‘easier’ to support people with mild intellectual disabilities. However, we are fortunate that people are differently motivated. Whilst working with people with challenging behaviour does not suit everyone, some staff enjoy the challenge. Others prefer the greater proportion of care that accompanies supporting people with severe impairments. Making sure that there is a good ‘fit’ between the residents and the staff who support them is a key recruitment issue.

Each house has its challenges, and if a house supervisor takes on board the aspirations of the *Victorian State Disability Plan 2002-2012* (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2002b) then achieving the goals makes every setting equally hard. Working with people with mild intellectual disabilities is ‘easier’ if your sights are set low. An ‘easy house’ is probably only a group home where staff believe that they can ‘take it easy’. Our own experience is that the challenge of
really listening to the aspirations of people with mild intellectual disabilities who live in group homes makes this an equally testing work environment. One would expect to see higher levels of choice and decision-making by people with mild intellectual disabilities and some real inroads in achieving valued roles in the community. Often those choices and valued roles can be hard to realise. Typical aspirations — about where and with whom to live, whether to have a sexual relationship, get married, have children, or get a job — are not easily achieved for people with mild intellectual disabilities.

**Creating a level playing field**

We suggest that house supervisors should expect to deal with the variation related to the residents, as this is central to the management of human services.

Our findings suggest significant variability between settings with regard to the organisation of services and resources, other than those which are related to the support needs of residents. House supervisors are therefore facing a different managerial context in each group home. This implies that a house supervisor performing competently in one setting could struggle in another.

We suggest that house supervisors should not be expected to deal with the variation that can be attributed to the ‘non-resident’ organisation of services and resources. This is something that is amenable to senior management intervention. Organisations should ensure that regardless of where house supervisors work they are operating on a level playing field — that each house supervisor has the same chance of being a competent house supervisor. The house supervisor’s job is difficult enough, without an organisation creating extra barriers to overcome. It could be that it is this variation in organisational factors, lack of parity in the allocation of resources, and the organisation of supportive structures which are more salient in describing some houses as ‘easier’ or more manageable than others, rather than attributing the ‘ease’ to resident characteristics.
8. Supervision as practice leadership

In Chapter 2 we stated that the *practice-led management* term has been applied to the frontline manager’s position (Reynolds, 2003), although *practice leadership* (Mansell et al., 2004) seems to have greater currency within certain circles within the Department. We will use the practice leadership term because it more accurately reflects the language spoken ‘on the ground’. In Chapter 18 we discuss differences between leadership and management.

In the chapters that follow, we further explicate the practice leadership term and show that it needs to be considered in individual interactions between a house supervisor and a direct support staff member, for example, and also in a group context. We develop the important idea that the organisation of services and the allocation of resources are key variables that impact on the opportunities that a house supervisor has to engage in practice leadership. We begin by giving people’s perceptions of practice leadership before discussing three key management systems — supervision, performance review, and staff meetings — which we identify as important arenas where practice leadership can be exercised. The first two typically take the form of interactions between the house supervisor and a single staff member, whereas house meetings highlight the importance of the group or team context.

**Perceptions of ‘practice leadership’: Role-modelling, practising what you preach, leading by example**

Practice leadership was not a term that had percolated down to some of the managers and house supervisors we interviewed, although people offered explanations of the term in language that was more familiar to them. A manager said:

> I actually haven’t heard of [practice leadership] before, until you’ve mentioned it now. I would assume that it’s a role-modelling term; the expectation is that house supervisors are going to be good role models for the CRU staff that work within their team. It’s not really a term that I’ve heard before. (M/11/I)

Two house supervisors, both unfamiliar with the term, similarly described it in terms of (role-) modelling.

> I’ve no idea [what practice leadership means] It means I’m trying to practise being a leader! (Laughs) I honestly don’t know what that would mean. I suppose that I lead by the practice that I work? Modelling is the thing that we do all the time. Being a new person in this house, with the old
8. Supervision as practice leadership

staff, they’ll say, ‘Oh you can’t do that’. [Yet] the guys [residents] would respond to what I did instantly. And I’d go, ‘Why can’t I do that?’ If you don’t model it then they’re not going to understand that it’s going to work. And if you model it and it doesn’t work, well that’s fine; you go off and try something else. It’s just the way I’ve always appeared to do it. (HS/10/I)

I haven’t heard [the job of house supervisor described in practice leadership] terms, but that’s a given….I am the house supervisor. It’s in everything I do. I emanate…I sweat ‘supervisor’. I see myself as the role-model in everything I do, always. Even role-modelling being relaxed. Even role-modelling, ‘Take it easy, this rule we can bend, you don’t have to follow every rule that strictly’. Trying to role-model every aspect. (HS/17/I)

Implicit in these quotations is an important element of practice leadership — that house supervisors must consciously and deliberately demonstrate ways of behaving for staff (and residents), so that they learn that this is the way that they are expected to behave.

There are a number of different ways that house supervisors can act as a role model. This house supervisor talked about how she could role model in a relatively informal way, identifying a time when she could show a staff member how to complete a teaching program.

I think you do [practice leadership] without even knowing you’re doing it. Some people will look at a program and it’s daunting. ‘Oh I don’t know how to do a program, I don’t know how to do a cooking program’. So you’re going to go through with it, you’re going to say, ‘Well this is what you need to do. Look, I’m on with you on Tuesday night, this is how it is’. It is a lot of role-playing. I don’t think it’s so formal, I think it’s more visual. It’s a lot of things that you know through your own time here. I don’t know if it’s so much leadership, I think it’s more role-modelling and communicating effectively with information. I don’t know if I’d walk about thinking I’m a leader (HS/13/I)

Demonstrating practice leadership ‘without even knowing you’re doing it’, suggests that this house supervisor has practised this ‘ability’ so much that it has become ‘second nature’. This is a useful reminder that learning is a process and that people go through various stages when learning a new ability, behaviour, or skill. ‘Doing something without even knowing you’re doing it’ evokes unconscious competence, the end stage in the ‘conscious competence learning model’ (Boag, 1998).
A recurring idea was that house supervisors would not ask people to do something that they would not do themselves, in other words they model everything.

*The basic premise is, ‘I’m there’. I take on all roles. If there’s muck to be cleaned up, I’m there cleaning it up, because I have to set the standard. I have to set the expectation. Many a time I’ll be in the toilet cleaning up the muck, dry retching, leaving the room and laughing, ‘It’s okay’. It’s not a pleasant job, no-one should think it’s a pleasant job, because it’s just not. That is the reality of the situation, the real side to it.* (HS/5/I)

Being involved in everything in this way sets the ‘tone’ for the direct care staff.

*If you’ve got a slack house supervisor, automatically the staff are just going to go, ‘Well, not much is expected of me’, but if you’re energised and enthused about trying different things then automatically the staff are going to have a different mindset.* (HS/2/I)

Respondents highlighted the importance of being ‘visible’ to staff. Direct support staff cannot informally pick up on good practice if they do not witness it.

*Practice leadership [is] just what you do in the everyday sort of thing. It’s the way you communicate, the way you talk to someone. Say I was addressing one of the guys. If there’s staff around, that’s going to impact on how they’re going to talk to [the residents]. How I address that person, the wording, and my tone of voice. If I show respect and dignity, [the staff are] going to do the same. So practice leadership would be doing that, where you lead by example. It’s like role modelling, what you do, then other people will tend to do the same, like having them involved in making choices. My staff go, ‘You know this person can’t talk’, or ‘This person just likes to sit there, so I’ll decide what they’re going to have’. It’s saying, ‘How about we put something in front of them and let’s see if they give some sort of indication’. Just by doing that then staff tend to follow that later on and do the same thing.* (HS/18/I)

Implicit in this quotation is a distinction between a more passive and active form of role modelling. The former is suggested in the first half of the quotation, where the hope is that the staff member will somehow pick-up on what she sees, whereas the second half indicates an active intervention. The house supervisor has indicated that she was aware of what was happening in the house, listened to what the staff members were saying, and as a consequence had given some
guidance or instruction. These are key elements of coaching (Stone, 1998), which are nicely portrayed in this example.

*I walked into the bathroom a couple of weeks ago and there’s a staff assisting one of our clients to dress themselves. ‘Don’t do that’, just quietly, ‘Don’t do that’. And she looked and she thought, ‘Oh!’ This resident knew exactly what she was doing ‘cos she looked at me and smiled. I took the clothes off the staff member and I said, ’Put that on. What do you think you’re doing? You expect us to work?’ She’s laughing, and she dressed herself and that staff member was absolutely amazed. (HS/10/I)*

Although ‘coaching’ appeared less frequently as a spontaneous term in the interview transcripts, respondents did use it or recognised it as a term that they could attach to their behaviour. Coaching is a form of on-the-job training, which Stone (1998) describes as a process by which employees obtain the knowledge, skills, and abilities to become effective in their jobs. Although similar or even synonymous with the active role modelling described above, making clear to staff what they should do and how they should do it through the coaching process is another aspect of practice leadership.

Being aware that you are being scrutinised all the time creates pressure, as this house supervisor found when she moved to a new house.

*Having a stranger come in gave them that very different perspective, watching me. That’s the modelling stuff. The staff were watching every move I made, and I felt as though I was on show. It was quite scary at times. ‘You want to take your clothes into the laundry for me?’ And they’d do it; they knew exactly what you were saying to them. Off they’d go into the laundry. ‘Yes you can put it on the floor there, or do you want to put it in the washing machine?’ In two days, this guy was putting his clothes in the washing machine. The shoes went in as well, that was a problem to begin with, but who cares? It just didn’t matter; he was putting his clothes in the washing machine. Taking his shoes out was going to be a different task later on. It’s just fantastic. (HS/10/I)*

Unfortunately staff (and residents) can learn to behave in unwanted ways by exactly the same process.

*If you’re not out being an example of [good practice] every day then who is leading the staff? What are they seeing every day? What’s being reinforced; the staff member who is really prescriptive and really directive? So they [the residents] just go, ‘All right, I know this is familiar, so this is what’s
8. Supervision as practice leadership

routine’. A new staff comes in, ‘Well that works. I’ve never worked in a
house before, you yell and you’re really loud, and then [the residents] just
all do what they’re supposed to do’. (HS/6/I)

It was interesting how often house supervisors would report conversations with
casual staff that represented perceptions of practice in other houses, which were
also indicative of the type of house supervisor they didn’t want to be.

Well the way I would look at [practice leadership] is it’s just a matter of
practising what you preach. If you’re talking about positive behaviour
support then you’ve got to carry that out. I’ve heard through casualties and
staff that have worked at other houses about supervisors who will say,
‘You’ve got to do this, you’ve got to do that’ but they don’t do it themselves.
In my opinion leadership is:; if you want your staff to do something then
model it, work the same way. That’s what I try to do here anyway.
(HS/16/I)

You’ve got to be out and about [interacting with residents]. I suppose the
one thing that concerns me is sometimes when we get casuals or new staff
coming in and saying, 'Well who’s the supervisor here? It couldn’t possibly
be you, you’re out here with everybody and you’re not in the office with the
door shut’. Surely that’s not still something that’s going on in the houses?
But it would appear that perhaps to some degree it is. (HS/6/I)

There’s been times after tea and the ladies are settled and in bed and then
you go round and clean up and do what needs to be done. There’s been
times when you’ve just been wiping the bench or cleaning down the table
and the [casual] staff will say to you, ‘Why are you cleaning that table?’
‘Because it needs cleaning’. ‘But you’re the supervisor and you don’t clean
the table’. ‘In this house everyone cleans the table’. Obviously some people
still aren’t used to that, which I find a little bit strange, but I guess different
people operate differently in other houses. (HS/19/I)

House supervisors recognised that being a role model meant that they needed to
be competent and maintaining a high standard placed a good deal of
responsibility on them to be ‘perfect’ all the time.

You need to be good at what you’re doing, skilled in all aspects of what
you’re doing, and needing to be able to correct or direct your staff in their
practice — role modelling good practice yourself. Fitting in that role, as well
as doing the office role is a big task. (HS/15/I)
8. Supervision as practice leadership

The supervisor has to be the best and the most accurate in doing everything. Follow all the rules, all the time. [The house supervisor] is always teaching, has to be the perfect role-model always. (HS/17/I)

Organisational barriers lead to weaker practice leadership

The passive form of role modelling relies on house supervisors’ practice being seen by other staff members, and the active form on having the time to show or model practice in a more formal way.

The timelog data indicates that house supervisors spent a significant amount of time directly supporting residents. About one third of the activities that are shown in the 20 most frequently coded individual competency areas (Table 7) relate to direct support. Only a small proportion of the house supervisor’s practice is likely to be witnessed by other staff members. In the morning a house supervisor may be supporting a person to have the ‘best’ shower, but this is unlikely to be seen by another staff member who will probably be helping another resident to shower, get dressed, or eat breakfast. Or later in the day the house supervisor may be supporting a resident to make a cake, whilst a second staff member is out picking up the residents from a day program. Although modelling in this way is important, expecting staff to pick-up good practice in this way represents ‘wishful thinking’ or a weaker approach to delivering quality services. A stronger intervention through the active form of role modelling is going to be more effective, although it was seldom reported in the timelog study.

Only four out of the total number of activities were coded under the ‘role modelling’ competency, not even 0.25 per cent (Table 8). In fact all four entries were recorded by the same house supervisor, which related to teaching a staff member how to complete a fire checklist, coaching about a recording error, and discussions about the use of slings, bibs, and supporting people with epilepsy.

How the roster is structured works against effective active role-modelling.

Sometimes you do [have enough time to observe and support], sometimes you wish you had more time, but I think the biggest disadvantage is the way the roster here’s structured, I don’t spend enough time with certain staff. That’s just a rostering thing and it’s very hard to get around. There’s one of the part-time staff, I see her twice a month, which I don’t think is adequate. (HS/4/I).

The view that the amount of time spent with certain staff members was inadequate was echoed by this house supervisor.
In this business often you don’t see the people you’re trying to manage. Calista, for example, she struggles with English, but I probably see her twice a week for an hour or two. So there’s not a lot of time where you’re there to be able to assist or support or give her directions, show her how to do [the paperwork]....She’s a part-timer. She works mostly afternoon/night shifts, so she works usually from say two, three, four in the afternoon, through to eight or nine at night. I have very few of those shifts, I usually work seven 'til four-thirty. I run a couple of night shifts but generally seven to four-thirty. So generally by the time I’m finishing work she’s just starting, and I’m going through the process of closing down my day. You’re not there to manage or to observe her work, observe what she’s doing, observe how she’s doing it, so in that sense [the roster] doesn’t work for me. I have a certain sense about her work but I don’t really witness it that often. To do that means special trips in. I have to work extra hours just to do that sort of observation and supervision work. (HS/15/I)

Direct support staff do not therefore all have the same opportunity to observe a house supervisor’s good practice, but more importantly house supervisors cannot observe each staff member’s practice equally nor offer ‘on-the-job’ coaching equally. This leads house supervisors to hope that the staff they see most often spread their good practice.

I’ve got two staff that I only work with four hours a fortnight. To model for them is really hard, but I feel that if you’ve modelled enough with the people that I work with on a really regular basis, they then get into the habit of doing that and showing other people what to do. (HS/10/I)

Or house supervisors have to fall back on the ‘tools’ that are available to them, which they intuitively know are less effective.

I can’t get that level of consistency across the whole staff. I suppose that is frustrating. You write in the communication book to convey certain things, and you do become accustomed to reading between the lines, on your days off, piecing together what’s occurred and knowing how to coach staff in a non-confrontational way via the daily report book, making very inclusive statements, ‘Can we please try and....’ not singling people out so much. (HS/8/I)

**Modes of supervision**

So far we have used words like coaching, guiding, instructing, and modelling to describe the actions of house supervisors, which we want to link to the concept of
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‘supervising’. Figure 6 shows that ‘supervision’ can be provided in different ways. Ford and Hargreaves (1991) make the distinction between two dimensions of supervision, *formal* versus *informal* and *planned* versus *ad hoc supervision*, thereby identifying four modes of supervision. The distinction allows us to make links with what we have been discussing here, but also to be clear about the type of supervision we will be discussing later.

We gave an example of *ad hoc informal supervision* earlier in this chapter. The house supervisor who came across a staff member dressing a resident and intervened (to demonstrate that if supported differently the resident could dress herself) is an example of this.

Of the four supervision modes, *planned informal supervision* is probably the least frequently used. It was not represented in our interview data, nor witnessed in any of our fieldwork, with one very specific exception\(^\text{12}\). This may represent a significant gap in the house supervisor’s repertoire of interventions and we think is an area worthy of development. To paraphrase Ford and Hargreaves (1991), *planned informal supervision* is an agreed way for house supervisors to improve the performance of direct support staff. It would be possible for staff teams to work out how this might be done, but there are also some well-defined examples.

\(^{12}\) *This is not to say that it does not happen. Workplace assessors do this.*
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*Positive Monitoring* (Porterfield, 1987) is one approach to help house supervisors structure the way in which they supervise (Figure 7).

<table>
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<th>Figure 7</th>
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<tr>
<td>The six components of Positive Monitoring (Porterfield, 1987)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Defining the aims of the service</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Specifying clearly what staff should do to achieve service aims</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Helping staff to work in the specified way</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Regularly watching staff work and looking at other records and other aspects of the service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Giving specific feedback to staff on their work and listening to staff comments and suggestions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reviewing individual job performance</td>
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We want to highlight two elements of the *Positive Monitoring* system here — regularly watching staff work; and giving feedback. These processes may sound familiar to people with experience of *active support training* (Jones et al., 1996; Mansell et al., 2004), in particular the element of that package known as *interactive training*. Interactive training involves active support trainers watching staff members carrying out activities with people with intellectual disabilities, which is then the basis of a discussion between the trainer and employee. There is no reason why a house supervisor and the staff team she manages could not come to a similar arrangement, that is, to agree in advance that the house supervisor would watch a particular staff member support a resident to eat breakfast, make a bed, or go shopping. This would then be the foundation for feedback, help and advice. The reason why *planned informal supervision* could have real benefits for service quality is that the research evidence suggests that this ‘on-the-job coaching’ is essential to the successful implementation of active support training. In one study, where the interactive training was not carried out, there was no change in resident engagement levels or increase in staff assistance (Jones, Felce, Lowe, and Bowley, 2001). Interactive training takes about 90 minutes.

A key question is whether this *planned informal supervision* could be incorporated into a house supervisor’s work schedule and how much is reasonable to expect. Although an arbitrary figure, the benefits of allocating 60 minutes per staff member every month for observation and discussion seem appealing and reasonable. This would be a worthwhile research project.
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Planned formal supervision: professional development and supervision

House supervisors are responsible for the general ‘supervision’ of their staff teams, but it is recognised that organisations require formal supervision processes, backed up by strong policies and procedures (Sines, 1992). Details of the Department’s position on planned formal supervision are in the Professional Development and Supervision Policy and Practice Guidelines (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2005e). This was developed as a result of the Disability Services Workforce Study (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2005b), where it was acknowledged that employees had insufficient supervision and that the supervision people did receive was not always appropriate.

Less than one per cent of the activities recorded by house supervisors for the timelog study related to formal supervision. Amongst other things, planned formal supervision is a space for reviewing how staff are doing, keeping direct support staff ‘in touch’ with the aims and objectives of the service, and reinforcing the values of the organisation (Mansell et al., 2004; Sines, 1992). These aims are also suggested in the framework given in Figure 8, through using a combination of the formative and normative supervision functions. It is suggested that supervision meetings should maintain a balance between the three domains.

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13 If a full-time house supervisor manages six staff members then one might expect a more practical proportion of his or her time to be between 6-8 per cent. This assumes that all staff receive a monthly planned formal supervision, which takes between 1 ½ to 2 hours. This includes time to prepare for the meeting and write-up a formal note either during or following the meeting.
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Figure 8. Proctor’s framework for clinical supervision

It is because planned formal supervision is a place for maintaining and developing staff practice, that it is a forum that practice leadership can be exercised. Our interviews found varied attitudes towards supervision, accounts of variable practice, and confusion about the different ‘performance management’ policies. This suggests that a significant amount of work remains to embed the Professional Development and Supervision Policy.

This house supervisor recognised the value of supervision as a management tool, but also the personal benefits of receiving supervision.

I think I’d probably be one of the few house supervisors that I know that would definitely complete monthly individual supervision. I think there’s a couple of reasons for that, the first one is time. A lot of people don’t feel that they have the time. The second one is that the Department rolled out the Professional Development [and Supervision Policy and Practice Guidelines], a different type of supervision, maybe 18 months ago. I thought it was quite a good idea and it would be an effective tool, sadly there was no follow-up on it. I think a lot of supervisors became confused and thought, ‘Well, am I supposed to be doing the old one, or the new one?’ There’s been no follow-up, or training or input, so that as a consequence they’re really not doing much at all. It’s certainly been my experience and observation that if you don’t have as close to monthly supervision that a lot of things for the people you’re supporting are not going to get done and
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there’s the increase of staff conflict because you’re not giving the person that individual time to discuss the issues with you, to thrash it out, to debrief and then look at some strategies you can put into place to keep everybody happy. I’m a very strong advocate of supervision and if I’ve missed my supervision with my manager, I will constantly request it. (HS/6/I)

In recognising the importance of supervision and making it a priority this respondent felt she had to cut back on other aspects of the job.

I see [formal supervision] as something that’s crucial, along with the staff meetings. One of the most crucial things in my job is the communication side of it with my staff. If I don’t do the regular monthly supervision, things end up, it’s just awful, it can really snowball certain things. It’s a really good opportunity to have a one-to-one chat. I know that some supervisors don’t, but I make it a priority. And consequently I think that’s probably why I don’t have a great deal of time to do any other things, because to me that is a priority. (HS/8/I)

Other responses suggested that the Professional Development and Supervision Policy and Practice Guidelines (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2005e) have not been embedded into everyday practice.

I try to do [formal supervision monthly]. I don’t do it that often, ’cos we’re all very close here and we talk, so I usually know if there’s something wrong. That’s one of my weaknesses; I need to do it more often in that sense. It’s always the same thing; I sit there, ‘Have you got any issues?’ ‘No’. They’ll come to me straight away if they’ve got a problem with something. It probably depends on your house and your supervisor. There was confusion about different [management tools and processes]; if you’ve got a discipline problem then you don’t do it in PDS [Professional Development and Supervision] and I think supervisors were getting really confused about the different processes. Then there’s workplace action plans for people who have underperformance issues. It would be nice if they brought out a folder, with it all outlined perfectly. I think supervisors were bringing up performance issues in PDS and they’re not meant to bring it up in PDS, that’s supposed to be a positive chat about how you’re going with work and what development need they have. (HS/16/I)

As well as suggesting that some house supervisors are confused about the purpose of planned formal supervision, and how different polices relate to one
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another, this house supervisor appears to favour other modes of supervision. This suggests a preference for the remaining supervision mode, *ad hoc formal supervision*, where the agenda is agreed on the spot when a staff member comes with an ‘issue’.

Some house supervisors saw ‘supervision’ and managing poor performance as interchangeable, which suggests that in some instances practice is different from that expected by the *Professional Development and Supervision Policy and Practice Guidelines*.

I don’t actually do [formal supervision] unless I have performance issues. I do triplicate formal supervision. Otherwise usually per shift I take a staff person and we sit down and chat, that can be over a cigarette and coffee, that can be in the staff room, it depends on the direction. I give direction. So it could be a new skill that I want them to take on, or it could be that we’re going to discuss ideology, and their personality as part of the team. And that has to be done in a quiet area where we’re all very chummy over a cup of coffee. Is that formal? I consider it to be formal. I consider every single time that I talk with staff member to be formal, because I am. (HS/5/I)

This house supervisor is also describing *ad hoc formal supervision*, making some space away from service-delivery to discuss a topic that has arisen on the spot. A familiar example is a house supervisor taking a staff member who has been assaulted into the office to discuss the incident.

**Supervision: Changing people’s perceptions**

The *Professional Development and Supervision Policy* states that, ‘Performance management and discipline issues are to be addressed separately from Professional Development and Supervision’ (p.1). A motive for making this distinction may lie in the need to turn around the perception that supervision meetings are where employees get ‘told off’. This house supervisor had begun to change the negative perception of supervision.

We use the term ‘supervision’ now, not in the negative sense any more. It’s a good opportunity to say, ‘This is what’s working well, this is what you’re doing well’. I try and do it once a month and I try not to make it too formal because it scares the crap out of people. It varies a little bit because sometimes you get people going off on holidays, but I try [to make it monthly]. I think they’re getting [to a place where they value it] and it’s getting people comfortable talking. That’s a bit of a skill, to get people to
the point where they can sit down and say, ‘Oh yes, I was doing this but I didn’t like doing that’. You’ve got to get them to where you can have those real conversations. It’s not just you sitting there telling people a list of jobs they’ve got to do for the next month. It’s more about how you’re going with this, to move it to that point. (HS/4/I).

However, not everyone has been successful in changing people’s perception of planned formal supervision.

I’ve had people say to me, ‘I don’t want you to write it down. What if someone opens up the filing cabinet and sees it’. It’ll be something little like, ‘I want to move, I need a change, but you can’t tell anyone, I don’t want anyone to know’. Yet, if I was working on shift they’d tell me about that. People are more inclined to be open when they’re not sitting there with a piece of paper and a pen. It was having to change the attitude about it, that it wasn’t a negative thing, it was all also about, ‘Look you’ve done this really well, but what portfolio would you like that you’re in charge of’. I’ve got to work on that and how I deliver it. It carries a bit of a negative thing, but it was drummed from higher management, you must do it. I was hesitant. I have started. I’m still new at it. I’ve had people say, ‘This is a wank, I don’t want to sit here and talk to you like this. I’ve just told you all this yesterday, why am I going to sit down and write it down. This is stupid’. We did have to change the culture of it all. (HS/13/I)

**Organisational barriers lead to weaker supervision**

As with role modelling and coaching, house supervisors identified significant constraints in being able to carry out planned formal supervision, and these barriers are a significant contributor to variability in practice across Disability Accommodation Services.

This house supervisor identified the unequal opportunities that exist for different staff, a point we made previously (see Clement and Bigby, 2006). She also highlights an important principle, which is that as far as possible, time for planned formal supervision should happen when staff are not required to support the residents.

[The roster allows the space for formal supervision] with certain staff, and it doesn’t with other staff. You can do it, you can make it happen, because we’ve got staff that start at 2.30 but the clients would come and there you are, sitting there. The staff are like, ‘Well I’m on direct care now’. For them
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it was a pain. ‘Are we done?’ They’d sit down for ten [minutes]. ‘Are we done? Is that it? I’ve got nothing to say’. I’ve got to work on that. (HS/13/I)

As well as underscoring the above point, this house supervisor raises the important issue of supervision for part-time staff.

It’s very difficult [to have formal supervision meetings] where you have one resident home all the time. So we do the best with what we can, but it is very difficult to roster in supervision with staff.... My goal is to have monthly [meetings] with my part-time staff because they’re all 60 hours, so they’re pretty much on board. (HS/12/I)

We have been made aware of verbal guidance that suggests that full-time staff should have supervision every month and part-time staff every two months^{14}. We think the practice of the above house supervisor is laudable, and makes perfect sense in some of the houses we have worked in closely. For example, one of the rosters we scrutinised thoroughly revealed that the two part-time staff actually worked on more days over the 28-day roster (20 and 18 days respectively) than the four full-time staff, three of whom worked 17 days and one 16 days (Clement and Bigby, 2006). The part-time staff also worked nearly all their hours when the residents were at home, that is, their hours were almost entirely dedicated to supporting the residents. In this case their need to benefit from good ‘supervision’ is equal to that of the full-time staff.

For other house supervisors there is no designated time on the roster. This manager reflected on her time as a house supervisor and her experience of managing other group homes.

[An obstacle to formal supervision is] usually the amount of time that house supervisors have. I had a large staff team, about eight on the team. Two hours of formal supervision would probably take up a fortnight’s worth of non-contact time. Also the fact that none of the CRU staff have any non-contact time. They would be coming in, in their own time. They would accrue time-in-lieu but they wouldn’t be paid for it, which would blow the budget. A lot of staff wouldn’t want to come in their own time, just for time-in-lieu. In a lot of houses they don’t have the opportunity to take the time-in-lieu so they would be accruing it, but they wouldn’t be able to use it. So I have to say a lot of supervision was done on the floor, on the job, and it

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^{14} The Professional Development and Supervision Policy (DHS, 2005e) states that supervisors and supervisees should work together to establish appropriate supervision times. However, the given example that a desirable frequency for new staff is monthly but for more experienced staff six-monthly supervision may be adequate [bold added] is worrying, misleading to house supervisors, and misrepresents the purpose and function of supervision.
was done informally. As you were going, you’d be saying, ‘Well, next time can you try it this way’. The only time I did supervision was when there were performance issues, so it was documented very clearly. I think a lot of people would say the same, there is this expectation from our level that it needs to be done and there is this idea that there is time to do it. I’d like someone to show me how, because it’s not realistic. (M/11/I)

Service resources need to be organised in a way that facilitates effective management practice. In the above scenario, where adequate resources are lacking the house supervisor is ‘compelled’ to rely on ad hoc informal supervision and only use planned formal supervision when there is a significant performance issue. This is likely to lead to or maintain the perception that ‘supervision’ is the place where employees get ‘told off’.

Planned formal supervision should not have to rely on employee good will.

There’s no time in the roster for supervision. There is no ‘non-contact’ hours for the staff....If I come in when another staff member’s on, I’m travelling all the way from home in the middle of the day, asking them to come in early as well, on my day off, to do supervision. Or, I’m asking them to come in on my day on, on their day off, or come in early, interrupting their day. They can take it as [time-in-lieu] but they don’t get paid for that, and I don’t get paid for that. That’s not good enough. Why should staff have to do that? (HS/10/I)

With this weak supervision arrangement there is a further disadvantage from the house supervisor’s point of view, which is evident in this quotation.

We don’t have inbuilt supervision time. You look for your supervision opportunities as you get them and quite often it’s extra hours. So you might have both house supervisor and staff member doing a three ‘til ten and people have to agree [bold added] to come in at two if you want to have that opportunity to talk without residents being available. (M/21/I)

If a house supervisor has genuine concerns about an employee’s performance, to get that person to agree to come in for a meeting places too much power in the hands of that individual. All staff members should expect to receive planned formal supervision; it is not an optional extra.

Managers are aware of the problem and it is this manager’s hope that over time ‘roster reviews’ will allow planned formal supervision to be incorporated into rosters.
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You mightn’t get a nice alignment between the house supervisor having reasonable contact in a non-client contact period of time where we actually can have that sit-down. There is overlap where both people work, but it might be at a core time, when there’s bathing going on, or at a meal time or meal preparation or a bus-run, those sorts of things. You can’t just say, ‘Here’s an hour and a half, let’s sit down’. It’s about trying to do that outside of resident contact or core time periods of the day. So what’s happened for those house supervisors that don’t mind and see the importance of that, they usually come in their time. They’ve got time-in-lieu for that sort of thing. So, if Mohammed doesn’t come to the mountain the mountain will come to Mohammed, but that won’t happen in every case, because the rhythm of [the house supervisor’s] week is determined by their roster, and perhaps other commitments of children and partners and family, and other things. It’s a big ask to expect them to do that. You try and factor it into a roster review, to make sure that we are going to have those crossovers but that usually means a lot more change than a little bit of tinkering around the edges. (M/22/I)

Stone (1998) makes the point in relation to coaching that many managers argue that they don’t have time to coach. A parallel argument is explicit in the views of some of the house supervisors that we interviewed. Resources should be allocated to allow for the regular planned supervision meetings. The Professional Development and supervision policy (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2005e) states they ‘should be a regular feature in the roster’ (p.8). Stone’s substantive point is that it is the problems from not coaching (to which we would add, and not providing regular formal supervision) that can become time intensive.

Clearer policies: Negative feedback - a necessary part of supervision

Before moving on we want to comment on the confusion that exists in the words and practice of some house supervisors and in the relevant policy documents. Managing staff members cannot always be a positive experience, nor are supervision meetings a cosy place to chat. To try and totally separate out performance management and discipline issues from the Professional Development and Supervision Policy seems to us to be artificial, confusing, and ultimately unhelpful to house supervisors whose raison d’être is to influence staff performance. The practice of those house supervisors who maintain the link are probably closer to the mark.
Reid, Parsons and Green (1989) use supervision and management interchangeably to refer to:

Applications within human service settings that are designed to impact staff performance. When considered in this light, the job of a human service manager or supervisor consists of two main functions: (a) to take specific action to change the day-to-day work performance of staff when such performance is problematic or less than optimal; and (b) to take specific action to maintain the routine work activities of staff when their performance is appropriate and acceptable. Hence, the supervisor should be considered a behavior change agent, with staff-behavior the first-level focus of the supervisor’s behavior change practices, and client welfare the second-level focus (p.16).

Performance management is therefore embedded in the Department’s definition of Profession Development and Supervision and should focus on things that people do well but also on things that they need to improve. Inadequate feedback to poor performers is one reason why some direct support staff do not engage in desired practices. Without a focus on the things that direct care staff need to improve, they may be left thinking that they are performing satisfactorily and therefore they have no reason to change (Fournies, 1988).

Clements and Zarkowska (1994) write that:

One school of thought suggests that negative feedback should never be used – the focus should be entirely upon positive feedback for positive behaviours. Whilst this raises an interesting philosophical discussion there is a serious practical problem in negative behaviours going unremarked. This is that negative behaviours may be strengthened by:

- Repetition – the more they are done the more they are likely to be done ('habit')
- Reward – the behaviours themselves may achieve positive results for the staff which if not checked will strengthen the behaviours (p.172-3).

Likewise, issues of discipline cannot entirely be removed from the Professional Development and Supervision process. Documented regular discussion, planning, setting of objectives, and review — all part of the Department’s definition of professional development and supervision — are processes that will keep direct care staff out of the Improving Work Performance and Discipline processes or make sure that there is a seamless transition between them. One of the first places to address the performance of direct care staff who are 'not meeting the
minimum requirements of their role’ (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2005c) ought to be *planned formal supervision*.

**Supervision: In summary**

Employees should expect appropriate and sufficient supervision. House supervisors should have the necessary resources allocated to make sure that it is possible, and those resources must be structured in a way that make sure that it is more likely to happen.

We believe that house supervisors need to be skilled at, and employ, all four modes of supervision that we have discussed. These modes of supervision are four ways in which house supervisors can exercise practice leadership and manage the performance of direct support staff. If used competently they will help to overcome the weaker practices that we reported in *The Story So Far* (Clement et al., 2007).
9. Formal performance appraisal

‘Staff supervision’ is one of the management systems identified by Sines (1992) that are required to reinforce desired practice. He also highlighted the need for ‘staff development and performance review’, which we discuss here. Inconsistent usage of terms can be problematic. What Sines (1992) calls *Staff development and performance review*, we shall refer to as *formal performance appraisal*. What Sines refers to as *Staff supervision* and the Department calls *Professional Development and Supervision* has been dealt with in Chapter 8. We use this discussion of formal performance appraisal as an example of a weaker Departmental managerial structure that in turn encourages weaker management in the houses.

Formal appraisal is an important process by which managers can assess employee performance and discuss work issues in a systematic and planned way with the staff they manage (Cole, 1988). There are many ways to undertake formal appraisal, but a common way is to have an annual meeting with your manager to identify the person’s level of job performance, strengths and weaknesses, identify training needs, and establish goals for the coming year. Some formal appraisal systems are linked to performance-related pay. This process is obviously related to ongoing supervision, but different enough for many organisations to have distinct supervision and appraisal processes. No discrete performance appraisal system exists for the Department’s employees working in group homes. However, there is a process for granting, refusing, or deferring annual salary increments, and house supervisors in some regions, but not all, are responsible for completing the Increment Report Form (Victorian Department of Human Services, n.d.-b). A decision to defer or refuse an increment would typically only happen if a staff member’s performance was being addressed through the *Improving Work Performance Policy* (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2005c), which we discuss later (see Chapter 14).

Although we believe there are substantial benefits of a formal appraisal for all employees, we would not necessarily advocate linking it to salary. Our findings suggest that the process for granting a salary increase to direct support staff is generally unrelated to a rigorous assessment of the individual’s performance. This seems to be the worst of all worlds, although some respondents did talk about how they used the process in better ways.

*The increment forms, that’s almost routine. I’ve got one at the moment that I’ve got to do, they’ve been at a certain level and when their yearly increment comes up you’ve just got to fill out the form. It’s just ticking*
whether their work’s satisfactory or unsatisfactory or whether you recommend them. I actually do talk to the person. I will make a time to speak to that person, talk to them, and I won’t automatically tick ‘excellent work’. I will say, ‘The work is satisfactory in some areas’. There’s only about four boxes to tick and pass it up. You would think if your staff is at a point where you wouldn’t encourage them to have an increment, you would be dealing with that issue in an early phase. A good manager should be attempting to deal with that and have some strategies in place before you get to that level. I do admit I have always let that person go off on the increment. (HS/3/I)

Most respondents agreed that the process was generally a ‘rubber stamping’ exercise, as this manager described.

I don’t think [the completion of increment reports is] a successful process. Four or five very generic questions, including one of the questions which is either ‘satisfactory’ or ‘unsatisfactory’, there’s no room in between. There’s not a lot of room for comments and even if a house supervisor was to withhold it I’m not really sure whether that would be supported anyway. [A house supervisor’s decision] can be over-ruled. I think it’s just something that would typically get done, people would just tick it, sign it, and it’s done. (M/11/I)

Refusing or deferring annual salary increment requires that house supervisors have undertaken regular, documented planned formal supervision, as this house supervisor acknowledged.

Well I haven’t [withheld an increment]. I think if I had a staff member here who I was constantly supervising, who basically wasn’t completing the tasks as directed, and all those sorts of things and the increment report came in, I’d say no. But I would have to base it on some pretty good, demonstrated things like, we had supervision on this date, this was discussed, and you didn’t do this. And maybe there’d be a bit of formal counselling. (HS/4/I).

As we outlined previously, our findings reinforced the Department’s earlier conclusion that employees have insufficient and sometimes inappropriate supervision. This house supervisor thought that she had completed the necessary documentation but had her decision over-turned as a manager previously suggested could happen.

House supervisors are asked to sign off and discuss with the staff member about their increment reports. However, I have been told, many years ago
when I actually wished to suspend that person’s increment because there were substantial work performance issues and they were all well documented, despite that I was told, ‘No just sign it because there’s actually no legal grounds for not giving this person the increment’, even though on the thing that you’re signing it says that this is to be discussed and you both need to sign. I would have thought it would have been a really good tool in a difficult situation but apparently you have to sign it off regardless. (HS/6/I)

In some cases increments are withheld, but this is not an easy thing to do.

I did [recommend an increment was withheld] once, under a lot of stress, stress to me. It was very well-documented. It’s a process, before the increment [is due], so it was very well recorded. That gentleman was moved out of the house and then finished with the Department altogether. It’s not a pleasant thing and it’s definitely not something I ever want to do again, thank you very much. It’s hard. (HS/10/I)

We have used this discussion of formal appraisal and highlighted the completion of the Increment Report Form to suggest a procedural gap, an existing weak process, which in turn encourages weaker management practices. The worst case scenario is that in some instances it would seem that staff are getting financially rewarded for performing badly, a further reason identified by Fournies (1988) for why employees don't do what they're supposed to do.
10. Practice leadership: The group context – captain of the ship

Many of the activities that we have discussed to date will take place as interactions between a house supervisor and an individual staff member, although some of them can equally happen as a group activity. To reiterate a point we made earlier, practice leadership also needs to be considered in a group context. In this chapter we consider the importance of teamwork in group homes and consider some ideas about leadership, before discussing the house meeting, a key setting where the characteristics of effective teams are likely to be observed and where house leaders can exercise practice leadership.

Enhancing staff relations: The importance of teams and team leadership

We feel it important to make the case for ‘teams’ and ‘teamwork’ as both terms are frequently misused. People sometimes refer to groups of people as a ‘team’ even when their experience suggests a dysfunctional group. Successful teams have particular characteristics (Belbin, 1981).

Katzenbach and Smith (1993) make the point that a teamwork approach is not necessary in all working environments. Sometimes all that is necessary to produce the desired outcomes is for people within a work group to produce their ‘individual bests’. However, it is probably obvious to anyone who has worked in a group home that delivering high quality services relies on teamwork.

Staff members who are attempting to teach a resident a new skill or reduce the frequency of challenging behaviour know that consistency is vital. You are unlikely to be successful in teaching a person with severe intellectual disability to feed himself if six staff members are using six different approaches. You are unlikely to reduce the frequency of a self-injurious behaviour if every member of staff is left to respond, in their own idiosyncratic ways, to a resident poking his own eyeball.

You need a team that will follow through. The key to alleviating a lot of issues is a consistent approach. When you’ve got a consistent team, who at a house meeting say, ‘This is a great idea, let’s go with it’, and everyone adopts the same approach, it will work. All you need is one person to go, ‘Nup, that’s wrong’, and try and sabotage a project, [and] the clients are affected. (HS/13/I)
10. Practice leadership: the group context

Although the notion of teamwork is embedded throughout the 14 competency areas, it is particularly manifest in ‘Enhancing staff relations’. This is summarised in Table 4 as:

*House supervisors enhance staff relations by using effective communication skills, encouraging growth and self-development, facilitating teamwork, employing conflict resolution skills, and providing adequate supports to staff.*

In order to be proficient in this area house supervisors need the knowledge and understanding that underpins the competencies. House supervisors acknowledged the importance of teamwork.

*If you’ve got a team of staff, that’s when you get the best results across the board. [Facilitating teamwork] would automatically be one of the things that a competent house supervisor would do. (HS/2/I)*

*You have to build a team so everyone trusts each other, can rely on each other. If you don’t have a good team you won’t have a good house. It doesn’t matter what sort of clients you’ve got, if you haven’t got a good team, you won’t have a good house. (HS/19/I)*

This house supervisor makes clear that the ‘best results’ of a ‘good house’ produce outcomes for the residents.

*If the team isn’t working properly, [then] it is a resident issue. Then the residents aren’t getting the care that they should be getting. They’re not getting the environment and the atmosphere that they should be getting. (HS/10/I)*

Managers recognised that the importance of teamwork extended to the organisational structures beyond the group homes.

*A house supervisor, a team manager, an area manager, is only as good at the team that they manage, and so to get the best out of them actually makes the job so much easier. (M/22/I)*

This manager’s thinking shows that it may be helpful to think ‘differently’. She sees herself as being part of the group home staff team, suggesting that the staff team is not just the names that appear on the roster.

*[House supervisors] have to be able to relate to us in ‘management’ too. There’s too much of ‘them and us’. I try and break that down with my house supervisors. I very much see myself as part of their team and they know I see myself as a leader of that team. I’m very much a part of it and we*
communicate quite well. I think you have to have a commitment to the rights of people with disabilities. There’s no point in being there if you haven’t got that because you’re not going to be able to show that to the team. They’re going to be guided by whatever you do, so you’ve got to have those skills and leadership. You’ve got to be able to lead. I’ve seen many a bad house supervisor that I don’t think are competent; their staff have come in new and gone that way as well, because they’ve seen them as their leader and they’ve followed. You’ve got to present yourself well, you’ve got to have the rights of the client, you’ve got to be able to work with the policies. My big thing’s the team, that you’re working as a team, and not as individuals. (M/20/I)

**Leadership theories: Traits and styles**

Francis and Young (1992) list *appropriate leadership* as one characteristic of effective teams. This means that anyone in a team can exercise leadership, but as the manager of a group home, the house supervisor is the person most likely to fulfil this role and create the climate where direct support staff can take on a leadership role.

Leadership is unfortunately not an easy concept to define and has been conceptualised in different ways (Bryman, 1996). The good news is that older ‘trait theories’, encapsulated by the idea that leaders are ‘born’ rather than ‘made’, have been discredited. This puts the onus on the organisation to develop people for the role, and emphasises the importance of activities such as supervision, training, and mentoring. One house supervisor’s comment reflected this.

> **I think people aren’t born supervisors, but they certainly can make good supervisors. Different people bring different things to the party.** (HS/4/I).

A second leadership approach has focused on leadership styles, with autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire styles the most commonly cited (White and Lippit, 1953). Inviting staff to contribute to a discussion before making a decision is part of a democratic leadership style.

> **I think when staff have the opportunity to be able to bring something and they’re passionate about what they’re doing, they do it well. I’m not a supervisor that goes, ‘I think we should do this’. It’s always at a house meeting, ‘What ideas do we have? How can we do this? How can we do that?’ And then everyone contributes. And if someone feels confident enough to say, ‘Look I’ve been thinking such and such, I want to get [a**
The democratic style is underpinned by the belief that involving people generates greater commitment and energy from a group of people.

[Facilitating and encouraging staff to be creative and try new ideas] that’s one of the real crunchers. If you can’t do that, you’ve just become a house supervisor who’s the only person with ideas, and the place isn’t going to grow, ‘cos people are going to go, ‘I’m just here, do what I have to do, get out, and grab the money, go’. But you don’t want that, you want to invite a number of people who think, ‘Ooh, I can try this’. Or if they see a resident who’s doing something they’ll go, ‘Hang on, he’s doing that, but what if we expanded that he could do this?’ You want people to have that way of thinking. Some people naturally think like that, some people don’t and you’ve got to nurse them along as best you can. (HS/4/I)

Although in certain circumstances being autocratic may be appropriate.

I do have to make decisions that some people may not like, but that’s part of my job. But if you empower people to have ownership or be a part of the decision making process, then they’re going to be a part of moving forward as well. There’s a lot of coaching and mentoring, especially when you’ve got a very different culture to the way I believe in. (HS/12/I)

In general we would advise that an overly laissez-faire style, that is, leaving direct support staff to their own devices, is an inappropriate leadership approach in group homes. This should not be confused with delegating responsibility for tasks to direct support staff, which should be based on a judgement that the staff member is competent and therefore needs less support (Blanchard, Zigarmi, and Zigarmi, 1986).

We see a laissez-faire style as inappropriate because we see management as the things that managers ‘do’. Fournies (1988) writes that, ‘Applying management as an intervention means that managers must do specific things at specific times to influence the eventual outcome of their people’s performance’ (p.89). Thus if house supervisors are not intervening, then direct support staff are performing without their help. We reiterate a key point from the discussion on modes of supervision and performance appraisal, which is that many direct support staff are inadvertently performing with limited help.

An important idea is that there is not one universal best style of management, but that an appropriate style will depend upon the house supervisor, the specific


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group home, the direct support staff, and the task to be completed. This is known as a contingency or situational leadership (Blanchard et al., 1986; Tannenbaum and Schmidt, 1958).

In this example the house supervisor explains that on moving to a new home, she decided to initially defer to the experiential authority of the direct support staff, which resulted in positive consequences.

When I first started, I said to them, ‘Okay, you guys are the experts. I’ll follow you, so you’re the boss. I’m the boss if we need to deal with things, but otherwise I’m a worker, so you need to show me as you would any other new worker’. That for them that was really empowering and they said that’s the thing that they liked the most, because I didn’t come in going, ‘This is how it is because I know’. Because I don’t know [the resident]. I’ve worked with loads of behaviours but I don’t individually know that resident. The men that worked with him for all those years know him inside out, so I’d be silly to go in and not listen to their advice. A lot of people come in straight away with their ideas and say, ‘I’ve done this and I’ve done that’ and change everything and get the staff’s back up. Then no-one will work effectively. (HS/14/I)

Selecting an appropriate leadership style in practice is difficult. As was suggested above, the house supervisor needs self-awareness, knowledge of the setting in which she works, understanding of the staff team, and an appreciation of the job to be done. In other circumstances in might be unwise to defer to the ‘expertise’ of direct support staff if they need direction themselves or the task is complex.

There’s a certain part of me that says that [developing person centred plans is] really beyond the role of [direct care] staff in particular. It’s quite complex, and you need to have a lot of knowledge of what’s available, what’s out there. People who work in this field aren’t necessarily the most activated people in their own right, yet we’re expecting them to be very activated in the lives of others. I think we really need to resource [person centred planning] very well, if we want that bigger picture, because like I said, I don’t think people are often resourceful in their own lives, so how can we expect them to be more resourceful in the lives of a person with a disability? (HS/15/I)

Leadership theories: Transformational Leadership

Newer approaches to leadership have been referred to as ‘transformational leadership’, ‘charismatic leadership’ and ‘visionary leadership’. According to
Bryman (1996) these labels conceptualise a leader as, ‘Someone who defines organizational reality through the articulation of a vision which is a reflection of how he or she defines an organization’s mission and the values which will support it’ (p.280).

This conceptualisation suggests that house supervisors need to develop a vision. As well as providing a useful metaphor for the house supervisor’s role the quotation below reflects sophisticated ideas about leadership — that house supervisors have a role in constructing organisational ‘reality’ in the heads and minds of direct support staff (see Morgan, 1986)

One of the more difficult roles as a house supervisor is manoeuvring staff ideology and ideas....As a supervisor it’s hard because I need to construct a future and then I need to enrol everybody to be part of that future, clients and staff all working towards that future. As a supervisor, if I don’t recognise that role, then we flounder. I often use the analogy of ‘captain of the ship’. I can’t get from Australia to South America unless I have a good crew. If they’re sitting around having cigarettes all day long, when the good wind comes we’re going to miss it, we’re going to flounder around. You have to have a captain you have to have a crew; you can’t have one without the other. Who is more important? A boat won’t function without both, so both are important, but someone has to make the tough decision. It’s the way that you go about doing that. (HS/5/I)

A more concrete example is given by this house supervisor. Where some people see a Community Residential Unit or CRU others see a house or a home. This house supervisor explains how his understanding of a home goes beyond the bricks and mortar to include the garden and the immediate neighbourhood.

I always say the house starts at the letterbox and finishes at the back fence. A lot of houses are very focussed on the house, what’s in the four walls. And what do you see? There’s weeds in the garden. I think that’s because they don’t see the place as a whole. I think that’s part of the philosophy good house supervisors have, that we improve everything, whether it’s keeping the weeds out of the gardens, ‘cos really if you can’t do it yourself, get Jim’s Mowing in to do it. If your bushes need trimming back and you don’t want to do it yourself, or you haven’t got residents who are capable of helping you, get Jim’s Mowing or get whoever. You don’t sit there and have your neighbours getting cross at the junky looking rental. You might have noticed this neighbourhood, it’s a very quiet neighbourhood, where people keep nice
10. Practice leadership: the group context

gardens, so if you want to be part of the neighbourhood, be quiet and keep a nice garden, otherwise they’re not going to accept you. (HS/4/I)

This vision of a home has to be communicated to direct support staff. It may be necessary to challenge employees understanding of what they may primarily see as a workplace and in doing so, set high expectations.

I find it really difficult to explain to some staff, ‘When you’re on duty you can walk in the house, when you’re not on duty you have to ring the doorbell. When you’re in the house, even if you’re on shift, I don’t really like you taking over the kitchen and making full gourmet meals for yourself, even if it’s your meal break. It’s your meal break but it’s their home, you’ve got to respect that’. That’s the difference between the personal and professional. Yes it is a home, and therefore you’ve got a good kitchen, and it is your meal break, but it’s not your home. (HS/17/I)

It is clear that these house supervisors have high expectations of Disability Development and Support Officers. Transformational leadership also demands a strong people orientation, which involves giving direct support staff personal attention, treating them respectfully, and allowing them to take responsibility.

[House supervisors need] knowledge, confidence, the ability to see the best in people and try to get the best out of them. Understanding that you’re working with people, whether the staff, the parents, the family, the workplace. You’re working with people and every one is different and they’ve got different needs, so [house supervisors need] people-management skills. (HS/17/I)

The same respondent also thought that house supervisors need:

To be able to think outside the square, to be able to follow rules but also to know what the meaning is behind the rules, so you know how to think outside [the square] when you come up against different scenarios. (HS/17/I)

‘Thinking outside the square’ is a prerequisite for change. This house supervisor explains that she had to challenge people’s understanding when she took over the management of a group home.

[Changing the culture] it’s slow and steady, ‘cos [the staff have] all been here for quite a while. It’s like, ‘Well, we’ve done that for the past 10 years’ and I’ve said, ‘Well I’m sorry, you’ve done it wrong for the past 10 years. This is the way that it needs to be done. It’s policy, so it needs to be
10. Practice leadership: the group context

followed’. It’s not negotiable with certain things. A perfect example is when I came here. One of the residents went bowling on a Sunday, and he’d been doing it for years. It was one of my first Sundays here and the person wanted to sleep in that Sunday. The staff member said they have to go to bowling and I said, ‘Well, why do they have to go to bowling?’ ‘Because it says that he goes to bowling on a Sunday’. I said, ‘But why does he go to bowling? Is it relaxation? Is it a job?’ It’d be different if he was getting paid. And she said, ‘Oh, recreation’. I said, ‘Well, is there any reason if he doesn’t want to go to bowling that he has to go to bowling?’ So things like that have changed. In the end he gave it up and he’s now doing ten-pin bowling through the Special Olympics, which is once a month. He makes his own way there and he loves it. Whereas he was going there and only a couple of people were showing up, or nobody was showing up and he’d have to go and bowl on his own. That was the culture that I was breaking through; it says that this person does this on this date, this person mops the floor on this date, this person does this on this date, does his washing at this time, but if he wants to go to the movies, can’t he do his washing tomorrow? (HS/12/I)

House supervisors may have to challenge people’s understanding about the most ordinary of activities that most people take for granted, such as how people take their tea or coffee. This house supervisor moved to a group home where former Kew staff had continued institutional practices.

It always makes me laugh when I came here for the first time and I was asking some of the staff how individuals had their tea and coffee. They looked at me and said, ‘White and one’ and I said, ‘Okay, does everyone have white and one?’ Everyone from Kew has their tea with milk and one sugar, because that’s how it’s made up in the jug, that’s how it comes on the trolley. It was such an eye-opener for me, having never worked in an institutional setting, that something as simple as deciding what you will drink and how you will take it…it’s been interesting for all of the guys [residents] here to be able to pick what they like and to see how they like it. (HS/6/I)

The leader as servant

Pengra (2000) makes the distinction between ‘Values’ with a capital V and those with a lowercase v. The former refers to an organisation’s Values, goals, and principles, whilst the latter refers to an individual’s values, specifically in this context the values of people with intellectual disabilities. She argues that human
services should be designed in terms of the service-users’ values, which is implicit in one of the five values espoused by the Department, ‘Client Focus’.

More often than not values are in tension with one another. Given the relative powerlessness of people with intellectual disabilities it may be the case that staff or organisational Values are given precedence over those of an individual service-user’s. In *The Story So Far* (Clement et al., 2007) we gave some examples of this tendency. A house supervisor articulated an outcome of this problem well.

*The biggest issue that we have I believe, as carers, is the fact that ‘I want to turn somebody into another me’ is very often the ideology. People aren’t aware of it, they’re not conscious of it, but it’s values that come into to it. So when we talk, am I effectively hearing what they want? Am I placing my judgement on that? (HS/5/I)*

In addition to the impact of our own values many people have stories about how service ideologies can be used to justify riding roughshod over a client’s wishes.

*Many years ago I was doing Social Role Valorisation training. One of our ladies was doing Meals on Wheels then, that’s what she wanted to do. She wanted to help people who couldn’t help themselves. She was in her late 60s, God bless her heart. She wanted to help people who couldn’t help themselves, so she got into Meals on Wheels. This guy that ran the Social Role Valorisation course told me that I was wrong to have allowed her to do that. Do you know why?15 I said, ‘This lady believes that she is serving the community and assisting people less fortunate than herself. She doesn’t see herself as devalued, or undervalued, and she felt she was doing a really good job’. I was so disheartened, because I thought, ‘This lady has chosen of her own free will. Nobody’s suggesting it [to her]’. She’d heard about it, and that’s what she wanted, to take these meals to these older people. (HS/10/I)*

A possible way of maintaining a client focus is by thinking about a leader as ‘one who serves’ (De Pree, 1989, p.12). This demands that we both understand our own values and try to understand the values of the people with intellectual disabilities, key elements of ‘reflective practice’ (see Johns, 1995). Not only does this require real insight into ourselves and others, but it also means taking risks. The concept of the leader as servant seems to be useful to us in reminding service workers of the importance of uncovering people’s values. We may not be

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15 One of the authors did answer this question in the course of the interview. An interpretation and application of Social Role Valorisation theory is implicit in the second-half of the quotation.
able to endorse those values in every case, but bringing those values to the surface, discussing and negotiating around them is a leadership task.

How do you separate yourself and your ideology and your culture, your beliefs? When Vera is walking down the street she likes to check the phones and the cigarette machines for change. Now there are a lot of people that consider that to be bad and stop her. There’s an argument that ensues about that, ‘Why can’t I?’ ‘Well because of bad manners’ ‘Why is it bad manners, they left the money for me. If I find it surely that’s for me, and how is that bad manners?’ So then you set up a negative, you have a boss and you have a client. It’s okay. My value says it’s not good for me to go scabbing around the place, but your value might say it’s good luck if I find it, how can that be bad? I have to understand what my value-base is, and I have to be without prejudice in a lot of ways. My happiness and your happiness are different things. What makes me happy, what’s making you happy they’re obviously very different things, the same with her. (HS/5/I)

Teamwork

Appropriate leadership is only one characteristic of effective teams. In a group home context Francis and Young’s (1992) term ‘team manager’ can be applied to the house supervisor’s position. As we stated previously everyone in the team should have the opportunity to exercise leadership and it is the house supervisor who enables this to happen.

You need to take [staff] opinions on and don’t always make decisions by yourself, because nine times out of ten you might have missed a little piece. If I have a major decision that’s going to affect all of my residents and my staff....with the staff I take on board what they’re saying. If it’s a sensible enough plan of action, and it’s completely different to what I thought and their action’s better, I take their actions. But only if it’s a better action. There’ve been times when they’ve all gone, ‘No I’m not doing that’ and I go, ‘Too bad, you’re completely wrong, this is what we’re doing’....With the residents [even if] there’s some things that they mentally couldn’t absorb, I’ll still talk about it with them. If it’s in a house where the residents are quite high-functioning and they can make a choice, I give them the opportunity to make that choice on their own. (HS/14/I)

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16 Francis and Young (1992) identify 12 characteristics of effective teams. Where we refer directly to one of their ‘labels’ the term is italicised.
Another quality of effective teams is suitable membership. Team members bring a mix of contributing knowledge, skills, and abilities.

We all come in with different ideas, different values, which is good. People come up with really good ideas. We’ve had some people come up with brilliant ideas that as a supervisor you probably wouldn’t have come up with, because a lot of people [have] come from other houses and they’ve had amazing life experience beforehand. We have people that are artists outside of work and they can come in and do an art program with a client, and work with clay, whereas I have no art skills. (HS/13/I)

When this is the case and the team has well-developed individuals supporting one another becomes more of a shared function.

I have some staff who I think are particularly good at particular things, and I will ask them, I will pull them aside and say, ‘Well you know, Brad’s started, you know I’ve just put him on contract, could you assist him with [such-and-such]. Could you gently do it, I think he is particularly great at this but he has had a little bit of deficit in this area’. It’s about empowering, training and coming together, support and nurture. (HS/5/I)

In good teams the roles are clearly defined. One of the house supervisor competencies is ensuring that staff members maintain appropriate boundaries between personal and professional issues.

Staff are what staff are. We all have our lives outside. I often say to staff, ‘I have a caring about what happens outside of work, but what I care about most is when you walk in that front door, you put on your professional jacket. Your mood, you need to understand, is not affected by outside. You’re a professional. We’re professional carers in a home. I expect professionalism from you. So if you’ve just come in and you’ve had a fight with your husband or wife I really don’t want you to bring that in. Part of my role is to perhaps assist you through that, but that’s not the main part, it’s not the main part at all. I need you to be professional when you come here, you know life affects us all, but we’re professionals’. (HS/5/I)

Clearly defined roles result in well-organised team procedures.

When I first came here there was really no formal keyworker system up and running and there was no formal portfolios. So what we did at one of the staff meetings that we have been able to have is I’ve written down a whole group of duties with what’s expected. A fire portfolio, a food portfolio, just things like that, and they got to choose which one they wanted to do. That
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also gets changed as well, so we put it all back into the middle, say six months down the track and say, ‘Does anyone want to change?’ It’s the same with keyworkers but that’s every couple of years if they wanted to, and certainly if the [resident] wants. If somebody is not happy with their key staff member then that gets changed straight away. (HS/12/I)

Good teams have created a constructive climate. This house supervisor suggests that challenging direct support staff to take on new tasks and roles requires the development of trust.

I don’t have a service card, and the reason I don’t [is] because what ends up happening is it all falls back on the house supervisor. I’ll be the one going out and buying the clothes, doing this, doing that, I don’t like that. I want the staff to be working as a group. I’m probably one of the house supers who doesn’t have a service card because I don’t believe that I need to. I can give that task to the staff and expect them to deal competently with it. And so it’s about that, giving people permission to do things, and then creating a situation where they can do it in an environment where they’re not paranoid about making mistakes. I’ve always said to the staff, ‘If we make mistakes, no-one gets into trouble. We look at the mistake, we learn from it, and then we move forward. So, if you make a mistake doing CERS\(^{17}\), big deal, we have a look at what happened, we work out where we went wrong, fix it up in the books, and we go forward from there. (HS/4/I)

Teams set worthwhile objectives that keep stretching the team’s goals.

They often say, ‘If you want to do a holiday go call up Alfred and see how he got around it’. I will always look at anything and say, ‘How are we going to get to this point?’ We’ve got a spa, and the residents have been on numerous holidays here. The residents last year had two weeks holidays which I reckon we’d probably be in excess of any other CRU. It’s all because I was willing to go out and find the resources and work my way round it. There’s a way to do everything, and my motto is that if I got told ‘No’, I just didn’t try hard enough. I think that’s good, if the staff see you going after things, the staff have a sense that the place is developing, or that there’s something happening. If you walked in this place and it’s the same every day and it’s been the same for the last five years, what would your thoughts be about the place; we’re going nowhere? I call [it] the ‘big ticket item’. I always say to the staff, ‘We’ll chase one big ticket item this year’. The year

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\(^{17}\) CERS (Client Expenditure Recording System) is the Department’s system of tracking residents’ expenditure.
before it was the spa, last year we did the Gold Coast holiday, this year will be the trampoline, next year will be something else. That’s how you keep the interest in the place, and make that feel that you’re getting somewhere. (HS/4/I)

House supervisors have the difficult task of building effective teams. Francis and Young (1992) see the commitment to teamwork as a distinctive management style, which requires the house supervisor to develop the resources of the group. The house supervisors we interviewed acknowledged the creative strength of staff teams and aspired to work in a way that recognised that all members are capable of contributing to the development of high quality services.

**The group context: A summary**

In this section we have used quotations from house supervisors to illustrate practitioner knowledge about the importance of teams and teamwork, which we have linked to well-known management literature. In doing so we have developed some key ideas about the ‘leadership’ element of practice leadership. A practice leader has an orientation to ‘teamwork’ and the knowledge and understanding of what underpins leadership, the ability to employ different leadership styles, and the qualities of a transformational leader. These individual qualities must be present for the house supervisor to facilitate teamwork, but organisational resources must also be allocated, and organisational structures must be in place to allow a team approach to develop.
11. House meetings: A space to develop teamwork, an arena to demonstrate practice leadership

The importance of house meetings

Staff meetings were a third managerial system identified by Sines (1992) that is needed to reinforce the value-base of the service. Facilitating house meetings accounted for three per cent of the activities recorded by house supervisors in the timelog study. Sines does not just advocate house meetings as another management system that is necessary to reinforce desired practice, but specifies a weekly meeting. As with rostered supervision, this manager identified that regular meetings have resource implications.18

We’d all love to be in a space where we could have monthly meetings that are rostered and staff were expected to attend. We’d all love it, but it’s an enormous expense and maybe needs to be weighed up against which houses need that, versus the houses that don’t. Some houses currently don’t use the staff meetings that they have available and we need to look into whether that’s right or wrong. Staff meetings shouldn’t just be an issue based thing, it should be proactive and developmental. If we had monthly meetings we’d be in a better position to put some structure around how those times are used. (M/21/I)

This manager reinforced that some house supervisors do not use the time that is available for house meetings effectively.

I’ve had a supervisor say to me, ‘I don’t know what to put on a house meeting’ and I’m astounded because there’s so much training that you could do, or provide information for your staff if you had three hours. You don’t have time when they start shift and they don’t have the handovers and things, so most houses they would love a monthly basis, because it does allow them the time to catch up, it allows people the time to express how they’re feeling, and it allows them the time to talk about things that have happened in that month. When we talk to someone good ideas will fly around the room with a bit of brainstorming. (M/20/I)

Coordinating and facilitating effective staff meetings is something that can be taught to house supervisors and it should be acknowledged that their managers have a role in ensuring that this is the case. The house or staff meeting is a key forum for facilitating teamwork, enhancing staff relations, canvassing opinions, and

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18 A two-hour house meeting once a month, plus half an hour for preparation and one-hour to write minutes would account for 2.5 per cent of a house supervisors hours over a current 4-week roster. A weekly house meeting on the same lines would account for 10 per cent of the house supervisor’s time.
11. House meetings

communicating information, and a place where house supervisors can exercise practice leadership. Although a weekly staff meeting would require a significant investment of resources, one metropolitan region has established regular house meetings, as this manager explains.

Our staff meetings within the region, they’re bi-monthly. Certainly the ones that I had, we did a lot of work on the [residents’] programs in those meetings. We also had ones that were just specific to one client whereas the staff meetings tended to cover all of the residents in the house, plus any other house issues. We had more specific ones if the need arose. There are houses that have them more frequently, and there are times within certain houses that you require them to be more frequent, in terms of say behaviour and you’re developing new plans and you need to train all the staff. But typically we’ve got the six a year and we have other training opportunities, lots of the mandatory training stuff as well. (M/11/I)

Our own experience suggests that a house meeting every eight weeks is not frequent enough. The previous speaker highlights a number of reasons for needing to meet more frequently, as does this house supervisor. A truly flexible service would be able to schedule additional meetings on an ‘as needed’ basis.

They do get paid for staff meetings once every second month. At the moment I’m having [meetings] nearly every month because I need to get the staff team here working, talking more. We’ve got a very new, young staff team starting to get together, so I’m having more regular meetings to let them feel that they are being listened to and being able to join in any decisions. (HS/10/I)

A manager pointed out the disparity between her formal opportunities to meet with other managers and those in the houses.

As a manager we meet every fortnight for a meeting. We have the small team meeting and we have a large one. And we have one, one fortnight and one the other. It’s like you expect us to get together to share information and to have training and so forth, but we’re not expecting that in our CRUs. We provide managers with the once a fortnight [meeting] and yet we’re providing the houses once every two months. (M/11/I)

Having every staff member attend the meeting was said to benefit teamwork.

[The house meeting] is rostered in [for everyone to attend], that’s very important. The problem is, if you don’t roster it in, people don’t turn up. That’s when your team breaks down. The meeting is one of the most
11. House meetings

important aspects, because that’s where you can bring all your concerns. If we’ve got an issue with our client’s autistic behaviours, [which] are always changing, then as a team we’ll go, ‘Look, I’ve tried this, I’ve tried this, I’ve tried that, that worked, that didn’t’ and then we come up with a plan. That’s really important. (HS/14/I)

Getting everyone to come to a staff meeting can be problematic in some houses, and requires creative thinking to find ways of keeping everyone involved.

We [have a rostered house meeting]. Every member of day staff [is rostered to attend], but not night staff. As a result of that, the two nights after the house meeting I work two late shifts so that I can update the night shift on what happened at the house meeting. So it’s not inclusive of all staff and that’s disappointing because the night shift are the most isolated members of staff. They’re also the members of staff that really take on the most responsibility, i.e. they have five residents in their care alone overnight. Their issues are important, and I think it’s important that they attend the house meeting so that they have an opportunity to express their point of view within the group and that the group has an opportunity to talk to them and understand what their role is. (HS/15/I)

In The Story So Far (Clement et al., 2007) we commented on the fact that in the three houses we observed, the part-time staff were not rostered to attend the house meeting. This meant that up to one third of the staff group were not included at the key forum for information sharing, problem solving, or decision making. In addition, they are absent from the key forum where the house supervisor can exercise practice leadership. One consequence of this is that some part-time staff may not feel that they are as important as full-time staff, which may also be the case for casual staff. One house supervisor discussed the importance of getting casual staff to come to house meetings, once again reinforcing variability in standards.

We have a [rostered house meeting] and it’s the third Wednesday of every month. We have some permanent casuals and they are encouraged [to attend]. If you work here for a couple of months, to have the house running effectively they need to know what our thinking is. It makes it an easier job for the casuals themselves. They know where everyone’s coming from, they know what the expectations are, they know that we’ve got some special ideas on how to treat different clients, everybody knows we all work in the same manner. It makes for more positive outcome for the clients. You can’t
do it with one doing it one way and then one doing it another way.
(HS/19/I)

Not all houses have a rostered house meeting, but house supervisors who recognise the importance of such meetings try to make it happen.

I think house meetings are very important. We don’t have actually a set house meeting date but I’ve got two dates in the roster where I’ve got a majority of the staff here, so we can actually have a house meeting. I’m lucky. [An active night staff] just lives down the road, so she’ll actually drop in and come to the house meeting. (HS/4/I).

We think the principle of the same house supervisor is commendable, when stating that resident support should be privileged over house meetings.

The only time we don’t have one, say in January, we’ve got all the residents at home. I don’t think it’s appropriate having a house meeting. Basically you’re spending one or two hours ignoring the residents and I don’t think that’s appropriate. If it’s school holidays we don’t have one but other than that we try and do it once a month. We work in a field where people don’t necessarily work together. So it’s keeping that teamwork and fostering that. I think that’s where your team meeting’s very important, ‘cos it’s the one opportunity you all get together and you keep that common purpose. (HS/4/I).

We pointed out in The Story So Far (Clement et al., 2007) that many of the house meetings we observed were scheduled without reference to the support needs of the residents, and so we saw residents being left unoccupied for the duration of house meetings, if they were held on days in the week when not all the residents attended day programs. There may be houses where there is a resident or residents home every day. House meetings need to happen in these settings too, and some thought will need to be given to enable the meeting to take place while the residents still receive support.

Even when house supervisors without a rostered house meeting try to arrange one, they are reliant on the ‘goodwill’ of the staff team. This manager believed that you could only ask for so much ‘goodwill’.

I’ve said it to management so I’m happy to say it to you, if I was on my day off and you asked me to come in and give up three and a half hours of my day, even if I was being paid, and it was in the middle of the day between eleven and four, then that’s ruined my whole day and I may consider not to come….I think you can ask people to be dedicated but only to a point. In the
11. House meetings

end they go, 'I do my job, I am dedicated while I’m there but I have a life outside of my work'. (M/20/I)

We make a similar point here that we made in relation to the notion of ‘optional’ supervision. If the house meeting is the important forum that we have made it out to be, then attendance should be part of people’s rostered hours. Resources should be allocated across the board to facilitate teamwork and give the house supervisor the space to exercise his or her leadership and give leadership a chance to be instilled throughout the staff team.

Managerial systems and structures: A summary

We have discussed staff meetings, performance appraisal, and supervision at length because they are recognised in the design of most community-based supported accommodation as foundational management structures. In a sense we see them as the ‘non-negotiables’. We believe they need to be in place to allow house supervisors to exercise their role. However, as we have seen in practice, they are not in place in every Department of Human Services group home.

In the next section we want to discuss what we might call ‘negotiables’. These are managerial systems and processes that could strengthen the practice leadership role of the house supervisor. We see them as areas for debate.
12. Consolidating the house supervisor’s role

It should be obvious from the previous chapters that the house supervisor is evidently responsible for managing the practice of other people. We have suggested that some house supervisors may see themselves primarily as practitioners who undertake some activities of a managerial kind rather than understanding that they are holding a position that should clearly be understood as a managerial one (Clement and Bigby, 2006).

Causer and Exworthy (1999) propose a typology which we have found useful in clarifying our own thinking about the house supervisor’s position. The typology, given in Table 10, reflects the ways in which professional and managerial activities relate to one another. We believe that the house supervisor’s position is best described as a practising managing professional.

Table 10
The relationship between professional and managerial activities
Adapted from Causer and Exworthy (1999)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Sub-division</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practising (or rank-and-file)</td>
<td>Primary function is to engage in the day-to-day exercise of professional activities</td>
<td>Pure practitioner</td>
<td>No supervisory or resource allocation activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manager</td>
<td></td>
<td>Quasi-managerial practitioner</td>
<td>Supervisory and resource allocation activities are an integral part of their activities, although they are not formally designated as managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing professional</td>
<td>Drawn from the ranks of practising professionals whose primary responsibility is the management of the day-to-day work of other professionals and of the resources utilised in that work</td>
<td>Practising managing professional</td>
<td>Continues to maintain some direct engagement in professional practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General managers</td>
<td>Have overall managerial responsibility for the activities of professional employees, but are not concerned with the direct management of day-to-day practice</td>
<td>Professional grounded general manager</td>
<td>Drawn from those with a background in the practice of the profession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Non-professional general manager</td>
<td>Has no direct engagement in professional practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clement and Bigby - 92 - Role of the house supervisor
12. Consolidating the house supervisor’s role

The house supervisor competency document reflects the job as it is now. However, jobs are not static. Tasks that require the same level of skill and responsibility can be added to the house supervisor’s current duties, or tasks that increase the amount of control and responsibility, can also be given\(^\text{19}\). These processes are known as *job enlargement* and *job enrichment* respectively. In the next two chapters we want to suggest that there are ways of strengthening the practising managing professional role, which may help to consolidate the managerial role. We do this through a discussion of recruitment and disciplinary practices. These are exemplars that emerged as significant issues from the interviews. There are other ways in which the house supervisor’s position can be strengthened. Whether an organisation chooses to do this is a matter of judgement. It illustrates a point that we shall return to in Chapter 15, which is that ‘a job is what we say it is’.

\(^{19}\) It should also be noted that tasks can be taken away and control and responsibility limited.
13. Recruitment

**Hiring staff: A reduced role**

A major difference between the North American and Department of Human Services’ house supervisor competencies is the extent to which house supervisors are responsible for the recruitment of direct support staff to the house they manage. A number of competency statements relating to recruitment, advertising, background checks, and health assessments were removed from the original Minnesota document because the related tasks are not undertaken by the Department’s house supervisors.

The Department’s house supervisors have some responsibility for staff recruitment, but this is a weaker role than in some organisations. Most respondents’ experiences of recruitment were primarily through: involvement in interview panels to appoint people to the pool of direct support casual employees; offering casual staff fixed-term contracts; and sometimes being able to fill a vacant roster line in the house with a casual member of staff who had proven his or her worth. Some house supervisors make this system work for them.

> I have a good relationship with the Casual Coordinator. When the new [list of] casuals come through, I call them ‘virgins’ because I don’t like the staff that’ve been around for a while, ‘cos they’re bastardised by then. So I get the new casuals and I try them out and anyone that [the Casual Coordinator] thinks might be okay. Out of each of the twenty-three new casuals that comes through, I might get one that’s okay….What I do is if I feel a casual has a potential I’ll give them lots of work, as much work as they want. I let them feel relaxed and I let them feel comfortable and I let them feel like ‘you’re my person’ and ‘you’re going to be here for a long time’, so they can show their true colours very quickly. I have to decide whether I want them or not. They’d call that ‘entrapment’ I’m sure.

(HS/5/I)

Having a pool of casual staff is a good ‘back-up’ as this house supervisor suggests, but the likelihood is that service quality will suffer if it becomes a dominant way of obtaining staffing to work at a house.

> Having the casual pool is great, so that when people are sick or on holidays you have backup that’s trained into the house. [However], I don’t want fifty casuals, I don’t want twenty casuals, but you’ve got to roll the casuals through the house until you start seeing the ones that are suited to the house. And they’ve got to be happy about the house, just because we like
them doesn’t mean they like us. So that means the clients have got to go through twenty different people that they don’t know and that can be quite daunting for some of them. People all have individual needs; you have to roll one [resident] in one way so that you don’t hurt one part of their body, and another lady is quite fragile and can bruise. The actual casual themselves, they’re getting bombarded with information that we need for our house, and then at three o’clock when they go and do their next shift they’re going to get bombarded in another house. And so you’re lacking in your care for the clients, and ultimately that’s what we’re here for. You’re not getting consistency across the board which ultimately gives it such a nice balance for the ladies. (HS/19/I)

**Recruitment: The case for enriching the house supervisor’s role**

High numbers of casual staff create extra work and can create issues with the quality of support. House supervisors wanted a greater say in hiring staff for the house they manage.

> It would be good [to have more of a say in who works in the house], and I think being on a panel for casual recruitment is great. I think you need more expertise specifically in the area of recruitment, interview skills and referee-checking, rather than to just expect that the house supervisor will already have those skills. I would probably be interested in it because I would see that that was a way that I could positively influence who was recruited, what people we were attempting to recruit to the job. (HS/6/I)

This house supervisor is right to emphasise that training is involved for people to have a competent role in the recruitment process. Having a bigger say in the recruitment of the direct support staff they have to manage was a view endorsed by all the house supervisors we interviewed.

> I’d like to choose my team. I would really like to be involved in that process. Having an ideal world, I think it’s important, actually vital to run a service very well, to be involved in the recruitment process. (HS/8/I)

House supervisors stressed the particular perspective that they would bring to the recruitment process.

> I think you should be able to be on a panel to interview people who are applying for a position in the house you work in, I think it’s really important. I’d be able to ask certain questions, one or two questions that you could
throw in that would probably give you a real idea if they’re going to be able to work effectively for you or not. (HS/13/I)

A bigger say is justified through the house supervisor’s knowledge of the residents and the qualities they have identified as being necessary to support them.

I think we should [be more involved in the recruitment of staff]. We don’t have time to do it, but I think it’s important, especially with the behaviour house. You have to have someone who has a really different attitude. Behaviour houses sometimes attract staff that feel you’ve got to dominate and conquer, but you don’t. You need to be firm and direct, but you need to understand why they do what they’re doing. If you come in firm and direct, so the resident understands, ‘I’m not going to be intimidated by you, but I’m listening to you’, you’re going to succeed. But if you have staff that come in and go, ‘You’ll do as I say, because I say so’, it just doesn’t work. Sometimes we get sent staff that are totally inappropriate. (HS/14/I)

The notion that the recruitment process had resulted in a less than good ‘fit’ between the residents and the direct support staff was echoed by this house supervisor, who manages a group home where a working knowledge of Auslan is important.

We’ve had people that we’ve had to say can’t work here, because it’s just not healthy for [them or the other staff and residents]. We’ve had a few people that have come with the right intentions but have been extremely inappropriate. I mean it’s not like a client has a real say. You’d have to employ someone knowing that they could sign, or train them. It’s never been the case. It’s been the case of filling that line and that’s it. We’ve got a body in there, that’s all we need, that’s our goal being achieved. I don’t see it like that. We’ve had a few people come in here that for various reasons have not been able to continue. (HS/13/I)

Finding ways for residents to have a say in the appointment of staff that support them is a sign of a progressive service. This is relatively easy when people have mild intellectual disabilities, but harder for people with severe impairments. This house supervisor illustrates a nice link between the recruitment process and person centred planning, which may help in considering the preferences of people with more severe intellectual disabilities.

[House supervisors should definitely have a bigger say in recruitment] because we know the residents, we know what they like, what they don’t
13. Recruitment

like and some of my guys are particularly fussy about the people that work with them. And just in regards to supporting them and their behaviours, there’s some staff that can trigger behaviours, like characteristics within a staff member. Even within the PCPs\textsuperscript{20} it’s got exercises we did; ‘Characteristics within the staff that I like’. So if you’re putting that in their plan but then anyone’s getting thrown into working for the house, we’re not going to be supporting their plans. So I think that with the changes in the legislation and the PCPs they need to reflect that in the recruitment of staff at house level. They can recruit what casuals they want as far as I’m concerned, because if I get one here I don’t like, I simply tell them not to send them here again. But as far as permanent staff members applying for a vacant line, I think that house supervisors should be very heavily involved in the interview and everything. Because I’ve worked here for so long, you can tell pretty much straight away what might set these guys off. (HS/16/I)

As well as knowing the residents well, house supervisors saw themselves as operating as a ‘quality control mechanism’. One way of doing this was alluded to by the previous respondent, of keeping a close eye on casual staff coming through the house.

I’m very fussy. I currently have seven permanent staff, I will fill the five vacant positions but not just with an arse on a seat. You know staff are for the clients. The individual basis needs to be served. My bigger role is to understand their happiness and to get staff who will naturally assist them in that. (HS/5/I)\textsuperscript{21}

A further consideration was the overall make up of the staff team.

I certainly do [want a greater say in recruiting the people that I manage]. We sit on the panel, but that doesn’t mean that we’re always heard on the panel. It’s really important because sometimes we’re just given staff and told, ‘You’ve got to have them’. At times they mightn’t want to be there. They might clash with the whole staff team; therefore you don’t have a workable team any more. You don’t have a united, unified team, and issues arise. (HS/10/I)

\textsuperscript{20} Person centered plans
\textsuperscript{21} It should be clear that house supervisors do have some control over the recruitment process. In the main this is a rather indirect route of finding staff through the casual staff that come to work at the house rather than directly hiring people for a vacancy at a specific house.
Incumbents who had worked for different organisations had first-hand experience of greater control and responsibility for the recruitment of direct support staff.

In other houses I worked...you hired your own staff, so you pulled your team in, the way you wanted it to begin with, or as people left you filled your gaps and kept it how you perceived the house should be. You don’t here, and that is a huge challenge. ‘This is your staff and you work with them’ and it can be people that aren’t necessarily suited to the disabilities in a house, their personalities may not necessarily suit everyone. You’ve got to pull that team together and make it all work, which can be huge. Whereas if you can go and pick your staff to suit the dynamics of the house and the clients....Everyone is motivated in different ways, so I am obviously going to go to people who are pumped. I’m not always going to go for quieter people, but I like to have a balance of old and young in a house, of male and female, you want that vitality, but then you want some maturity and balance. Some people don’t see that. To be able to pick your crew makes a huge difference because you’ll get to your result quicker. I think it’s one of the biggest mistakes [the Department] makes. You’re isolated to a degree, you’re out here on your own, and what we do is quite specialised, depending on the disabilities and the behaviours, so you need to get everyone in and that team built very quickly. Within DHS I’ve found it’s, ‘Well there’s a staff member. You’ve got a staff member’, but it doesn’t necessarily mean it’s good staff. (HS/19/I)

The above quotations illustrate the variable experiences of house supervisors’ involvement in the recruitment process. People have been involved in interview panels for casual recruitment, others have been ‘sent’ people who are poorly matched to the residents they support, some feel that their voice is not heard in the process. There were some examples of house supervisors being given a stronger role in recruiting staff directly for a specific house, not just the casual pool.

I would definitely [like more of a say in recruiting the people that I will manage]. We were looking to release the vacant line, and we advertised it, and it was very good of the [region’s] management to ask me whether I wanted to be on the interview panel. That was important because I needed to be involved in that process. I think the house supervisors should be involved in recruiting staff to their house. Each house has a different makeup and as the house supervisor you have a good understanding on whether or not someone is going to be able to meet the needs of your team.
or come into it without disrupting the team too much. Some staff, you can tell, straight away in interviews, they might be great with their knowledge but you can pick up that they might have bits of their personality that are just going to conflict with the whole setup of the team. I would like to see that the house supervisors are involved in recruiting their staff. (HS/18/I)

If the positive reasons for strengthening the role are not evident so far, then the negative consequences are spelled out by this house supervisor. Not being involved in the recruitment process allows people to deflect the responsibility for the poor hiring decision elsewhere, and as we shall see later also makes the house supervisor less accountable for managing that person.

I think it’d be absolutely fantastic if we could go down the track of [having more of a say in the recruitment process]. We advertise, we do the interviews....I think that would be absolutely awesome. From what I understand it’s slim pickings, you get what you’re given. At the same time, there’s a part of me that’s saying, 'I don't want that level of responsibility', because if I get a dud staff I want to blame someone. There is part of me that says, 'I want to be protected'. (HS/17/I)

**A way forward?**

One metropolitan region has been having these discussions and is looking to change the way house supervisors are to be involved in recruiting staff as this manager explained.

We’re gradually moving towards [house supervisors] being responsible for interview panels and managing that process themselves for their house. It’s certainly on the cards. There’s a few issues as you would expect and there’s different opinions. We’ve had a couple of acting DAS managers and one thought, ‘No, too risky’ and the other one was, ‘No, if they’re going to manage the staff they should choose them’...Obviously where a house supervisor has not shown great judgement in the past, you might as their line manager be involved as a coach and mentor, but with the ultimate aim of the person doing it themselves. Sometimes managers want that control and want that input as to who ends up in their houses. I would say in at least half of our interview panels the house supervisor does the interview with another one or two house supervisors, and the cluster manager is not even involved at all, because, ‘If you want to take a risk on someone then you need to be sure that you are responsible for managing those issues as they come up’. It puts the responsibility back on the house supervisor to not go, ‘Well you chose him, you deal with him’. It also allows [house...
supervisors] to better pick people who have a good fit with the other team members. (M/21/I)

Managers and house supervisors will sometimes have different perspectives.

I would like a bigger say in who works in my house. I would like to recruit the best staff possible. That’s from a purely selfish house supervisor’s perspective, which is a wonderful thing about being a house supervisor; I don’t always have to look at the Department’s perspective. I want the best staff. I want the staff with the right attitude, ‘cos attitude to me is everything. I can teach the staff the skills, that’s the easy bit, but I need people with the right attitude, otherwise I can’t teach them the skills. (HS/4/I).

There will be occasions when managers enforce a solution to staffing issues, which means having to face the consequences of doing this.

Sometimes it might be, ‘I know you don’t want this particular person but there is no other choice’. It will always get down to the fact, ‘Look, we have to deploy this person, they’re an ongoing person, they have rights, you have a vacancy, they live quite close by, it’s the same hours they’re currently working, we need to deploy him because of the conditions of their employment’. So sometimes we have to make those decisions, ‘Yes I know you don’t want this person but unfortunately you’re going to have to have them’. (M/22/I)

**Recruitment: A summary**

The house supervisors we interviewed were unequivocal in their view that they would like a bigger say in hiring the staff they will have to manage. They suggest that their particular insights into the orientations and skills needed to work with the residents would result in a better ‘fit’, and their intimate knowledge of the staff team would result in a more balanced team with a better skill mix, which would result in better service delivery. Our argument is increasing the house supervisor’s control and responsibility strengthens the house supervisor’s managerial role in the group home.
14. The ‘Too hard basket’: Improving work performance and managing discipline

In Chapter 9 we used the discussion of formal performance appraisal to suggest a procedural gap, which resulted in weaker management practices. In this section we want to discuss a much stronger policy and procedural area that on occasion still seems to result in weaker outcomes — processes related to improving work performance and managing discipline.

There may be occasions when an employee’s ‘personal limitations’ prevent them from achieving the required standards, but these situations rarely occur as frequently as managers claim (Fournies, 1988). The onus is therefore on organisations to make sure that the right policies, organisational structures and resources are in situ to enable employees to achieve the required work standards. In cases of unsatisfactory work performance the Department has put in place robust policies that house supervisors and managers must follow.

Employees can be formally disciplined for engaging in serious misconduct, minor breaches of discipline (‘misconduct’) or unsatisfactory work performance (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2005d). In order to enter the disciplinary process for unsatisfactory work performance, employees must have been taken through the Improving Work Performance Policy (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2005c).

Although there is a requirement that house supervisors discuss concerns about work performance with their team managers, we have shown that there is a strong expectation that house supervisors are the key people for initially ensuring satisfactory work performance. House supervisors need to make sure that employees know the required standards and receive guidance and support to achieve those standards. In the Improving Work Performance Policy it states that, ‘Supervisors who have effective supervisory practices will be aware of the day-to-day work of their employees’ (p.6) and that improving work performance is, ‘underpinned by the policy principle that supervisors are expected to provide employees with regular supervision’ (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2005c, p.2).

**Improving work performance: Respondents’ perceptions**

Not surprisingly there was a perception that managing unsatisfactory work performance was something that house supervisors found difficult and did not like doing. People’s comments also suggested that it has not been an area that had generally been done effectively in the past.
Some house supervisors may find it personally difficult to raise performance issues because they have to 'live' with the consequences of doing so.

*If you have an issue with a staff member or something's been raised, and you need to discipline, it’s very difficult to discipline someone who you may then have to work ten hours on a weekend shift with, that’s what I find difficult. You can have a client that’s got a huge behaviour issue and you deal with them, that’s fine, the next day it’s a new day, it’s a new beginning and you don’t drag it on. When you’ve got a staff issue it can drag on for roster after roster. That’s where it’s easier as a manager removed from the house to walk in and say, ‘Right, we’ve had an issue with this, we can discuss it’. It’s very difficult when you raise something with someone and then you’re stuck with them for eight hours and they’re probably annoyed about what you’ve said. And quite often it’s not a work performance thing, it’s often a team thing. So if someone’s got an issue with someone because they think this, and they thought it should be done this way, it’s a matter of speaking to both, so you could be working ten hours with one of them on a Monday and ten hours with one of them on the Tuesday. I find that difficult. (HS/13/I)*

If house supervisors can get past their personal barriers, we have highlighted a number of weaknesses in the organisational structures that do not allow house supervisors to engender good performance. As we outlined in Chapter 8, house supervisors have limited opportunities to observe the practice of the staff they manage.

*For me to effectively performance manage someone, it’s very hard to do, particularly when you don’t see the person. You’re dealing with hearsay. The two staff model means that any information you get is going to be hearsay. You can’t get any clear evidence often about a person. If someone’s been bullied I’ve only got someone else’s word to go by. And that’s very hard to performance manage someone on, because you can’t on hearsay. So the model actually impedes getting clear evidence for performance management purposes. (HS/8/I)*

Practice often takes place between individual workers and ‘silent’ clients in unobserved settings where performance is hard to measure (Evans and Harris, 2004). Consequently direct support staff have a significant amount of autonomy, which compels house supervisors to be more cautious when making judgements about practice.
14. The ‘too hard’ basket

If you haven’t got motivated staff, there’s nothing you can actually do, because they always come up with some sort of excuse, which could easily be a lie, it could be the truth, so you don’t really know what it is. It’s like whipping a dead horse, some of them, it’s so hard. (HS/17/I)

Our own experience of managing staff in group homes resonates with this house supervisor’s uncertainty about the ‘truth’. We managed certain staff who consistently came up with credible excuses for why they had not undertaken tasks they had been asked to complete. This is exacerbated when staff are working alone. An illustration from our own experience was a staff member who claimed to be unable to support a resident to go to church because the washing machine flooded the kitchen just as they were about to leave the house. In a discussion about ‘building inclusive communities’ this house supervisor implies the same dynamic at work.

I think it’s fear [that is stopping people participating in ordinary events]. That’s what I’ve come across when I’m asking staff, ‘Well why is it that something comes up on a Tuesday night when it is part of your job to support this person to go swimming? It seems every Tuesday night something happens and clearly you’re not comfortable with it. Let’s have a chat about it’. There’s always some reason when we thrash it out and get down to it. They just say, ‘I’m so embarrassed if so and so does something inappropriate’ or ‘What if they touch a child’s head?’ because this particular person might have a habit of tapping people on the head, ‘I don’t know what I would do, that would be terrible, it would be terrible for them, it’s a reflection on them’. (HS/6/I)

Barriers leading to weaker performance management

Although the above house supervisor alludes to good practice — picking up on a pattern of behaviour and then being skilled enough to uncover the staff member’s fears about supporting the activity—we have shown that there are organisational barriers that stop good supervisory practice from consistently happening. Contrary to policy expectation, supervisors may not be aware of the day-to-day work of their employees nor be able to provide them with regular supervision. A sobering thought, and a possible motivator to change this situation, is that inadequate supervision, uninformed and weak management are factors that have been shown to be factors in the neglect and abuse of people with intellectual disabilities (Furey, Niesen, and Strauch, 1994).

The Improving Work Performance Policy requires weekly or fortnightly supervision meetings to review and support unsatisfactorily performing staff. Achieving this
might require additional resources, rather than expecting house supervisors to achieve this with the resources at their disposal, as many of them are already struggling to achieve a monthly supervision meeting for full-time staff.

Part of the team manager’s role is to make sure house supervisors have followed procedures correctly before the disciplinary policy for managing unsatisfactory work performance can be used, as this manager outlines.

If a person’s performing badly they’ve probably got some behaviours or traits that are less desirable than what we’d otherwise want, but some of those traits and behaviours might be because the current supervisor’s been too weak, or has avoided, or hasn’t got the confidence to actually manage that situation, and its got out of hand. And although this particular individual might be problematic, we need to have a look at [the context]. What’s their journey been? What support and advice have they got? What corrections of these performance issues have been offered? If there’s none, and this person might be useless, but they haven’t been guided very well, they haven’t been supported well, and so there’s some ownership under that. So, rather than go in boots and all, we say, ‘Look, maybe it’s an environmental issue’, [by which I mean] the support that’s at hand, the advice, the communication, etc.. We’ll try him somewhere else, with someone that we know has got some good people-management skills, will be very clear, it’s very similar, we’re not setting the person up for failure. Some people would say, ‘Look, that’s person’s blossomed, they’ve had a chance’. And it might be because there was conflict or no direction. ‘Thank God someone’s told me what I should be doing’. And you see that. In other cases you sit the person down. ‘It didn’t work over here, and you said it was because of this, that and the next. We’ve given you an opportunity and lots of support. Here’s all the evidence, you’re still doing it. You’ve got an issue and you need to make those changes or you need to question whether you should be working in the field’. Unless we do that and unless we’ve got a trail of evidence along the way that says, ‘We’ve identified that, we’re listening to you, we’ve given you a new opportunity, I know the support’s been there, here’s the examples and here’s the conversation, here’s copies of the things that have been done along the way, and you’re still doing it’...It’s a hard one. (M/22/I)

Using both the Improving Work Performance and Managing Discipline policies exposes the house supervisor’s own practice to examination, not only from their
managers but other scrutineers. This respondent suggests this is another reason why house supervisors might shy away from using the policies.

*I think that a lot of the constraints for performance management are part of the Enterprise Bargaining Agreement and things like that. There’s a fear of disciplining staff, so performance management’s something that supervisors are petrified of, in case they get hauled in by the Union. So there’s a softly-softly approach and I can appreciate all of that, but it just seems like it’s a bending over backwards scenario, when staff attitude is clearly not a desirable attitude to have in this field, which is pretty common. (HS/8/I)*

All this suggests that managing people’s performance when there are concerns about unsatisfactory performance requires confident, competent house supervisors who are supported by equally skilled team managers. This manager said:

*We’re starting to address [poor performance] issues much more, and the underperformance policy is being put into place a lot more. We’ve gone in quite hard I think in the last 12 months and a lot of people that have been underperforming and haven’t been working well have been taken through the process with good results. There’s people who’ve been there for years and when they’ve done something in one house then they’ve been moved to others. I think we’ve been moving in the right direction but there’s still a lot of issues. A lot of that would have to be sometimes the house supervisor’s fault, if you don’t document, if you don’t do the right things for someone who’s underperforming, then it makes it very difficult for us to go through that process and we have to start at scratch again. But if they clearly follow the policies, then we would have no hesitation at a management level of going in and going, ‘You’ve been underperforming, this is where we’re at’, then going through that procedure, even down to disciplinary or being dismissed. (M/20/I)*

Another manager suggests that instability in the key positions of house supervisor and team manager, (a topic to which we shall return in Chapter 16), is another factor that contributes to weaker practice in managing performance.

*The worst staffing issues don’t get resolved because of the lack of follow-up. A lot of people can get away with doing next to nothing, or doing the wrong thing, because unfortunately people move on. Team managers change, house supervisors change, and there’s not that follow-up, there’s no handover, there’s no real information sharing. So often it doesn’t get*
14. The ‘too hard’ basket

corrected, and also because of the strong unions it’s really difficult to address serious staffing issues. However, there are really good outcomes where people have been supported, strengths were targeted and people have turned around. (M/23/I)

The lack of confident, competent house supervisors can lead to less than optimal practices. This house supervisor described her experiences as a ‘trouble-shooter’ at Kew. It reveals a common strategy in organisations of ‘rewarding’ highly performing employees with more work, so that house supervisors who have effectively addressed underperforming staff are given more underperforming staff to manage.

In some units there were some problems with the staff so they thought, ‘Well, she’s been able to deal with those difficult units before’, so they’ve put me in there. Basically you’re there to fix things up and then they move you on again to the next place that might have a bit of an issue or a problem. It’s not really where you want to be, you don’t want to be moving from one place to another just to settle things down and then get told, ‘You can move on to the next place’. (HS/18/I)

Moving staff between ‘wards’ or ‘units’ was common practice in institutions (Rose, 1993), but is not as easy in dispersed community-based services. This house supervisor describes a different strategy in group homes of moving an underperforming staff member to a skilled house supervisor.

I worked in one house where we had the best supervisor and that’s who I like set my benchmark against. And because he was so good we had a great team, [and] all those staff that had disciplinary issues just kept getting sent to us. Once you have three or four disciplinary people, who already haven’t got a good work ethic, they drag down all those ones that do. It’s a bad mix. So they need to seriously think about where they redeploy those people who have issues. I know they’ve got to be redeployed and I agree that sometimes a change of environment is better. Sometimes I think they should be made to stay where they are, and manage, work through their issues, because you’re just letting that baggage come to another house. You need to remove that baggage before they’re even sent. The Department do that, you muck up, you’re moved….They need to say, ‘This is the issue and we need to resolve it’. And if they do want to move, there should be conditions on that and say, ‘Okay, well you need to do this, this, and this to move’, which they don’t, they will quite often reward bad behaviour. People will deliberately do that, I’ve seen it thousands of times. The staff go, ‘If I
Moving or ‘transferring’ an employee is a possible outcome of the disciplinary process.

Weakening or strengthening the house supervisor’s role

The way in which respondents talked about how the Disciplinary Policy is enacted suggests that as employees move through the process the role played by the house supervisor can become more peripheral. Initially house supervisors must discuss concerns about performance improvement with their team manager and should not initiate discipline action without the endorsement of their line manager (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2005c). Later on formal warnings are, ‘given in a personal interview between supervisor and/or [bold added] manager and the employee concerned’ (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2005d, p.4).

In one metropolitan region the managers we interviewed suggested there had been a concerted effort to tackle poor performance and misconduct.

In the last two years the amount of my time and the other sector managers’ time that’s taken up in those things has dramatically increased. The number of people who’ve been investigated and who have left their jobs willingly or, we’ve only ended up terminating one person because everybody else has
left prior to that occurring….We are getting much better at it, ‘You’re no good at your job’. We’re picking up on incidents better and dealing with those incidents. It’s still a bit of a tricky thing, and it’ll be a longer-term issue to deal with people who are always just under where you want people to be. They’re not smacking people, they’re not doing anything that you can pick as a single incident, but they’re always just not quite as good as you would like them to be. They will take a long time, but that’s about building up house supervisors’ skills to have conversations with those people.

(M/21/I)

The substantive point we are trying to make here is that the management of underperforming staff, or staff who are alleged to be guilty of misconduct, can be done in a way that weakens or strengthens the house supervisor’s managerial role. Some house supervisors have a perception that they either have a marginal role or no role in the latter stages of the disciplinary process. Indeed, the policy allows for formal warnings to be given without the house supervisor being present. The house supervisor’s managerial position will be strengthened if the disciplinary issues are jointly managed, or the house supervisor is supported to manage disciplinary issues. House supervisors will not then be able to talk about how ‘The Department’ manage staff, but acknowledge that they are part of ‘The Department’ and as such have ownership of the issues.

**Recruitment and improving work performance: A summary**

We have used two issues to show that an organisation has choices about the way a job is defined, and that these choices have consequences for how the role is perceived and enacted. We have suggested the role of the house supervisor as a practising managing professional could be strengthened if incumbents had more control and responsibility for recruitment and the management of poorly performing direct support staff. However, strengthening the managerial role has implications for an incumbent’s workload. It is to a discussion of the house supervisor’s workload that we now wish to turn.
15. The house supervisor’s workload

In stating that ‘a job is what we say it is’ and labelling greater involvement in recruitment practice and the disciplinary process as ‘negotiables’ we are implying that there are choices to be made in establishing a job’s boundaries. We made an argument that involvement in both of these activities would strengthen the practising managing professional role, and thereby consolidate the managerial role. Enriching the house supervisor’s job to include greater recruitment control and responsibility comes at a price. Training has to be given in good recruitment practice, time set aside for short-listing and interviewing. Some people may argue that this is not practical as it adds to a full workload. However, in addition to the benefits we suggested there may also be some workload ‘savings’. If one outcome is a more stable staff team then less time will be spent on filling vacant shifts, inducting new casual staff, and so on. It is hard to predict how things will pan out. A decision has to be made whether any change to a job is a price worth paying.

The house supervisor’s job: Difficult or impossible?

One manager suggested that the house supervisor’s job has become so large that it may be difficult enough already without enriching it with recruitment competencies.

*The requirements of house supervisors now could fill up a book, so being able to remember what’s required of them and plan it into their day whilst doing the other things they need to do is becoming increasingly difficult.*

(M/21/I)

People who have a sense of how the position has evolved have noticed changes in the balance of tasks. This manager said:

*House supervisors are spending more and more time [identifying and monitoring safety issues within the physical environment]. How they do that takes up a good 30 per cent of their office-based time. I think that it’s worthy of highlighting the importance that has in their environment now. Following up investigations for DINMAs, house supervisors need to complete manual handling risk assessments for each task that a resident does. With some houses that’s one hundred risk assessments, so it’s a huge task. There’s Occupational Assault risk assessments. This one [competence] undersells the importance that’s placed on it now. (M/21/I)*

Another house supervisor classified her job as ‘undoable’:
15. The house supervisor’s workload

I acknowledge that the job is undoable within the time constraints and I had to lower my standards quite a bit, and not be so proud about my job. I’ve shifted my focus, because I’m very driven to be very organised from an administrative standpoint. I’ve had to realise that I just can’t achieve that level within here [the office], but out there is where I get my satisfaction and I have to really remember that’s what it’s about. These days it’s hard to get me in the office, because I do get most of my satisfaction out of working with direct care, just because this part of it is so overwhelming. When you think about it, it’s two jobs in one. (HS/8/I)

One reason given by Fournies (1988) for non-performance is that no one could do the job, but he suggests that it is rare to come across this reason for non-performance. It may be the case that the job of house supervisor in this house is ‘undoable’. We don’t know the answer to that, but what we have suggested is that structural differences between settings have created an uneven playing field. If a house supervisor has inadequate resources to do the job, he or she may have to make some tough decisions about what tasks to prioritise. Another solution is to work extra hours.

It’s a bit of a reality-check that sometimes house supervisors should be doing things, but for time reasons that they just cannot. The hours I used to put in outside; and you still don’t get it all done, like the formal supervisions, that’s just reality. (M/11/I)

Employees are often willing to work additional hours for short-periods or when there are special occasions, but this is unsustainable in the long-term. We reported that nine of the house supervisors who completed the timelog worked in excess of their rostered hours. In Gifford’s (2006) study residential managers recorded working excess hours on one of every three shifts.

Data from the timelog study has given us an indication of how house supervisors spend their time. The tables in Chapter 4 give an illustration of how a ‘typical’ house supervisor might spend his or her time, but they also show variability between house supervisors. For example, the most frequently recorded competency was related to the use of active support approaches to engage with residents. The range column in Table 8 shows that one house supervisor recorded tasks related to this competency 43 times whilst another recorded only 5 occasions. All of the competencies show this spread, which suggests that the amount of time that house supervisors spend on different tasks — the workload balance — can vary quite considerably.
15. The house supervisor’s workload

Although the competency document has gone some way to providing greater clarity about the house supervisor role, we have suggested that for some house supervisors, the service is not resourced or structured in a way that makes it possible for incumbents to effectively fulfil the role. We also need to ask whether house supervisors should be spending their time in the way that the timelog data suggests. Are certain activities consuming a disproportionate amount of time? Are house supervisors doing the most important work for someone in the position?

For example, is the amount of time spent by house supervisors managing risk now disproportionate in comparison to other competencies (see Sykes, 2005)? Are other competency areas not receiving enough attention? A major goal in the State Disability Plan (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2002b) is building inclusive communities, yet we coded house supervisors’ activities in a way that suggested this accounted for just over two per cent of their ‘time’. This may not be enough of an emphasis to make any serious headway towards this goal (see Clement and Bigby, forthcoming).

Table 8 also shows that house supervisors support residents in utilising transportation. Most of the entries were simply driving the residents from place to place. It will not be possible or desirable to cut down on all of these trips. Some house supervisors, for example, liked to support people to attend important medical appointments. However, is driving residents to and from day programs a good use of the house supervisor’s time? In one of the project’s focal houses a round-trip to the day programs took about 60 minutes. A house supervisor could complete this trip twice a day. In another setting the house supervisor was compelled to drive when she worked alongside a particular direct support employee because that staff member does not hold a driving licence.

Structuring the job to allow for non-contact time

People tend to talk about the house supervisor position as if it were ‘two jobs’: ‘working with the residents or administration’; ‘hands-on or paperwork’; ‘out there or office work’; ‘contact or non-contact time’. House supervisors do have some rostered time for what this house supervisor abbreviates to ‘admin’.

*The Department gives you admin times, and those times are usually through the day when the ladies are at placement. If you start at seven o’clock in the morning you’ll work seven ’til ten-thirty on the floor, showering, feeding and spending time with the ladies and getting them ready for placement. Then whatever else chores that have to be done around the house around ’til about ten or eleven. Then we’ve got three or four hours to deal with admin. The girls are home again at around about*
four, and by then you’ve had enough of admin anyway, so you’re happy to go out. You have to be really dedicated in making sure that you do your admin in those hours. There’s days when you don’t want to do it and there’s a million other things that happen and there’s a million other meetings you’ve got to go to, but you’ve just got to be self-driven I suppose, to make sure that you get it done in those [hours]. What you’ve missed today you make sure you pick up and do it tomorrow so you don’t get behind. I guess it’s a bit of time-management. (HS/19/I)

Figure 3 shows the times when house supervisors in the timelog study began their shifts, which were more likely to be in the morning, in the way that the above house supervisor describes. This allows the house supervisor to engage in direct support at the busiest time of the day and have time for paper-based tasks. A consequence of this is that the time for observing the practice of direct support staff, and for giving feedback, coaching and support, is limited.

**Time management: What’s important?**

In Gifford’s (2006) study only two out of 27 participants identified the ability to manage their time effectively as a skill for competent residential managers. Five admitted they were poor at time-management and seven were unable to identify any time-management strategies. Given the breadth and depth of the job, and the competing demands and priorities, training in time-management might be worthwhile. The competing demands felt by house supervisors are well-illustrated here.

> We’re supposed to be client-focussed yet we’re supposed to be bloody well documenting everything that’s going on with the clients at the same time and I can’t see how you can do that. ‘I’m sorry if you want a coffee, but I’ve really got to do five file notes, an incident report, and fill this shift, tough!’ And so as a result what are you going to do, you’re going to throw that chair, and I’m going to do another incident report because I couldn’t respond to your needs or wants because I’ve got to do five file notes, an incident report, and...we really do need a little bit more time for the administration side of what we’re doing here. Either that or just ditch the administration, one or the other. (HS/8/I)

Having said that time-management training may be worthwhile, it is also worth noting that the general focus of such training is on helping the individual rather than examining the organisational context. It may be the case that the organisation is a more appropriate target for intervention. One manager said:
15. The house supervisor’s workload

I think house supervisors don’t get enough non-contact time....Non-contact hours [for house supervisors] in our region vary a lot. We can have as little as thirteen a fortnight in some houses, which by the time you’ve probably signed your timesheets and you’ve done your CERS and filled a few shifts and whatever else, that’s gone, without doing any of the other stuff, including the supervision which we’re supposed to all be doing really regularly....My biggest feedback from this [interview] process would be, you know, thirteen hours in a fortnight is not enough, and twenty hours isn’t enough in some houses. House supervisors are constantly being given new tools, and new policies and procedures and programs and so forth but there’s no extra time to be doing that. So I think we need to look at that. (M/11/I)

This manager indicated that she had the flexibility to provide extra resources when there are special circumstances.

It is easier in some houses to get all your work completed in your non-contact hours. They all have non-contact hours, mostly around about twenty to twenty-one hours a fortnight, where there are no residents for them to care for, or if there’s residents in the house there’s other staff there with the residents and they have that time to complete their paperwork. Depending on the house that you manage sometimes that’s not enough, if you’ve gone to a lot of medical appointments that fortnight or whatever, so you may find that you’ll be very restricted and have to do some paperwork within the times that residents are there. But, residents' needs should always be paramount, and from my point of view as a manager, if they were finding that difficult then I would hope that they would come to me and say so. I’ve taken my house supervisors off line for a whole shift to allow them to catch up if they’re really found that due to things that have happened in the house they haven’t been able to manage within their timeframe. (M/20/I)

It is worth posing whether extra hours would be made available in a different scenario. Say a house supervisor wants to be able to delegate a task to a direct support staff, but in order to do this she needs additional time to coach and support the staff member. Would extra hours be made available for this?

Although paper-based tasks are important, there is a tendency to privilege administration over effective work in supporting the residents. In the quotations we have used here respondents have used monitoring safety issues, risk assessments, file notes, incident reports, CERS, filling shifts, new tools, policies, and procedures as illustrations of activities that take time or they need more time
15. The house supervisor’s workload

to do. In privileging administration it may be the case that employees are responding to what the managers in the organisation emphasise as being important (see Mansell and Elliott, 2001). Perhaps our ‘extreme’ sample of house supervisors has managed to swim against the administrative tide and retain a client-focus. We were taken by this house supervisor’s ‘turn of phrase’ to describe the practice of house supervisors who try to burrow their way to the office.

_I think one of the important things for house supervisors [is] not to be seen as the officer gopher. I tell the staff I’ve got to mop the floor every morning otherwise I have a bad day, which is total crap, but, what it is about is that I do the same job that every other person. It’s not that Alfred sits in the office and plays with the computer all day, but I spend time with the residents, I do things with the residents. I went to the pictures last night with the residents, but I do what I expect the staff to do. I have got [special] jobs and administration tasks as well, but that’s not all I do. I’m part of the actual goings on of the house. I think that’s very important because staff respond better to managers who are seen as part of the process, rather than separate to the process. You set the standard too. If staff see you cleaning they’re going to be more likely to be wanting to clean the house, rather than saying, ‘Well hang on, I’m vacuuming the floors at the moment, while that lazy bugger’s sitting there on eBay!’ So I think that’s very important, you set your standards, and people model themselves on what they see you do. They see you talking and chatting with residents, they say, ‘Oh it’s the proper way to behave’ so they also do that. (HS/4/I).

It is important that the house supervisor’s position does not mutate into that of the ‘office gopher’, a non-practising managing professional who has no direct engagement in professional practice (Causer and Exworthy, 1999, see Table 8). This house supervisor understands the importance of maintaining some direct engagement in ‘hands on’ practice.

_When someone says to me, ‘Such and such a person is doing this’, I have an understanding of what they’re talking about because I have been involved and I can see it. Being removed from that, when someone’s talking to me about an issue or an event that’s happened, I’m only going on what my experiences have been in the past, because I haven’t been in that environment for a period of time. So I don’t know the individual’s likes, dislikes, how they cope with changes, stress, all that stuff. So being removed from the hands-on, means that I don’t have a full understanding of what’s going on. In order to be able to give people advice and support, how
15. The house supervisor’s workload

am I going to do that if I’m not there, still in touch with what the people need, to have an understanding of what their needs are? For me it’s always been, if you’re removed from it, if you’ve been sitting behind a desk, then how can you give advice or lead by example? If someone says, ‘Oh I’ve got a problem with such and such’. You could try giving them suggestions but I think you can do a better job when you’re actually in there and you haven’t been removed from it, still being involved with it and still picking up things….If someone comes in and says, ‘Oh, the task’s too hard for me’, well I’m thinking, ‘I’ve been doing that task’….I know from experience, because I’m doing that task as well. I think that’s important. If you do the task and you’re involved, then you can actually make a proper judgement. If you’re sitting a little bit away from where the action’s happening, then personally I don’t think you make a proper judgement. (HS/18/I)

Getting the workload balance right: space for practice leadership

It is beyond the scope of this project to identify the ideal workload for a house supervisor. Hewitt and Larson (2005) suggest that front-line supervisors should do no more than 10-15 hours per week of direct support to maintain the right balance of supervisory and direct support work22. The most conservative estimate from the timelog data suggests that a typical house supervisor is working at least 16 hours a week directly supporting the residents although the figure is probably much higher23.

It is important that we do not equate ‘supervisory work’ with administration. In the specific case of implementing person-centred active support Mansell et al. (2004) claim that house supervisors need to do less administrative tasks and spend most of their time with direct care staff as a practice leader. A direct consequence of this is that house supervisors have to lose some administrative tasks. All paper-based tasks cannot simply be ‘ditched’ as one respondent proposed, although some processes might be able to be jettisoned or streamlined. Mansell et al. suggest that administrative tasks have to be picked-up by more senior managers in the organisation. Again there is a judgement to be made about what administrative tasks house supervisors should lose and keep.

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22 It is not clear how they have arrived at this figure.
23 A full-time house supervisor works 152 hours on a four-week roster. 43per cent of the activities recorded by house supervisors were coded as ‘providing direct support’, which is roughly 65 hours a roster or 16 a week. It is likely to be higher as other client support tasks were recorded in other competency domains, for example, giving medication and taking residents to medical appointments were coded in ‘Protecting Health and Safety’.
15. The house supervisor’s workload

It may be the case that house supervisors should reduce the amount of time that they spend directly supporting the residents; but it should also be noted that working with the residents was a facet of the job that our sample enjoyed, believed was an area where they felt they made a difference, and for some incumbents direct support enabled them to bear the less enjoyable aspects of their job.

It certainly seems to be the case that for some house supervisors the balance of their workload is not ‘right’. This may be because some individuals have misjudged the priorities. In other cases it may be that the job really is ‘undoable’ in 152 hours a month. We have made a strong case to suggest that for some house supervisors the structures are not in place to enable them to be effective house supervisors.

Being a practice leader is different from being a competent direct support worker, although practice leaders need to be competent at direct support work. Reducing the administration and direct support workload is not the end goal. The aim is to create the space to change the workload balance to include time for practice leadership; time where house supervisors can observe, direct, coach and support the people they manage. We do not really know from this research how our sample would feel about the reorganisation of their workload, given the strength of feeling they expressed for working directly with the residents. Practice leadership still involves being ‘out there’, being ‘hands on’, but in a different way. Would incumbents get as much job satisfaction from assisting the staff they manage to work competently with the residents as they do from engaging with the residents themselves?

**Rosters and the allocation of resources**

Giving each group home a house meeting, ensuring every staff member has a planned formal supervision meeting, and creating the space for practice leadership may not require a huge financial injection. The same outcomes may be achieved by allocating existing resources differently.

In *The Story So Far* (Clement et al., 2007) we suggested that the rosters we had looked at were more staff-centred than client-centred and that there were a number of hours in the houses that are not used effectively or efficiently. We acknowledged that this may have been a consequence of the large proportion of full-time KRS employees that have had to be redeployed to the new houses. This manager supported this viewpoint.
What happens with the KRS rosters, there’s so many ongoing staff that they need to place, what they do is they develop rosters to suit the ongoing staff that need to be placed. There’s so much that they look into, travel to work, is it going to be further than Kew? They negotiate all this, give them really great rosters, and they build other people’s roster-lines around those, whether they have people or not. Sometimes a house can come out of Kew with four staff, and three vacant roster-lines, but those three vacant roster-lines, hardly anyone wants them because they’re 10 three and a half hour shifts a fortnight. So they’re working ten days, they’ve got to come in to work for three and a half hours each time, and they’re only getting thirty-five hours a fortnight. They target those staff that need to be placed and then everything is built around them. (M/23/I)

Although there is a process for reviewing rosters, the outcomes are generally minor changes rather than the major changes that are necessary to reallocate resources and make the rosters more client-centred.

Currently the roster that we have was developed to meet the needs of the staff so they would agree to come and work here when the house opened. We’ve found [reviewing the rosters] very difficult because we have to include the union from Kew. They have a list of things that they’re wanting to be met. There were only two staff here under the Kew EBA\textsuperscript{24}, we weren’t allowed to touch their hours and or their shifts, and those two lines dictated what the rest of the roster did. We were unable to move it, we’ve attempted about ten times in the last two and a half years. I have a roster developed that I’m just sitting on. For example, one day in the roster we have two full-time staff members on all day, and there’s no residents at home, and a third staff member starting at one o’clock. [Those hours] could be used to do a lot of great stuff, but I don’t think you need quite that much time, when we could put that in a Friday night, or one other day where we could really support more one-to-one activities. There’s lots of examples of that in the roster. (HS/6/I)

Similar issues are likely to found across the Department’s group homes. The more general Disability Services Workforce Study (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2005b) also discusses the need to improve the utilisation of staff, particularly through less reliance on casual staff, exploring client-centred rosters, and promoting greater staff flexibility.

\textsuperscript{24} Enterprise Bargaining Agreement
15. The house supervisor’s workload

Of course changes to employees’ condition of service are not going to be immediate or easy and must be done with the relevant stakeholders. We are not in the business of stating exactly what the necessary changes are but the direction of some changes is implicit in what we have written. If house supervisors are to become practice leaders in the way that has been described they may have to work 20 days over a 28-day roster. This may not suit everyone, but it is hard to imagine how an entire staff team can be effectively supervised under some of the constraints we have described. It is likewise hard to imagine how any staff member can sustain a high level of work performance over extended periods, even with meal breaks.

Another feature of the roster that is incredibly difficult is, I’ve got staff working thirteen hour days. And I don’t know how you can get an effective work, I can performance manage as much as I like, but you can’t performance-manage fatigue. Thirteen hour days are a standard. It’s just impossible, so you have to be really sensitive with your staff and take all of those sorts of things into consideration. I can’t expect 110 per cent out of my staff if they’ve been working for thirteen hours a day. I might get 50 or 40 by the end of the day. Those sorts of things have to be taken into consideration as well, I mean, you’ve got to be realistic. (HS/8/I)

Staff salaries are typically the biggest item on a group home’s budget. Given that research shows that the way in which staff provide support to the residents has been identified as a key determinant of client-outcome, then it seems to us that the allocation of direct support workers’ time, and the support given to those people, are absolutely crucial in developing high quality services.

The house supervisor’s workload: A summary

We are suggesting that for many house supervisors their workload is out of balance. The aspects of the job that are specifically related to practice leadership need to be brought more centre-stage. House supervisors are expected to be practice leaders, yet the job does not seem to be structured to allow them to do this. In the future we think that there are benefits for all house supervisors in keeping a timelog, so that they can discuss how they are spending their time with their team manager. If this is done systematically it will enable house supervisors to have a focused discussion about their specific balance of tasks. Each group home would also benefit from a formal audit to systematically review whether the necessary resources and structures are in place to allow house supervisors to be effective managers.
House supervisors bear a big responsibility for service quality. Before turning to a discussion of the support that house supervisors receive from their line manager we want to finish this section with the words of a manager. They are a useful reminder that the entire burden should not fall on house supervisors’ shoulders.

House supervisors have a role in modelling, teaching and coaching, but I think there’s a bit too much reliance placed on a house supervisor’s ability to model, teach and coach, and there are not enough other developmental opportunities provided to direct care staff. We always leave it in the hands of the house supervisor to develop staff. They certainly go and get training on mandatory things like first aid and manual handling, but in terms of ‘communication with residents’ and the broader issues that people would always benefit from tossing around in a room of other people, direct care staff don’t get that. I think there’s increasingly more pressure on house supervisors to be the one-stop shop for information and support for direct care staff. It’s a lot of pressure. (M/21/I)
16. Supporting the house supervisor

The ongoing participant observation element of *Making life good in the community* highlighted two issues that we want to discuss here. We observed that some house supervisors received low levels of *planned formal supervision* and a significant turnover at the team manager level\(^{25}\). The latter impacted on the frequency of supervision and interrupted the process by which a team manager develops a relationship with the supervisor, the staff team, the residents and their families. This not only impacts very specifically on the quality of *planned formal supervision* but also more generally on the support available to house supervisors.

**The meat in the sandwich: Issues of stress**

There have been a number of research studies exploring the levels of stress experienced by residential staff. In a survey of the social care workforce in the United Kingdom, managers of residential homes for people with severe intellectual disabilities returned stress scores that were above acceptable levels on an objective measure of stress (Balloch, Pahl, and McLean, 1998). In comparison to direct care staff, house supervisors have reported higher levels of anxiety and pressure (Rose, Jones, and Elliott, 2000) and shown more evidence of emotional exhaustion, one component of burnout (Edwards and Miltenberger, 1991).

We did not attempt to measure house supervisors’ levels of stress, but we suggest that the job’s complexity and degree of difficulty is reflected in the quotations we have used. It was not surprising to find that people spoke of the pressures they faced.

*I worked [as house supervisor] at a house which had a very inappropriate culture. This is just an example. There were these, [staff] called them ‘feeders’, I call them serviettes, that people have around their necks. They were being thrown in with the ‘kylies’ [a brand of incontinence bedsheets]. Wet kylies were being thrown in with resident clothes. And they complained to management about me [when I asked the staff to wash them separately], they rang upper management and of course management said, ‘Well we agree with Maureen, she has our full support. You should be doing that’. I was creating more work for them somehow....I brought people into the vacant lines that were brilliant, and I knew that if we were able to role-

\(^{25}\) The team manager turnover was monitored indirectly through our engagement with the houses. In conversations with house supervisors they would mention that they had a new team manager or in house meetings a different manager would turn up. In three houses we noted the house supervisor had four team managers in a 12-month period.
model, if anybody had a chance in changing the culture of the house, we would be able to. [The new staff] left, because they couldn’t cope with the culture, it was just too ingrained. It was staff conflict in power-plays, setting people up, it was horrible. I think I lasted four months, before I needed to [move] and I’m a very positive person. It ended up affecting my health, so I had to leave too, which I took as a personal thing because normally I can cope with things like that. I tried everything. I tried being nice, providing examples, providing leadership, and then I would also have to give directives with certain things. Nobody wanted to change. (HS/12/I)

We have been concerned about the well-being of two house supervisors that we engaged with during the course of this research. This house supervisor specifically mentioned the concept of burnout.

It’s been tough; I’ve burnt out at least twice already. I’ve backed off quite a bit and I’m cautious as to how much time I devote. I was working about 60 hours a week when we first started off in the house and I can’t sustain that. There have been challenges, some of which is because of my skill base. I wish I had more training in the management of staff. I felt quite inadequate in some areas so I was learning from making mistakes, which is great, and it’s effective, it’s just that with time constraints, it would have been better had I learnt beforehand, but they have been valuable lessons. (HS/8/I)

One house supervisor competency relates to incumbents managing their own stress, which was ranked eleventh in the table of most frequently coded activities (Table 7). All of the activities listed by house supervisors related to taking meal or ‘coffee’ breaks.

This house supervisor specifically mentioned the need for house supervisors to monitor their own levels of stress.

One of the important parts of the job is to recognise your own stress levels. I have a very good staff group here, I have a very good resident group here, however, there are little stresses that can get you going. In other houses there can be a lot of staffing issues, and if you’re constantly going in, day-in, day-out dealing with other people’s issues you can get very stressed yourself and not recognise it. I think it’s very important having those little debriefing discussions with your team managers. And that’s where you’ve got to get in supervision meetings. There’s a bit of discussion time in there as well, where you turn round and say, ‘Well how are you going?’ not as in, ‘Are you getting all tasks performed to departmental
House supervisors are in a relatively unique position, experiencing upward stressors from the staff members they manage and downward stressors from the organisation (Elliott and Rose, 1997). In Chapter 2 we quoted Reynolds (2003) who described this as having to face in more than one direction. It was interesting that three respondents referred to the role as being like a sandwich, a simile that also appears in Gifford’s (2006) work.

Sometimes you’re the meat in the sandwich here. You’ve being pulled from the staff and you’re being pulled that way. You’ve got to take a management view, well; I can also see the staff view and the resident view. I think the further up you get, you’re stuck in a certain ways, with procedures and things. (HS/12/I)

It’s a difficult role, because you’re very often the ham between the two pieces of, you have the cheese and then the butter and then the bread on top. (HS/5/I)

We really are the meat in the sandwich because our job is to advocate for our residents and our staff, but it’s also to follow directions from our management. Sometimes we get managers that give us dodgy ideas, not premeditatedly; it’s just that their personal beliefs come in. As supervisors we have to sift through that. ‘Yes, that’s correct’, well ‘No it’s not’. (HS/14/I)

Another house supervisor referred to the house supervisor as a filter.

I see part of the role of being a house supervisor is, you need to be a filter between the staff and management at times and then between management and the staff sometimes. (HS/6/I)

Given that house supervisors manage the staff in their immediate environment there are less readily available sources of support within the group home. This is not to deny that direct care staff cannot be a source of support for house supervisors, but Elliot and Rose (1997) suggest they represent more of a supervisory burden. As house supervisors are based in the group home, the particular nature of dispersed services means that house supervisors have fewer opportunities to receive support from their team manager than direct support staff can potentially receive from the house supervisor (Rose et al., 2000).
16. Supporting the house supervisor

relative lack of support for house supervisors has therefore been highlighted as an important issue (Balloch et al., 1998).

Sources of support

From the perspective of the organisational hierarchy, the team manager is the house supervisor’s first point of contact. As the house supervisor manages the practice of direct support staff, so the team manager has a similar role in relation to the house supervisor. This is why the relationship between the two is important and the frequency and quality of planned formal supervision crucial. Data from the timelog study revealed that one per cent of house supervisor’s recorded activities were coded as discussing issues with their line managers, which includes all four modes of supervision (Figure 6)\(^26\). Given the emphasis we have put on planned formal supervision as one forum for managing the practice of direct support, so it is also a forum for supervising the house supervisor.

You don’t always get support from management when it comes to dealing with staff. I think also the house supervisors are not confident in their skills, or they may not have the skills, and sometimes I certainly haven’t had the skills to deal with managing certain staff issues, particularly if they become difficult. Sometimes I didn’t have confidence in my approach, so that was another thing. I don’t think there’s enough formalised support. They are starting to do that, [our regional office] is actually starting to give us a lot more training on dealing with challenging staff scenarios, which is good, but I think in the past there hasn’t been a lot of training in that area. (HS/3/I)

In the absence of support from team managers house supervisors will look elsewhere.

Cluster managers, generally can be supportive, can be, and like anyone you get good cluster managers or area managers and you get poor cluster managers. If you have a good cluster, or if you have a good relationship with your, we call them ‘team managers’, it makes your job a lot easier. Your team managers are very important, because if you do have a good relationship with them you can use them as a soundboard, but if you don’t have a good relationship you tend to deal with issues in a different way, you go more towards other house supervisors or your colleagues, so that you feel like you’ve got support. In an ideal world you really need to do that

\(^{26}\) One team manager stated that she meets with house supervisors for two to two and a half hours per month. A two-hour meeting, without any preparation or travel time, accounts for 1.3 per cent of a house supervisor’s time over a four-week roster.
communication with your team manager, but it doesn’t always work out that way. (HS/3/I)

This house supervisor also highlighted other house supervisors as a source of support.

I have one supervisor who’s great with manual handling stuff. If I have any questions I always go to her. I have another one who’s great with community inclusion, I always go to her, and then I’ve got another supervisor who’s great with behavioural stuff, so I’d go to her. So if I ever go, ‘Oh I don’t know, it doesn’t sit right with me’, I ring someone up. (HS/14/I)

Given the length of time that our sample of house supervisors had been in the position, some had extensive support networks. These networks take time to build up and may not be available to newer, younger house supervisors.

I probably do a lot of [networking to learn new ideas]. I don’t know that that’s a luxury that many other people can indulge in. I probably have a really large network of people that work in non-government organisations who are friends or colleagues that I’ve worked with in the past. So we have a great network of people that we can share our ideas and the different things that we’ve been working on. E-mail has been fabulous in that people can come and share all of their different information. In this area there’s a lot of stuff available through other community houses but also the local hospitals have a lot of free talks on different health issues, things like that. There’s more things happening than you can attend. It’s quite vibrant out there. There’s a lot of different things that you can access if you have the time and the energy to do it. (HS/6/I)

Some team managers have held the position for a long time and managed the same houses for an extended period. Indeed, one person we interviewed had been a team manager for more than 10 years and set a benchmark for good practice.

I do formal supervision every month and at that meeting I go through everything with my house supervisors, and it’s about a two, two and a half hour meeting. (M/20/I)

**Stability and instability**

The interviews confirmed that regular turnover at team manager level can be detrimental to the provision of quality services and good support to house supervisors. Turnover is not simply related to people leaving the organisation or
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being promoted. It is also related to service re-organisations, the inability to recruit competent team managers, covering for lengthy periods of recreational leave, and the practice of removing incumbents to act-up or be seconded elsewhere.

As well as acknowledging this instability, the following quotation highlights the fact that not only do underperforming house supervisors need direction from their team managers, but consistency in the messages is important.

> We’re aware of the [turnover at team manager level] and it’s not something that we would condone as being good practice. It does feature in a lot of our conversations around our workforce stability, our management stability in fact. We had some conversations about that today. I’ll quote a house supervisor that we met last week about a particular performance issue and this house supervisor’s functionality. He said, I’ve had five different team managers in the last 18 months and I had five different answers about an issue. In the end I went to the policies and procedures and pulled it out and got the answer myself’. My simple answer to that would be ‘Why didn’t you go there in the first place?’ and then ask, ‘Have I got this right in reading the policy?’ But the message was also there that they found that quite disruptive, considering the performance gaps for this particular individual...I don’t believe for one second that without consistency we’re really supporting people as much as possible. We need to improve this, but there needs to be some alert from management and say, ‘Oh come on, we’ve got to look out for this team. This is the third change in twelve months. We’re doing this team a disservice and we need a new focus’. The other aspect of that’s to say that’s just a fact of life and what does the area manager do about it? (M/22/I)

This house supervisor reinforces her different experiences and outlines the negative aspects of team manager turnover.

> Prior to my most recent team manager I had eleven team managers in the space of a year. I did count people going on leave too. I remember calling one of my team managers, I called her ‘Number nine’, which I thought was quite fun. I’ve had the same team manager for the last three years, which has been the most consistent. It does help a lot and I think that’s probably one of the more important things. I think it’s not so bad for me because I’m quite resourceful. It wouldn’t matter if I had different team managers, I’d still have the same agendas, I’d still be doing the same things. But I think the house supervisors who need more support, say their staffing issues, or
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resident issues to deal with, would need the consistent support of one team manager. Otherwise the issues get lost. You’re trying to change people’s behaviour, so that if you’ve got a staffing group who are displaying these terrible behaviours, and then suddenly the team manager leaves, and new people come along, you’re back to square one again with all these issues, and it never gets resolved or, what needs to happen never happens. It’s like a pimple, it just, never gets squeezed. (HS/4/I)

The advantages of having a stable relationship are well articulated by these house supervisors, both of whom have experienced rapid turnover and stability:

[An advantage of having a stable team manager is that] you’re not repeating yourself. It’s just the fact that they know the clients. A lot of things that do happen have happened before and they will [again] and it’s like, ‘Look we’ve had this incident occur again’ so they’ve got the history behind it. When we did have no [stable] cluster manager we had about three or four in a span of a year. Every three months it was, ‘No, no, look, we tried...well you don’t know...that could have changed by now’. I wasted more time repeating myself, so that’s just easier for me. (HS/13/I)

I’ve had the same [team manager since] when I came here, thank goodness. He’s brilliant. We have been lucky, because we’ve got a lot of complex needs here, we’ve been very lucky. Another house that I worked at, I would have had about five team managers in about a year, something ridiculous like that. The consistency [makes a difference]. The team manager knows the residents that live here, knows the issues, and that’s really important because you’re not on your own. You feel comfortable knowing that you can ring up that person and say, ‘Hey, I need to nut this out with you. This is what I think, is there anything I’ve missed?’ If that person doesn’t know the residents, doesn’t know the house, they can’t provide that support. It’s so important. (HS/12/I)

More than anything else these quotations emphasise that these house supervisors frame this as a quality issue. Complex issues related to either the residents or staff cannot be effectively progressed when they move in and out of focus. The advantages of a long-term relationship were underscored by these managers, who suggest that the benefits only begin to materialise after 12 to 18 months.

The only real advantage that I see [to stability] is that we get to know the residents so well, we get to know the families and we get to know those house supervisors well. You get to know how they work and where they
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need development and where they don’t. You get to know the person as a person, so they’re comfortable with you after a long period of time. And it takes a long period of time. It takes a long period of time to get to know the residents and their families....In my last move I had six new houses out of seven. I had to find the names of six new residents in each house, to get to know the families, to get to know the staff. To build where you need to build it takes you a good 12 months, before you get to know that house and have it running efficiently and effectively. (M/20/I)

You get to know the issues, where supports are needed, and how much to give. You get to know the residents, the parents, the day placements that they go, so when issues come to hand you know the people you’re dealing with, you know the background, so there’s a lot of advantages to having the same team over a long period of time. To get to know the staffing team, their strengths, their weakness, house supervisors, their strengths, weaknesses, where house supervisors need support. It’s not something you get to know over three months, six months. You get a rough idea, but in some instances, you’re wrong, your initial assessments are wrong. But over a period of twelve months, eighteen months you start getting closer to that mark. There are benefits of managing long-term. (M/23/I)

A further disadvantage of team manager turnover is that house supervisors have to get used to different managerial styles. This house supervisor also points out that there is a perception of variable standards amongst team managers.

If you’re working with issues, if you’re trying to follow through on things, having a one [team manager] following through is better than constantly informing and updating someone else. You develop a working relationship with one person, you get to know that person and it makes the job easier. Whereas if you’re constantly adapting and changing to the different management style, system, what have you, it throws the way you’re doing things out, if you’re constantly needing to change everything to meet the plans of a different person. From what I hear [team managers] do all have different styles and different expectations. I haven’t experienced that because I’ve had two [in ten months], but that’s the feedback that I get from other people. Different people want different things. (HS/15/I)

The belief that team managers have different standards is reinforced by these respondents.
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It’s very hard because you get one [team] manager who has completely different standards to the next. So sometimes, things that you’d never needed to advocate for, then you have to. (HS/14/I)

It’s all very much dependent on who you work with, the standards are dependent on who you work with. So if I was working for a different cluster manager perhaps I’d need to do a whole set of different other things that I’m not expected to do at the moment. And similarly my staff might think, ‘Oh, I might have to do this while Mabel’s here but if I have another house supervisor I wouldn’t have to’. (HS/8/I)

In Chapter 7 we highlighted the considerable differences there are between group homes and suggested that whilst there may be core house supervisor competencies, incumbents also needed specific knowledge and skills to work with some residents. This also represents a challenge for the team manager, who may not have the very specific knowledge to advise the house supervisor how to effectively support a resident, as this comment suggests.

Because the house is so diverse, you might get a cluster manager who’s fantastic in a medical house, but in his cluster he’s got a behaviour house, [and] he’s never worked with behaviours and he doesn’t understand the complexity of it. So that’s where us, as supervisors, have to skill ourselves up to ensure that we’re advocating on behalf of the residents. (HS/14/I)

Variability in standards are likely to lead to two sources of organisational stress, role conflict and role ambiguity (see S. E. Jackson and Schuler, 1985). In the Balloch et al. (1998) study, the most frequently mentioned sources of subjective stress included being exposed to conflicting demands (role conflict) and being unclear about what was expected (role ambiguity). In the circumstances that we have described house supervisors are likely to experience both of these as this manager illustrates.

I had a new house supervisor and normally after a month or two I sit down and say, ‘Look, we’ve worked together for a while, these are the things that I would like to see from you and now you need to let me know where you feel I’m not meeting your needs, maybe I’m not managing the way you’d like me to. Let’s discuss those things’. And she went, ‘You know what, I’m okay now but when you first come I went, ‘oh shit’’. That’s exactly what she said to me and I went, ‘What do you mean?’ She said, ‘Well, I had two managers quite quickly before you, and to one I would say, ‘Do I have to do that?’ and she’d go, ‘You should, but it doesn’t matter’. And then next one
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would go, ‘Oh don’t worry about it’, and then you come in and you go, ‘Yes and I would like it by….You’re making me do those things’. I said, ‘Well, that’s part and parcel of my role and that’s what you’re supposed to do. I’m just monitoring that you’re doing what you’re supposed to do’. She said it’s made her improve herself as a house supervisor because she realises that I do come down once a month and have a look and I am expecting that her job will be done. Hopefully I’m fair, but I do have an expectation, which she hadn’t received that before. It was hard and in her face when I went there and said, ‘Well, you do need to do that, and I’d really like it by…’ House supervisors do find it difficult because there are things that I prioritise, which the next manager that I sit next to may not. (M/20/I)

The importance of house supervisor stability

The goal of providing people with intellectual disabilities with a stable, skilled workforce is integral to providing quality services (Lakin et al., 2005). Long-standing vacant lines on the roster can add to the instability of a staff team, compelling the use of casual staff. In The Story So Far (Clement et al., 2007) we commented that the practice of taking house supervisors out of the houses to act up in other positions for significant periods creates instability. In one house there were three acting supervisors in a month and two full-time staff acting in other areas of the service. This house supervisor had experiences of being asked to move to other houses for short-periods:

There have been many times where you might be asked as a favour to go and quickly fill-in for one, two or three months in a house that may be in crisis or something of that nature. I’ve done a fair few of those. I think you have to try and ensure that obviously the house has to be maintained well when you’re not here. You attempt to put things into place. I certainly didn’t ever agree to go unless things are stable, under control, all our plans were up to date. Usually my one clincher of agreeing to go is to have somebody else that I either know or know of who you think of as competent that could come and act up in that setting. That’s often the difficulty, you’re asked to go somewhere else to alleviate an emergency situation, because it’s perceived that the house that you’re in is running well and they can manage without perhaps any supervision at all for one, two, three months. I don’t think that that’s in anybody’s best interests. (HS/6/I)

Instability creates issues not just for the staff team and the residents, but also for other stakeholders.
You need stability, in particular in house supervisors. I always say the focus of the Department, if they really wanted to do the job more effectively, should be on recruitment retention. I think retention’s often the key. I know if I was a parent and I was speaking to a different house supervisor every six months I would be getting pissed off, especially if I was discussing the same issues every six months. Also I think part of my philosophy is that if a parent asks me to do something I will make damn sure I do it. I’ve never had any parent complaints….I think that’s how you foster those relationships. (HS/4/I).

**Support and stability**

Handy (1993) makes the point that role cultures succeed when they can operate in a stable environment. Creating stability in the house supervisor and team manager positions would seem to be an important issue. Stability in the house supervisor position creates a better environment in which to exercise practice leadership and stability at the team manager level improves the chances of giving better support. An ongoing working relationship increases the likelihood of good supervision, provides a platform for consistent messages, means that both parties are aware of the important issues, and those issues are more likely to be followed through.
17. Eliminating causes of poor performance

Ford and Hargreaves (1991) list a number of reasons for poor performance at work (Table 11). Most of these can be attributed to organisational failures rather than failings of the individual employee. Even some causes that they place under the ‘workers’ list are a result of organisational failings, for example, poor recruitment processes allow people without the skills to take up jobs.

| Table 11 |
| Causes of poor performance (Ford and Hargreaves, 1991) |
| **The organisation** |
| Job description: Too wide so impossible to achieve. Insufficiently specific so unclear. No job description. Other staff affected not aware of job description. |
| Induction: Lack of induction. Poor induction (too short or too limited; planned without consulting the worker or other staff; training need not identified or met; insufficient resources devoted to it; badly planned so ineffective to meet the need). |
| Standards and monitoring processes: Failure to agree these at the beginning of the job. |
| Supervision and support: Irregular. Poor skills of supervisor. Poor knowledge of supervisor. Supervisee does not use potential of sessions. No ‘appraisal’ of skills and progress in the job. Lack of awareness and action by supervisor on issues of race, gender at work. |
| Probationary period: use of it not planned: Regular sessions looking at work do not happen. |
| Relationship of worker and line manager |
| Relationship of worker with peers |
| Culture of the organisation: Mismatch between worker and the organisation. |
| Inadequate resources to do the job |
| **The worker** |
| Lacks the skills or ability to do the job: Poor recruitment process. Lack of identification of training and support needs, and resources to meet these. Lack of confidence. |
| Health problems impede performance on the job: Physical or mental. |
| Stress caused by personal circumstances: Move of house. Personal relationships, for example, divorce. Death of close member of the family. |
| Inability to do the job in the time available |
| Poor motivation |
| Values conflict with the purpose and process of work |
17. Eliminating causes of poor performance

We have not got the space to deal with all of the issues highlighted in Table 11, but we want to use it to bring together some of the issues we have discussed to date in relation to the performance of both the house supervisor and direct support staff.

We have addressed a number of issues in relation to the house supervisor. We have suggested that the job description is not adequate; that the standards for house supervisors have not been clear; that the supervision and support available is inadequate and not always of a high quality; that the relationship between house supervisor and team manager can be fractured, which impacts on the quality of monitoring and review. In some cases house supervisors have not been allocated the resources to do the job and it may be possible that some house supervisors just cannot do the job in the time available.

**Induction to the house supervisor role**

The house supervisors who were newer to the position talked about their induction to the role.

> I understand that they had constraints, but in terms of my preparation and me getting a handover [I would have liked] better designed time-lines. Okay, the decision’s made, give it a certain amount of time for the news to digest and for preparation, but then also have some follow-up after the changeover has occurred. I could have done with a little bit more support in terms of coming in here, in terms of the handover. There’s a pro forma for everything else so why not have a pro forma for something as important as a handover, and because every house is different, you can’t walk in and assume that it’s going to be this way. I suppose if I’d had a better handover given to me then I might not have been so idealistic and then felt so let down when what I tried didn’t work. (HS/2/I)

> I worked at Kew for twelve months as a house supervisor before coming out and in that time it was always just ‘sink or swim’. It was, ‘This is the job, have fun and hopefully you’ll learn some tricks on the way’. And that’s really how it’s been. So it’s a job that you seem to get to learn through experience; definitely if you’re coming up through the ranks....Everything has a huge learning curve. Everything you need to do you have to go and read policies and procedures, you’ve got to go into the internet, you’ve got to surf that. It’s about spending a lot of time finding out the information that you need, so that you can do the...

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27 Knowledgenet is the Department’s intranet site, where many policies and procedures are listed.
tasks that you need to do, and because there are such a complex range of tasks that you need to do, which are monitored by a complex range of policies and procedures, it is a very time consuming thing until you become experienced and get up to date. (HS/15/I)

**House supervisor training**

Very few people are going to come to the position with expertise in all competencies. People will have a mixed profile, novice in some competencies, proficient in others. Identifying and meeting training needs is therefore important.

> It would be better if there were guidelines to get some training for supervisors, especially new supervisors. I’m following the way I was taught, because I never did formal training to become a supervisor. There is no formal training, so you’ve just got to hope that the people who’ve become supervisors had good supervisors before them, had good modelling and teaching. (HS/16/I)

Long-term employees perceived that there had been a reduction in the level of available training over the years.

> We’ve got individual learning guides now but they’re quite sparse because it’s all to do with very basic mandatory training, for example, how to administer a suppository, how to administer medication. Many years ago you used to get a training manual for the year. Everything was available at head office and you would actually attend perhaps one training day a month. It was about effective communication, a day of how to effectively communicate in a written communication and then the next month it might be in verbal communication. Some of the great ones that I have gone to were, ‘How to deal with difficult people over the telephone’, there were some great skills that you can try to impart to people on a day to day basis, but without that opportunity to sit down without distractions and go through them…it’d be fabulous to have some of those training opportunities, not just for me, but for staff as well. (HS/6/I)

**Eliminating poor performance in direct support staff**

Given that we have identified the house supervisor as being primarily responsible for good practice in their house the same table can be used to consider the causes of poor performance of direct support staff. As far as the practice of house supervisors go we have highlighted deficiencies in standards and monitoring processes, supervision and support, the relationship between the house supervisor and direct support staff.
17. Eliminating causes of poor performance

If direct support staff lack the knowledge, skills and abilities to do their job then resources need to be allocated to meet these deficits. Part of this may be rectified through training, but the stronger element will be the supervision, coaching and support of the house supervisor.
18. Thoughts about practice leadership and practice management

In the previous chapters the notions of management and leadership have deliberately been used in ways that are relatively interchangeable. We don’t think that this is good practice, but we have done this to accommodate the fact that the practice leadership term has greater currency within the Department than practice management. Terms need to be defined and a consistent usage and a common understanding would help house supervisors know what is required of them. What is it that house supervisors are doing? Are they managing or leading? When are they expected to manage and in what situations are they expected to show leadership?

The relationship between leadership and management is complex and as Jackson and Donovan (1999) observe,

...has generated a wealth of different writings and disagreements, often quite heated. A hierarchy exists for some people, with leadership being on a much higher plane than management, instead of both roles having importance.

For some, management and leadership are quite distinct – leadership is about goal setting, values and the ‘big picture’, while management is about implementing.

For others the terms are interchangeable or closely interrelated. Leadership has been identified as forming a set of qualities that are an integral part of being a ‘good’ manager’ (p.9)\textsuperscript{28}.

Given that we have claimed that it is unclear how and when supervisors are expected to fulfil a management and/or leadership role we will share some of our thoughts in relation to the house supervisor as a starting point towards clarity.

We have made it clear that we view the house supervisor’s position as one that should be formally designated as a managerial one. As a practising managing professional the house supervisor is someone who is responsible for the work of others, monitors the practice of the direct care staff he or she manages and changes the performance of direct care staff where it is deemed necessary. It is in this context that Sines (1992) is correct in writing that the, ‘Quality [of services] will clearly depend on the motivation, commitment and skills of staff

\textsuperscript{28} We would argue that many of the terms that are referred to as leadership in Chapter 10 are better understood as management.
who will require **leadership** [bold added] from their managers’ (p.70). House supervisors must ‘give a lead’ to the staff they manage.

The important point here is that house supervisors should not be operating in a vacuum. They are not expected to be ‘transformational leaders’ who articulate a new vision for the staff team (see Chapter 10). House supervisors will have been exposed in varying degrees to ‘knowledge’ about intellectual disability services through completion of formal courses, in-service training, orientation and induction. We made the point in *The Story So Far* (Clement et al., 2007) that documents like the *Victorian State Disability Plan 2002-2012* (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2002b) define what the future should look like. At a different level other employees, probably managers, have approved decisions about what inputs or technologies should be used to achieve the organisation’s desired goals, such as *person-centred active support or person-centred planning*. We suggested that it is the job of house supervisors and middle managers (such as the team manager) to make the desired future a reality and implement these tools and techniques.

House supervisors are responsible for developing and maintaining good services but also need to be sure that action is in line with the Department’s policy, legal requirements and available resources. This is well captured by our respondents’ notion of being a ‘filter’ or the ‘meat in the sandwich’. The house supervisor is an important channel between direct support staff, service-users, family members and more senior managers. House supervisors necessarily look to their senior managers to provide leadership in the organisation (see Rogers and Reynolds, 2003).

Jackson and Donovan (1999) come up with a neat way of resolving the management/leadership divide.

> *In our view, the most useful way to think of management and leadership is that they are distinct from each other only at their extreme ends. In other words, a small number of activities may be ‘purely’ leadership or ‘purely’ management but most activities are both….it is clear that anyone designated a ‘manager’ must have some leadership qualities and anyone designated a ‘leader’ must have some managerial qualities (p.10).*

If we accept this view it does of course mean that house supervisors engage in both management and leadership activities. We believe that most of the activities that house supervisors have described in this report are essentially management activities. Undertaking planned formal supervision, coaching, facilitating
Thoughts about practice leadership

Meetings, and following the disciplinary process are all management activities. Practice management therefore more accurately describes what house supervisors do, although this term does not have the same ‘appeal’ as practice leadership.

In implementing person-centred planning the house supervisor is being asked to copy or imitate what a leader has produced through innovation. Leaders in the field have developed person-centred active support and house supervisors are expected to put in place the systems that sustain it.

Negative Leadership

Those people that advocate ‘leadership’ as a means of improving the quality of services are probably promoting a certain type of leadership. We have made the point that in the relatively isolated settings of group homes day-to-day practice may be insulated from the aspirations of the wider organisation. Handy (1993) uses the term negative power to refer to power that is used in a way that is contrary to accepted practice. He writes, ‘Negative power is the capacity to stop things happening, to delay them, to distort or disrupt them’ (p.131). A direct support worker whose practice keeps residents in a state of disengagement, by doing tasks without any attempt to involve them, is using his or her power negatively. If we extend this concept to leadership, then a house supervisor can practise positive or negative leadership— in other words, a house supervisor can move the service in the direction set by senior managers (positive leadership), or can maintain the status quo or move it in the opposite direction (negative leadership).

Thus when Emerson and Hatton (1994) highlight the importance of leadership and management they are talking about positive leadership that looks outwards to the norms and values of the leaders within the wider (intellectual disability) community. A house supervisor who receives training on person-centred planning and implements it is exercising positive leadership. A house supervisor who promotes the ‘hotel model’ is demonstrating negative leadership. Likewise a permissive style of management that delays progress towards the organisation’s goals, and contributes to the establishment of norms and values that are incongruent with the Department’s espoused ones, is also practising negative leadership.

Leadership or management: A summary

House supervisors can exercise leadership, but they are primarily managers and we have labelled the house supervisor as a practising managing professional. Their fundamental task is to make sure that the staff teams they manage meet
18. Thoughts about practice leadership

the organisation’s goals. The Department’s good intentions will not translate into quality lifestyles for people with intellectual disabilities unless the group homes are well managed from the inside (Burton, 1998). Proehl (2001) writes that, ‘The reason many change initiatives are never fully implemented is a lack of management’ (p.105). This resonates strongly with the observation that the opportunities that exist for residents to enjoy a good lifestyle in small housing are not being fully exploited. A commitment to practice leadership/management could ensure that all residents in group home settings have a quality lifestyle.
19. Conclusions, issues, and future work

Clarifying what is expected of house supervisors

A major outcome of this research is the document listing the 141 house supervisor competencies, which delineates what is expected of a house supervisor working for the Department of Human Services in Victoria\(^{29}\). We have described the position as a practising managing professional, that is, a person who works directly with people with intellectual disabilities who has primary responsibility for the management of the direct support staff in a group home.

Identifying the house supervisor competencies was a first step in informing a range of other important issues. We identified the following developmental work, which we recommend is taken on by the Department, so that current and future house supervisors are better prepared and developed for the role.

- The competencies are utilised by the Department to communicate to house supervisors what they are expected to do. The competencies establish the job’s boundaries and clear performance standards. It would be possible to create a document that illustrates each competence with illustrations from the house supervisor’s we interviewed.

- The competencies are utilised by the Department to create a revised position description for house supervisors that reflect the competencies.

- The competencies are utilised by the Department in recruiting house supervisors. We flagged that many of the house supervisors’ stories and examples could be developed into a realistic job preview.

- The competencies are utilised by the Department to develop an assessment tool that could be used by house supervisors and others (for example, team managers) to identify and detail the gaps between the identified competencies and the actual practice of current house supervisors.

- The competencies are utilised by the Department, with information from the aforementioned assessments, as the basis for the training and development of house supervisors. We suggest that both the theoretical frameworks we have used and the qualitative data may be helpful in designing training.

- The competencies are regularly reviewed by the Department to incorporate new thinking about how the house supervisor’s job should be defined.

\(^{29}\) The competencies will need further revision to make them entirely relevant for respite and children’s services.
Towards an understanding of practice leadership

Given that house supervisors are responsible for the management of the day-to-day work of direct support staff, then attaching the concept of practice leader to the house supervisor’s position seems helpful. It emphasises the demanding nature of the direct support job and reinforces the importance of good support to those people engaged in supporting people with intellectual disabilities.

Practice leadership was not a familiar term to most of the house supervisors and managers whom we interviewed. We believe that practice management or practice-led management more accurately describes what house supervisors do. In order to explicate the concept of practice leadership we presented stories and examples given by the people we interviewed, and linked these to theoretical frameworks.

Practice leadership seems to have a number of important dimensions. Firstly, it is enacted in interactions between a house supervisor and one other person, whether that is a resident or an employee. Secondly, it has a group dimension, significant in the context of supported accommodation, given the importance of teamwork. Thirdly, practice leadership takes place in a broader organisational context, bolstered by organisational structures and resources.

Practice leadership was defined by using more everyday terms, such as coaching, directing, role-modelling, supervising, and supporting. The notion of a practice leader is also reflected in more academic terms, like reflective practitioner. Practice leadership is something that needs to be visible. House supervisors’ practice needs to be competent and it must be seen by direct support staff. Practice leaders actively, consciously and deliberately make clear to direct support staff what they should do and how they should do it.

Practice leaders have an orientation to ‘teamwork’ and a knowledge and understanding of management. They can use different management styles and must have time to discuss and demonstrate good practice, which happens in both informal and more formal spaces, such as house meetings and planned formal supervision.

Group homes do not always offer sources of immediate support to house supervisors, who must therefore be well supported from the outside. Practice leadership is enabled by the allocation of sufficient organisational resources, which create the spaces and frameworks where practice leadership can be enacted.

We identified the following developmental work:
19. Conclusions, issues and future work

- Given the importance of planned formal supervision resources should be allocated to clarify and embed the Department’s Professional Development and Supervision Policy.

- Training should be developed and delivered that teaches house supervisors to be competent in using the four modes of supervision that we have discussed.

- We suggested that conscious use of planned informal supervision may be a significant gap in the house supervisor’s repertoire of interventions. We think that incorporating it into a house supervisor’s work is an important developmental area and a potentially useful research project.

- A more academic piece of work should be undertaken that develops a better theoretical understanding of practice leadership.

Supporting and developing house supervisors: Reality and goals for the future.

We began this report by suggesting that the opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities to enjoy a good lifestyle in supported accommodation are not being fully exploited in most cases. Three variables that we have discussed in this report, which are related to variations in outcomes for service-users, are the characteristics of the service-users, the design of services, and differences in staff performance.

If we use the concept of practice leadership as a benchmark, we have used the words of house supervisors and managers to describe the variability that exists in relation to this standard.

Some house supervisors are unable to observe the practice of direct support staff equally, so people have differential opportunities to benefit from coaching, feedback and role modelling. A consequence of the limited opportunities to observe staff practice is that house supervisors may not be aware of the day-to-day work of their employees and this has the inadvertent consequence that many direct support staff are performing with limited help. Some direct support staff who need a lot of direction, coaching, and support may end up being left more or less to their own devices. Part-time staff may be disadvantaged in relation to full-time staff, even though their hours are often specifically targeted to work with the residents.

The frequency of planned formal supervision meetings and house meetings varies from house to house. House supervisors are sometimes reliant on the good will of staff members to attend house meetings or rearrange their rostered hours to attend planned formal supervision meetings. House supervisors may therefore
not be able to provide direct support staff with regular and appropriate supervision.

Some house supervisors are forced to rely on other members of the staff team to spread ideas about good practice and are compelled to use less effective management practices. A number of house supervisors have experienced significant and regular turnover at team manager level, which is detrimental to the good support of house supervisors and the development of quality services.

The report and this summary both address and validate our claims about the role of the house supervisor that were outlined in Chapter 2. Although some of these practice issues may be a result of variations in the performance of individual house supervisors, we have also highlighted that there are some house supervisors who face significant organisational constraints in fulfilling their role. Our findings suggest significant variability between settings with regard to the organisation of services and resources, which has resulted an uneven playing field. For some house supervisors the service is not resourced or structured in a way that makes it possible for them to effectively fulfil the role.

We have suggested that the workload of many house supervisors is out of balance. The aspects of the job that are specifically related to practice leadership need to be brought more centre-stage. Resources should be allocated and organised to give the house supervisor the space to exercise practice leadership. These are resources to facilitate teamwork, carry out planned formal supervision, run house meetings, observe staff practice, give feedback, and coach. These are resources to develop and support house supervisors in their role, backed up by robust policies, and a stable line-management relationship. Creating stability in the house supervisor and team manager positions are important in creating a more successful environment.

The employees that house supervisors manage should expect to receive appropriate and sufficient supervision and attend house meetings. These are not optional extras. Attending these important forums should be part of people’s rostered hours.

These developmental points and some new questions are summarised below. The Department needs to:

- Create a level playing field to ensure that regardless of where house supervisors work they have similar chances of being an effective house supervisor. This might be done through a formal audit that reviews whether...
the necessary resources and structures are in place. This should also consider the skill mix of respective staff teams.

- Allocate specific resources to allow for planned formal supervision meetings and house meetings.

- Recognise that part-time and casual staff have an equal need to benefit from good ‘supervision’.

- Look for ways of creating stability in the relationship between house supervisor and team manager. Or look to minimise practices that fracture this relationship.

- Consider ways in which the house supervisor’s managerial position can be strengthened, for example, through recruitment practices and the management of disciplinary issues.

- Review each house supervisor’s workload. This might be achieved by keeping a timelog for one month. Are certain activities consuming a disproportionate amount of time? Are house supervisors undertaking the most important work?

- The DDSO2 position is a quasi-managerial role. It would also benefit from greater role clarity.

- Given the strong comments about the team manager’s role this is also a position that might benefit from a review.

**Final words**

The importance of having competent house supervisors in supported accommodation settings has been recognised for years. More than 25 years ago Inskip (1981) wrote,

*The cost to residents and staff from the muddle, lack of any clearly understood policy and hand-to-mouth decision making that follows a second-rate appointment is much higher than anyone can realise who has not lived or worked in a residential home. The residents have to live with the consequences for the whole of every twenty-four hours*[bold added]. (p.41)

All of the developmental work that we have highlighted is amenable to senior management intervention, which may require a good deal of transformational leadership. The consequences of not addressing these issues are suggested by Mansell, McGill and Emerson(1994):
19. Conclusions, issues and future work

Over the next few years, those individuals leading the development of learning disability services face a choice. Either they will develop the infrastructure needed to develop or sustain good services or they will produce pale imitations, even new institutions in the community. (Mansell et al., 1994, p.89)
Appendix A: House supervisor competencies

1. **Enhancing staff relations**
   
a. House supervisors effectively communicate with staff by listening to their concerns, supporting and encouraging their ideas and work, thanking them for their contributions, and providing positive feedback regarding performance.

b. House supervisors facilitate and encourage staff to be creative and try new ideas.

c. House supervisors seek staff opinions and input regarding various issues (for example, person centred plans, behaviour management plans, procedures).

d. House supervisors empower staff to make decisions.

e. House supervisors facilitate teamwork, positive interactions and attitudes among staff.

f. House supervisors provide advice, guidance and support to staff when conflicts arise.

g. House supervisors provide formal communication to staff through communication books, memos, and e-mail and by facilitating effective meetings, ‘handovers’, and purposeful interactions.

h. House supervisors ensure that direct support staff understand and fulfil their roles and responsibilities.

i. House supervisors ensure staff maintain appropriate boundaries regarding personal and professional issues.
2. Providing direct support

a. House supervisors communicate effectively with residents using their primary method of communication (for example, speech, gestures, sign language, communication boards, with the assistance of interpreters).

b. House supervisors interact with residents by listening to their issues, responding to their requests and concerns, sharing ideas and humour, and participating in meals and other activities.

c. House supervisors provide culturally appropriate support to residents, including support for religious beliefs.

d. House supervisors use ‘active support’ approaches to assist residents with daily living skills, meal preparation, self-care, health care, and other tasks that maintain resident well-being as needed.

e. House supervisors provide first aid and arrange for emergency medical appointments as needed.

f. House supervisors assist residents in developing routines and activities which are of interest to them (activity and support plans, opportunity plans).

g. House supervisors support residents in identifying, planning for, and participating in community events, activities and holidays.

h. House supervisors assist residents in developing and maintaining family relationships through various means such as correspondence, phone contact, visits, and help to plan and coordinate social activities.

i. House supervisors support residents in making and maintaining friendships with community members.

j. House supervisors ensure that the physical environment in which residents live meets their style and needs, and advocate for necessary resources with their managers.

k. House supervisors support residents in purchasing household supplies, personal items, and groceries.

l. House supervisors support residents in identifying, securing, and utilising transportation based on their individual preferences and needs.

m. House supervisors implement behaviour management support plans, intervene with residents in response to challenging behaviour, and defuse crisis situations as they arise.

n. House supervisors model, teach and coach direct support personnel in the most effective approaches to achieve these direct support competencies.

o. House supervisors identify necessary resources for residents and direct support staff, and advocate for these resources with their managers (for example, additional staffing in response to changed circumstances, special equipment).

p. House supervisors evaluate the quality of supports provided to the residents and continuously strive for improvement.
Appendix A: House supervisor competencies

3. Building inclusive communities and supporting residents’ networks

a. House supervisors communicate with, consult, and inform other support providers, support team members, and case managers (if involved) in their efforts to identify and support the desires, preferences, issues, concerns, and other supports for residents while respecting their rights.

b. House supervisors maintain regular contact with and follow up with residents, family members, and support team members to design, implement and develop strategies regarding ‘informal’ concerns and issues.

c. House supervisors ensure that formal complaints made by residents, family members, and other representatives are managed in accordance with the Department’s policies and procedures.

d. House supervisors network formally (for example, at conferences) and informally with other service providers to learn new ideas and strategies for supporting residents.

e. House supervisors coordinate or assist in the development of new plans and supports for residents.

f. House supervisors facilitate coordination with generic (for example, YMCA, Neighbourhood Houses) and specialist community agencies (for example, such as Rural and Metro Access) to provide inclusive opportunities for residents.

g. House supervisors support residents in making connections and maintaining involvement within community agencies, organisations, events and activities.

h. House supervisors support residents in learning about and participating in adult and community educational opportunities (for example, gardening, literacy, computer courses).

i. House supervisors promote positive relationships between residents, staff and neighbours and actively participate in neighbourhood associations.

j. House supervisors support residents in coordinating, facilitating, and participating in support network meetings (such as Person Centred Planning meetings).
Appendix A: House supervisor competencies

4. Support planning and monitoring

a. House supervisors develop, implement, and monitor resident support plans that are as ‘accessible’ as possible or assist direct support personnel in this process (for example, Person Centred Plans, Individual Program Plans, opportunity plans).

b. House supervisors facilitate Person-Centred Planning meetings for residents or assist direct support personnel in this planning process.

c. House supervisors coordinate the development of new support plans for residents who are new to the house.

d. House supervisors coordinate and facilitate annual (or as needed) resident planning/review meetings or assist direct support personnel in this process.

e. House supervisors complete and use formal and informal assessments regarding behaviours, adaptive skills, health and physical development or assist direct support personnel in this process.

f. House supervisors develop and monitor the implementation and documentation of residents' progress toward personal goals.

g. House supervisors obtain information regarding residents’ goals and desired outcomes from them and their support network members.

h. House supervisors complete required charting, documentation and reports regarding progress toward meeting residents’ goals and outcomes (for example, opportunity plans, behavioural data).

i. House supervisors observe, monitor and provide feedback to staff regarding the implementation of residents’ support plans.

j. House supervisors assist in developing behaviour management plans, and implement and monitor authorised behaviour management plans, which may include the use of restrictive interventions (seclusion, chemical and/or mechanical restraint) in accordance with policy and procedures.

k. House supervisors identify and manage risks in developing resident support plans.

l. House supervisors investigate, record, discuss and manage issues with staff regarding incident reports or Disease Incident Near Miss Accident (DINMA) reports.

m. House supervisors maintain resident records including completing necessary filing or assist direct support personnel in this process.

n. House supervisors maintain confidentiality of the residents who live in the house, but release resident information when it is appropriate to do so (for example, allergies, diabetes).

o. House supervisors complete necessary paperwork when a resident moves from a house.
Appendix A: House supervisor competencies

p. House supervisors demonstrate and encourage residents to be as independent as possible (for example, answer their own telephone, assist in meal preparation, assist with housework).

q. House supervisors communicate necessary information and maintain positive working relationships with staff from other disability service providers which provide supports to residents (for example, Day programs, Speech Pathology, Adult Behaviour Consultancy (ABC)).

r. House supervisors identify necessary changes in the planning and monitoring systems within the Department of Human Services and at the local, state, and federal levels, and advocate for these changes with their managers and government officials (for example, implementation of the Disability Act 2006).
Appendix A: House supervisor competencies

5. Personnel management

   a. House supervisors participate in interview panels to recruit new direct support personnel (for example, to the pool of casual employees).

   b. House supervisors seek opinions from staff, residents and their family members when making decisions or giving advice about hiring decisions.\(^{30}\)

   c. In collaboration with his or her manager house supervisors complete necessary paperwork for changes in staff status (for example, move from part-time to full-time, staff movement advice, resignation, or termination).

   d. House supervisors use formal supervision meetings effectively to delegate, support, coach and direct staff in accordance with policy and procedures.

   e. In collaboration with his or her manager and the ‘Return to work’ Coordinator, house supervisors follow up on reports of staff injury at work and all workers’ compensation-related issues as required of them (for example, Workcover).

   f. House supervisors complete increment reports and make recommendations regarding increases for senior management approval.\(^{31}\)

   g. House supervisors identify opportunities for developing staff (for example, promotion, job enrichment), other means of recognising staff and discuss these with managers (such as the Valued Achievement Awards).

   h. House supervisors recognise the need for, and plan celebrations with, staff.

\(^{30}\) There are a number of competency statements that make specific reference to families (2h, 3b, 3c, 5b, 6c, 9q, and 13e). The precise role that family members play in the lives of their relatives will vary from resident to resident, from no involvement to close involvement. Some of the statements were particularly the subject of differences of opinion. These were related to the involvement of family members in recruiting staff (5b); identifying staff training needs (6c); and getting family input into ‘in-house’ and Departmental policies (13e). We have chosen to leave in the reference to families in these competencies for a number of reasons. Firstly, Government policy stresses the importance of family and carer involvement. A manager said,

‘There is an expectation that we keep families involved and be proactive in doing that, because lots of things happen if you don’t. A good house supervisor would find exactly what pushes the buttons, what’s important, ‘What would you like? A phone call once a week? Do you want to know these particular issues?’, so there’s an agreement and that’s articulated to the rest of the staff. Some families want to know when their [relative] has had seizures, or if you’ve had to stay home because of illness so they haven’t gone to their day program. If you don’t know those sorts of things to begin with, then it ends up becoming a problem. So a good supervisor would establish those relationships....Within the new legislation families and siblings are very important people in the residents’ lives, so we need to embrace it a lot more and we need to work with it and foster those sort of relationships, so that we are seen as a partnership.’ (M/22/I)

Secondly, we were given positive examples by house supervisors where family members had been involved or contributed to recruitment, training, and policy development. A parent who visited the house two or three times a week was asked her views about casual staff before offering them a contract. Another parent had suggested sexuality training for the staff team so as to better support her daughter. A number of house supervisors mentioned family involvement in the development of behaviour management plans (an ‘in-house’ policy). In addition to formal consultation processes, family members who are regular visitors represent an underutilised source of feedback about the Department’s policy and procedures.

\(^{31}\) There was a regional difference with regard to this competence. In one metropolitan region house supervisors did not complete the increment form.
Appendix A: House supervisor competencies

i. House supervisors develop a strategy to improve work performance in accordance with policy and procedure.

j. In conjunction with his or her manager, house supervisors provide necessary disciplinary action in managing unsatisfactory work performance in accordance with the Department’s ‘managing discipline’ policy.

k. House supervisors coordinate and facilitate staff meetings.

l. House supervisors liaise with the Casual Co-ordinator and network with other supervisors when they use staff from the casual pool.

m. House supervisors discuss procedures and work tasks with support personnel when necessary (for example, Human Resources, Casual Co-ordinator).

n. House supervisors initiate discussions with staff following a crisis situation, incident or accident and seek the appropriate level of support.

o. House supervisors direct staff to confidential counselling (for example, Employee Assistance Programs, Critical Incident Stress Management) to assist employees to resolve issues.

p. House supervisors understand, monitor, and implement the relevant Enterprise Bargaining Agreements (EBAs) in relation to ongoing, casual and fixed-term direct support staff and participate in responses to formal grievances when applicable.

q. House supervisors offer, monitor, and review fixed-term contracts to direct support staff in consultation with his or her manager.

r. House supervisors attend and actively participate in the Department’s management, planning, and cross-functional work group meetings.

s. House supervisors report and discuss resident, family, or house related issues with management as necessary.

t. House supervisors delegate tasks or duties to staff as needed (above and beyond job description for special events and activities).

u. House supervisors prioritise their tasks and responsibilities in order of importance and to ensure deadlines are met.

v. House supervisors manage their own stress by balancing personal and professional lives, taking recreational leave, meal breaks, and utilizing stress management practices.

w. House supervisors maintain confidentiality of the staff who work in the house.

x. House supervisors keep tabs on turnover, recruitment success, and employee job satisfaction and use the results to improve management practices.
Appendix A: House supervisor competencies

6. Leading training and staff development activities

a. House supervisors attend in-service training, participate in continuing education, and work with their managers on the development and implementation of a Professional Development and Supervision (PDS) plan.

b. House supervisors coordinate and document staff participation and performance in orientation, in-service training and completion of other alternative self-directed learning and development.

c. House supervisors observe and obtain feedback from staff, residents, and their families regarding direct support staff training needs and desired opportunities.

d. House supervisors share resources and information with staff related to supports, technology, interventions and the ‘hottest issues’ for supporting the residents.

e. House supervisors coordinate the orientation of new staff through a variety of formal and informal instructional and learning activities and answer any questions they may have.

f. House supervisors ensure that required training is provided to staff regarding the needs of residents and in response to rules and regulations (for example, cultural issues, use of glucometer, rights, emergency procedures).

g. House supervisors support staff in learning how to use a computer.

h. House supervisors identify competent individuals from within the staff team to provide resources, coaching, and opportunities for direct support staff.
Appendix A: House supervisor competencies

7. Promoting public relations

a. House supervisors provide informal education to community members regarding people with intellectual disabilities (for example, rights, responsibilities, dispelling myths).

b. House supervisors point community members in the right direction to learn more about the Department of Human Services and the people who receive services.

c. House supervisors accept and mentor students on educational placements at the house.

d. House supervisors collaborate and network with other service providers within the community.

e. House supervisors communicate with and maintain relationships with community vendors (for example, Telstra, Foxtel, gardening services), landlords, and related entities.

f. House supervisors contribute to the development of Departmental promotional materials (for example, newsletters, brochures, and videos).
Appendix A: House supervisor competencies

8.  Maintaining homes, vehicles, and property

a.  House supervisors schedule, monitor, and arrange for (or complete) household maintenance tasks (including vehicle maintenance) in accordance with routine schedules (for example, checklists) and in response to emergency needs.

b.  House supervisors consult with maintenance personnel as needed regarding maintenance issues and get quotes from outside contractors when necessary.

c.  House supervisors arrange payment for needed maintenance when necessary (for example, sign-off completed jobs, get approval from his or her manager).

d.  House supervisors maintain a safe environment and coordinate services or perform duties as needed to ensure safety (such as adequate lighting).

e.  House supervisors ensure basic routine household maintenance tasks are completed (for example, lawn care, changing light bulbs, water plants, vehicle servicing).

f.  House supervisors identify maintenance responsibilities that can be delegated to staff and provide staff with the necessary instructions and resources to complete the tasks.
9. **Protecting health and safety**

a. House supervisors identify and monitor safety issues within the physical environment (through DINMAs, manual handling risk assessments, occupational assault risk assessments).

b. House supervisors ensure that infection control procedures are followed in accordance with policy and procedures.

c. House supervisors monitor residents for health-related concerns and respond by reporting issues to health professionals and documenting as needed.

d. House supervisors ensure that residents receive routine medical, therapeutic, and dental care; and coordinate transportation and staffing or take individuals on related appointments.

e. House supervisors complete restrictive intervention (seclusion, chemical and mechanical restraint) monitoring review forms as indicated.

f. House supervisors support residents to locate health, dental and therapeutic services in local communities.

g. House supervisors obtain doctor’s orders, document orders as needed and follow up with direct support staff.

h. House supervisors ensure that doctors document new medications on the treatment sheet and that these are recorded in the house in accordance with policy and procedures.

i. House supervisors administer, or ensure that direct support staff administer medications and treatments as prescribed and in accordance with the Department’s policies and procedures.

j. House supervisors monitor for medication errors, report and review as indicated with staff.

k. House supervisors ensure medical supplies are ordered (for example, medications, assistive devices, incontinence aids), interact with pharmacies, and arrange for medications to be picked up or delivered as needed.

l. House supervisors ensure direct care staff receive training to administer first aid and arrange for emergency medical appointments as needed.

m. House supervisors ensure fire and emergency drills are scheduled, completed, and documented as required by the Department’s policies and procedures.

n. House supervisors support residents who are ill by monitoring signs and symptoms, implementing treatments and providing reassurance and nurturing.

o. House supervisors follow policy and procedures in obtaining consent for medical interventions, procedures and medications from the ‘person responsible’ under the *Guardian and Administration Act*.

p. House supervisors involve residents in their health care plans by educating and offering choice to residents regarding treatment options (where possible).
Appendix A: House supervisor competencies

q. House supervisors ensure that residents (where possible) and their family members understand suggested medical interventions, procedure, or medications.

r. House supervisors discuss and review menus with the residents and the direct support staff (seeking advice from dieticians if necessary, special diets), ensuring that adequate substitutions are available to support the desires and needs of all residents.
10. Managing financial activities

a. House supervisors manage the Client Expenditure Recording System (CERS) in accordance with policy and procedures (reconcile monthly ledgers against bank statements, respond to financial audits).

b. House supervisors complete bank transactions, or support direct support staff in making bank transactions for the house and liaise with financial administrators regarding residents’ expenditures and purchases.

c. House supervisors prepare and review budget and financial plans in consultation with the resident and their administrator and in accordance with the housekeeping budget

d. House supervisors budget, manage, monitor, and replenish housekeeping and residents’ accounts.

e. House supervisors monitor, approve, and arrange for payment of some household bills.

f. In conjunction with financial administrators house supervisors ensure residents’ bills are paid in a timely manner.

g. House supervisors, in conjunction with their manager, complete and approve expense reimbursement requests made by staff.

h. House supervisors ensure that Government benefits, for which others (such as the State trustees) are not responsible, are current for residents (as with the Continence Aids Assistance Scheme).

i. House supervisors complete the Department’s asset inventories.
11. Rostering and payroll

a. House supervisors assist in developing staff rosters within budgetary limitations, under union or Departmental policies and rules, and in response to resident needs.

b. House supervisors solicit and approve staff time sheets (including monitoring staff vacancies, variations from agreed roster and completing the roster vacancies pro forma).

c. House supervisors plan recreational leave (for example, around holiday periods such as Christmas and New Year) and approve staff leave (for example, recreational, sick, personal) in accordance with policy and procedures.

d. House supervisors secure staff to fill-in when necessary due to staff illness, resignation, holidays or vacant lines.
Appendix A: House supervisor competencies

12. Coordinating weekday daytime supports

a. House supervisors monitor residents’ involvement in external activities (such as day programs, paid employment, retirement activities) to ensure that a schedule is created that is based on their individual preferences and needs.

b. House supervisors create a schedule, or assist direct support personnel in this process, which is likely to include in-house and external activities, for residents who are ‘at home’ on weekdays (through retirement, part-time day programs, choice), that is based on their individual preferences and needs.
Appendix A: House supervisor competencies

13. Coordinating policies, procedures and rule compliance

a. House supervisors follow through on reporting procedures as required by the Department's policy and Victorian State law when there is an incident or allegation of physical and/or sexual assault.

b. House supervisors have and utilise current information and knowledge regarding all State rules and regulations, and Departmental policies and procedures (and know where to access this information).

c. House supervisors examine Departmental policies and procedures with their managers and in response to internal and external reviews (for example, Community Visitor reports) and resident needs.

d. House supervisors participate in and respond to issues identified in internal and external reviews, audits, and quality assurance monitoring activities.

e. House supervisors ensure the input of residents and their families in the development of 'in-house' and Departmental policies and procedures as well as Federal and State rules and laws.
14. **Office work**

a. House supervisors answer the telephone and return phone calls promptly when messages are left.

b. House supervisors monitor and respond promptly to messages on answering machines and voice mail.

c. House supervisors read and respond promptly to mail and email.

d. House supervisors write letters, memos and reports concisely using appropriate grammar, spelling, and formats.

e. House supervisors use the computer for accessing resources, word processing, database management, and creation of spreadsheets.

f. House supervisors effectively complete various office tasks (for example, copying, filing, typing, and maintaining a clean and tidy office).
# Appendix B: Completed timelog example

**Day:** Monday  
**Date:** 12/02/07  
**Rostered shift:** 07.00 – 16.30

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>What I did in detail. The duration of each happening.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 07.00 – 07.30 | 7.00 – 7.15 Handover with night staff. Organised day with day staff.  
                        7.15 – 7.30 Help clients to make beds, clean rooms.                                                                                              |
| 07.30 – 08.00 | 7.30 – 7.45 Assist with dressing client.  
                        7.45 – 8.00 Assist clients with breakfast.                                                                                                     |
| 08.00 – 08.30 | 8.00 – 8.15 Assist clients with grooming, brushing teeth, etc.  
                        8.15 – 8.30 Bus run – assist clients onto bus.                                                                                                 |
| 08.30 – 09.00 | Bus run – dropped clients off at ATSS.                                                                                                                                                                |
| 09.00 – 09.30 | Bus run – dropped clients off at ATSS.  
                        Got petrol 8 minutes.                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 09.30 – 10.00 | Went to chemist organise incontinence pads.  
                        Fill out log bus book.                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 10.00 – 10.30 | 10.00 – 10.15 Coffee break.  
                        10.15 – 10.30 Open computer check e-mails.                                                                                                     |
| 10.30 – 11.00 | 10.30 – 10.45 Tried to fill vacant shift.  
                        10.45 -                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 11.00 – 11.30 | 11.10 Discussion via phone with staff member regarding stress leave. Quick e-mail.  
                        11.10 – 11.30 Looked at roster. Delegated staff to replace shift.                                                                                                                                   |
| 11.30 – 12.00 | 11.30 – 12.00 Completed CERS. Wrote in communication book.  
                        Wrote e-mail.                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 12.00 – 12.30 | Supervision with staff.                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 12.30 – 13.00 | Supervision with staff.                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 13.00 – 13.30 | Lunch.                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 13.30 – 14.00 | Opened snail mail and attended to mail.  
                        Attended to e-mails.                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 14.00 – 14.30 | Arrange appointments. 20 minutes.  
                        Answered phone calls. 30 minutes ↓                                                                                                                                                               |
| 14.30 – 15.00 | Organised dental appointments. 10 minutes.                                                                                                                                                           |
| 15.00 – 15.30 | Phone call from other CRU asking me if we could drop off clients to their CRU. 5 minutes.  
                        Clients arrived home from programs, greet them. 25 minutes.                                                                                                                                     |
| 15.30 – 16.00 | Drive the bus and drop other clients to their CRU.                                                                                                                                                   |
| 16.00 – 16.30 | 4.10 arrive back at CRU.  
                        Close computer, tidy desk, write notes in communication book.  
                        Spend time with clients. 10 minutes. Home.                                                                                                                                                    |
Appendix C: Compare and contrast: The house supervisor competencies and the tasks and functions document.

There are a number of ways that a job can be defined. We have defined what is expected of a house supervisor in a certain way and in an earlier paper we drew attention to other sources that could be looked to for guidance, specifically the Certificate IV in Frontline Management (Seek Learning Australia, 2006), the Advanced Diploma of Disability Work and Diploma of Community Services Management (Northern Metropolitan Institute of TAFE, 2006) and the National Occupational Standards for the position of Registered Manager (Adults) in the United Kingdom (Skills for Care, 2006).

In Chapter 4 we stated that during the course of the research we were given another document that has attempted to define the house supervisor’s job, a document entitled House Supervisor Tasks and Functions (Victorian Department of Human Services, n.d.-a). Specific details about how the House Supervisor Tasks and Functions document was produced are not given, but it does state that, ‘Each task is linked to a relevant competency from the Advanced Diploma in Disability Work’ (p.1). In some ways this is immediately problematic given that the minimum qualification for the house supervisor position is the Certificate IV in Community Services. A manager said,

The house supervisors are not being measured against the Advanced Diploma, they’re being measured against the Certificate Four competencies. However, the Advanced Diploma is there as something to progress towards. The context of the Advanced Diploma is much more managerial and takes away from the direct support, but that’s about going to the next step. The Cert Four is still the basis of the house supervisor role at this point in time. (M/21/I)

The Northern Metropolitan Institute of TAFE lists 20 compulsory units and 4 elective units that comprise the Advanced Diploma. There are 8 units on this list that do not appear in the Department’s document. We are not sure why this is. It could be that the Department has obtained the curriculum from another institution. Given the current emphasis that the Department is putting on leadership at the house supervisor level it is worth noting that one of the missing units is entitled, ‘Lead and develop others’.

The Department has taken the ‘competency’ statements from the Diploma and added to it a separate document listing the tasks and functions of ‘direct support
tasks’, making a distinction between the ‘house supervisor’ and ‘direct support’ elements of the job. The Department has arranged the competencies into seven key focus areas. The supervisor element lists 86 tasks under 22 competencies. The direct support element lists 68 tasks under 17 competencies. Table 12 summarises the organisation of the two documents to allow a comparison to be made.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 12</th>
<th>A comparison of the structure of the house supervisor competencies and the supervisor tasks and functions documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>House supervisor competencies</strong> <em>(Appendix A)</em></td>
<td><strong>House Supervisor Tasks and Functions</strong> <em>(Victorian Department of Human Services, n.d.-a)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>14 competency areas</strong></td>
<td><strong>7 key focus areas</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>141 competencies</strong></td>
<td><strong>39 competencies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>154 tasks</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The house supervisor element lists:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 key focus areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22 competencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>86 tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The direct support element lists:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 key focus areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17 competencies (organised in 12 ‘domains’ as some competencies are clustered together).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>68 tasks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Very broadly the two tools are similar in terms of the total number of competency statements (141) and tasks (154). However, there are significant differences.

One of the strengths of the house supervisor competencies is that it is based on published research that was specifically conducted to identify frontline supervisors’ competencies. As was stated in Chapter 2, the original research used a relatively large sample. We have made numerous insertions, deletions, and language changes to validate the document for Departmental settings, using a further 21 respondents, as well as integrating this research into the broader findings from the Making life good in the community project. Our own experience of curriculum development within educational settings is that it is less rigorous than a job analysis. The curriculum for the Advanced Diploma is more likely to have been put together by a small number of ‘experts’ in the field.
A further advantage of the competency document is that it is much more streamlined. One quality of good theory is ‘Parsimony’ - that is, it should be simple and economical. Although the competency document is not a theory, the principle of parsimony is usefully applicable. The competency document has gone through a greater process of simplification and produced something that is more elegant, in other words, more parsimonious than the Department’s framework. One manager told us:

*I found the competency folder extremely hard to comprehend and understand. A lot of us did. A few of us sat together and went, ‘Why don’t we just do simple wording in things? Why do we make them so difficult that people can’t really comprehend what you’re trying to ask of them?’* (M/20/I)

The Department’s framework reads as a work in progress that would benefit from more revision and streamlining. For example, the direct support worker task, ‘Participate in team meetings’ is implicit in the supervisor task, ‘Conduct regular staff meetings’.

Although there is some repetition in both frameworks, there is more in the Department’s tool. For example, these four tasks appear under different competency statements:

- Review Individual Program Plans
- Manage monitor and review Individual Program Plan implementation
- Review Individual Program Plans, quality plans at house meetings and plan new directions as required
- Review monthly client report.

The mention of Individual Program Plans also highlights the constant need to revise and update documents, given the move to Person Centred Plans.

The supervisor competency document has 16 direct support competencies, whereas the *Supervisor Tasks and Functions* document lists 68 direct support tasks and functions. Removing these direct support elements from the total number of competencies and tasks and functions leaves 128 to 86 statements respectively. Although house supervisors must be competent in direct support, the competency document more correctly emphasises the management element of the house supervisor’s job.

We believe the Department and house supervisors need a document that clearly defines the job. It is our view that the competency document is the better document.
Appendix D: Transition and behaviour management plans

There are two other topics that emerged from the data as being interesting and important. They did not fit very easily into the main body of the report so we have relegated them to the appendices. The first, ‘Transition’, is likely to be a short-term issue as it is directly related to the closure of Kew Residential Services. It is however, an issue that is currently very real in some group homes. The second is likely to be more enduring as it relates to the support of residents with challenging behaviour.

Transition: Relocating staff from institutional to community-based supported accommodation

In its original conceptualisation, Making life good in the community was a research project that was closely related to the redevelopment of Kew Residential Services. It was hoped that research findings from small projects in new group homes would be transferable to other supported accommodation settings. The evolutionary nature of Making life good in the community has resulted in this more general piece of work, which has transcended its specific beginnings. House supervisors did however discuss one issue that has its roots in Australia’s oldest and largest institutional setting — issues related to the relocation of staff from a ‘hospital’ environment to community-based services.

Our key focus here is on the issues faced by house supervisors in managing direct support staff who have moved from Kew Residential Services. We would imagine that there are similar transition issues for some Kew managers (such as Deputy Unit Managers) who have moved to house supervisor position.

There is a view that direct support staff in institutional settings are prone to become ‘institutionalised’ in a similar process to people with intellectual disabilities, which is implicit in this house supervisor’s comment.

There’s an old saying in Kew, ‘People with any get up and go, do that, they get up and go’. So I knew that the people who put their hands up first to leave, would be volunteers, not conscripts. They’re not being forced out of a job they like doing. These are people who want to move out, who want to try new things, so therefore I knew that I’d get a better group of staff than if I waited ‘til the last group of people to move out, ‘cos then you’ve got the conscripts, not the volunteers. So that’s part of my rationale for leaving ASAP. (HS/4/I)

Although Allen, Pahl and Quine (1990) suggested that this view may have some validity, they also wrote:

We are aware that there is a certain absurdity in the idea that whilst residents can be discharged from an institution and de-institutionalised for
**Appendix D: Transition and behaviour management plans**

Life in the community, their former professional caretakers may be seen as unsuitable employees because they are ‘too institutionalised’. (p.40)

To aid transition the opening of each house was preceded by a two week block of training, known as ‘transition training’, (see Clement et al., 2007). This was a form of orientation to the new role. Transition training was never expected to fully deliver the knowledge, skills and abilities that direct support staff would need in their new workplace.

When I first opened [the group home], empowering the Kew staff was such a very hard thing to do at times. The day after we opened I’m in the office, on non-contact hours, and a staff member came in and said, ‘It’s quarter past twelve’. ‘Yes’. ‘Well, do we get their lunch now?’ I said, ‘It’s your decision, you make that decision’. ‘But we don’t make that decision’. I said, ‘You do now’, and this is how things went along in that house. In the afternoon, a knock on the door. ‘The door’s open. This is your office as well; you don’t have to knock on this door, unless it’s locked’. ‘There’s so-and-so sitting in front of the telly’. I said, ‘Oh right, so?’ ‘Well, will I turn it on?’ They wouldn’t even do that, without having an instruction to do it. When I first asked them to go shopping, they were petrified of doing shopping for the CRU, because they’d never done anything like that. At tea time, ‘Will I cook it like this?’ I said, ‘It’s a recipe, you cook the recipe’. (HS/10/I)

House supervisors suggested that ex-Kew direct support staff could expect an expanded role and be confronted by managers with different styles.

One of the big issues with the staff was that there’s a modus of operation at Kew that was you don’t do anything ‘til the Deputy tells you to do it. You need to able to work independently, and at the same time work in a team. It was getting their heads around the ownership issue, of taking ownership of the house, of skilling them up to do things without having to think, ‘I’ve got to ask permission to do this’, but at the same time giving people a parameter where they will seek advice when necessary. For example, a parent rings up on the phone [and the staff says], ‘Well I’ll let the house supervisor know you rang’, [rather than] dealing with the parent on a more competent level. (HS/4/I)

When we first opened the house the documentation, file noting and the day report book and things like that was a completely foreign experience for my staff, and they’ve come leaps and bounds in doing those sorts of tasks. They had a unit manager to do all that sort of stuff, so in effect what I’ve
Appendix D: Transition and behaviour management plans

been told is that all they had to do was sign off on medication. So it was a real change for them. (HS/8/I)

The experience of this house supervisor mirrors that of the previous respondent, that former Kew employees have learnt new skills in the new settings.

Some [staff] have thrived and some have just brought that Kew mentality. It has been difficult for some to transition from being spoon-fed. All they do is turn up and do the basics, and then go home. Others have pushed themselves beyond the boundaries and are doing things that they never did at Kew, and are doing good things, particularly with clients. (HS/15/I)

The same quotation suggests that other direct support staff are not working in a way that is consistent with their ‘new’ role, which is expanded, underpinned by a ‘new’ service philosophy, subject to greater role ambiguity, requires higher levels of input, and receives more pressure from management (Allen et al., 1990; Rose, 1993). This house supervisor has also had a mixed experience, and alludes to a process of slow change for some staff.

The staff that haven’t come across from Kew are far more open, free with their ideas and more comfortable to speak out, whereas some of the staff that have come across from Kew, they’ve just been so, indoctrinated I suppose, with what they can and can’t do. I’m not sure that the staff were really that well looked after. I think some mentoring or extra assistance there would have helped a lot of staff. I’ve seen a change in the last year. It’s a slow change, much slower change than you would give it credit for, because those ideas and practices have been indoctrinated in people for years. It takes a long time to break some of those things. (HS/19/I)

This house supervisor suggested that the residents found the move easier than the staff members.

I can encourage [staff to be creative and try new ideas] but the culture from my perception has been that it’s been actively discouraged in Kew. So turning that around, especially if someone’s been working in a particular way for 10-odd years, turning that around has proven more difficult than actually transitioning the clients. (HS/8/I)

The ease with which Kew staff both adjust to the new setting and develop their skills is another variable that can place demands and constraints on a house supervisor’s management of the home. In Chapter 7 we drew attention to the skill mix in staff teams. We have observed some houses where the greater proportion of staff worked at Kew and we would not describe them as staff that
have ‘thrived’ in the new setting. Two years after some of these houses have
dropped we are still seeing what we regard as poor practice. Some house
supervisors therefore manage a staff team that are predominantly performing
poorly on the direct support competencies.

Allen et al. (1990) make the point that as the direct support job becomes more
demanding, so the need to support staff will increase. Many of the structural
weaknesses that we have written about in this report have been observed in
these settings. Direct support staff who need a lot of direction, coaching, and
support have been left more or less to their own devices. House supervisors in
such settings find themselves unable to delegate tasks to these direct support
staff and have ended up trying to do all the tasks that other staff are being paid
to do.

**Behaviour management plans**

Two competencies that generated a lot of discussion in the interviews were
related to behaviour management plans. We thought it might be helpful to share
some of the respondents comments, especially as they relate to many of the
principles outlined in the *Disability Act 2006 Restrictive Interventions

The Department defines a behaviour management plan as, ‘A plan that specifies a
range of strategies to be used in managing a person’s behaviour and reduce the
risk of harm associated with the behaviour’ (Victorian Department of Human
Services, 2007b, p.233). Behaviour management plans are developed in relation
to ‘complex’ or ‘challenging behaviour' and could involve the use of ‘restrictive
interventions’. Every house supervisor is expected to know his or her
responsibilities in relation to the use of restrictive interventions and behaviour
management plans, even if not all house supervisors will use them in the group
homes they manage.

Outcomes for people with challenging behaviour may be particularly instructive
about the overall ‘health’ of a service. Mansell et al. (1994) write that,
‘Challenging behaviour represents the ‘test case’ for service competence: the
point at which most services (institutional as well as community-based models)
are weakest and most likely to break down’ (p.82). They suggest that people with
challenging behaviour are especially susceptible to inadequacies in service
organisation and the most likely to be excluded from community services.

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32 The Residential Services Practice Manual refers to complex behaviour. We prefer the longer
standing and more widely used ‘challenging behaviour’ (see Blunden and Allen, 1987 for
example).
Appendix D: Transition and behaviour management plans

We can deal with the first competency quickly, which is in the Providing Direct Support domain. To suggest that, ‘House supervisors implement behaviour management plans, intervene with residents in response to challenging behaviour, and defuse crisis situations as they arise’ is relatively straightforward.

To be an effective house supervisor you have to apply strategies, you have to be there. My very first shift at this house they were having fish-fillets and the fish-fillets came out of the oven on an oven-tray and quick as a wink that oven-tray was taken and the back shatterproof window was smashed in. Just with the repeated force of the ‘smash, smash, smash’. You can imagine this huge commotion. All the staff looked at me as the new house supervisor, ‘What do we do?’ I went, ‘What do you normally do, what’s the normal process?’ They’re floundering round and I said, ‘Okay, the first thing we do is, we don’t turn it into a circus, let’s remove ourselves first. If it’s attention seeking behaviour and we’re not giving it attention it should defuse naturally’. So we hid behind the wall and I said, ‘Okay the second thing is, I want you to go out and offer her a cigarette and we’ll sit down and calmly talk about this. What’s going on? What do you want?’ Their mouths were open, ‘You’re asking a client what they want. What do you mean? We don’t give her a cigarette to start with’. I go, ‘Well, we do now. This is a crisis situation, this is crisis management, and I want to know what’s going on’. Sat her down, had a cigarette, put her into seclusion, went in and said, ‘Why? What do you want?’ And it came out in that first meeting, that first shift, that the most notorious client in the region liked the police coming. She didn’t care about the mace, didn’t care about the handcuffs, because when she got to the police station she was given a cup of tea and a biscuit and a couple of cigarettes. They spoke to her nicely, they joked around with her nicely. If she had a real bad moment she was placed in hospital. She got to smoke as many cigarettes as she wanted, and have dessert. Her whole aim was getting out of her home. Someone had missed that. They’d been containing her for ten years, where it got to the point where she was strangling and stabbing people to get out of her home. Someone neglected to ask, ‘Why are you doing it? Why are you so unhappy?’ It was undone because I understood what she wanted, an effective communication. (HS/5/I)

Some house supervisors with little or no experience of challenging behaviour can end up managing group homes where some of the residents exhibit challenging behaviour. A source of that support for house supervisors is through specialist
teams colloquially known as BIST (Behaviour Intervention Support Team) or ABC (Adult Behaviour Consultancy).

[Implementing behaviour support plans] well that’s a really hard one for me because I have no challenging behaviour training whatsoever. I do it, but as to its quality, I’m not comfortable with that. In effect I’ve written the strategies and they’ve been edited by BIST. I feel when I first came to the house I was given a list of behaviour management strategies that weren’t really effective and I needed to do something straight away. I could not wait for BIST to come in, I needed to help my staff, otherwise we would have had a mutiny, and we would have had some very ill clients. So I had to do something and what I did I thought was right, and then it was ratified by BIST later. We made them up as we went along, keeping in mind least restrictive stuff, and the policies and regulations, and all that sort of stuff. (HS/8/I)

As well as highlighting the importance of having the knowledge to write behaviour management plans, the previous quote also reinforces the key point that house supervisors are at ‘the sharp end’. The house supervisors are the people that direct support staff first look towards for support and guidance (Reynolds, 2003). They are also the people who have to manage the implementation of any behaviour management plan.

BIST can come up with great strategies but if the staff aren’t alongside with it, if they’re not going to back it, it isn’t going to work. BIST aren’t going to be there to make sure it is working, which means it’s not going to work. It’s really hard for a supervisor to work against that kind of mutiny. It’s okay when the supervisor’s there, which means the clients get as confused as all hell. If the supervisor’s there the staff might do it, and if the supervisor’s not there, they ain’t going to do it. How confusing is that? (HS/17/I)

Designing or assisting?
The second competency appears in the Support Planning and Monitoring domain and was finally written as:

House supervisors assist in developing behaviour management plans, and implement and monitor authorised behaviour management plans, which may include the use of restrictive interventions (such as seclusion, chemical and/or mechanical restraint) in accordance with policy and procedures.

As well as being written to reflect the language in the Disability Act 2006 Restrictive Interventions Implementation Guide (Victorian Department of Human
Appendix D: Transition and behaviour management plans

Services, 2007a), there was a significant change to the wording from the original North American competency document, which read, 'Frontline supervisors design [bold added], implement and monitor behaviour support plans, the use of aversive and deprivative procedures (Rule 40) and psychotropic medications’ (Hewitt et al., 1998, p.25).

The key issues that we want to discuss here are the extent to which house supervisors should be expected to design behaviour management plans and the relationship with specialist support services. In creating services for people with challenging behaviour Mansell et al. (1994) discuss the importance of specialised long-term support, which is often provided through specialist expertise.

Given the nature and impact of challenging behaviour, expert help is generally wanted immediately. Much of the time this is not possible.

Quite often when you ring up BIST, you’re at crisis-point. They’ll say, ‘You need to ring up the intake team and dar-dee-dar-dee-dar’. Or you might get an appointment in three weeks’ time, they come in and that client’s perfect. (HS/13/I)

The availability of external help creates the context for how people use and develop behaviour management plans. A consequence of limited resources is that external support is subject to triage so the house supervisor is obliged to develop new strategies in relative isolation.

With BIST, unfortunately there aren’t enough hands for the amount of people that might require them. You always start with the least restrictive alternative anyway, and that can be an informal plan, start off with informal then maybe get it more formalised. BIST usually doesn’t come in unless you’ve tried every single other alternative. For most house supervisors to be able to come up with a simple strategy without the help of BIST, I think they’d be able to do that. It’s just when everything’s not working, all these strategies are failing, and they’re not sure where to go from there, that problems might occur. (HS/18/I)

Other consequences are that inappropriate strategies may remain in place and external workers are compelled to find ways of spreading their expertise around. The danger of this is that expertise can be spread too thinly.

The reality is you might not get a BIST worker for six months, so are you going to continually use these BMSs [behaviour management strategies] that are outdated and the residents are suffering and the staff are suffering? We don’t do anything unless it’s signed off by management, and that’s
where these little short BIST consultations are good. They come out and meet residents, have a look, read through their history and check your BMSs. So that safeguards you. It depends on the behaviour really. At the moment, our resident’s completely up the wall, behaviours we’ve never seen. We don’t even go there, we go straight to BIST. We don’t even attempt to touch that ‘cos it’s unknown to us. (HS/14/I)

The previous house supervisors recognised that there are limits to their competence and boundaries that they should not cross. The implication of setting limits means house supervisors also make judgements that there are some behaviours about which they are competent to address.

The boy I work with now he needs a lot of intervention, but some of the other residents have very minimal behaviours that you could deal with quite easily yourself and bring up your own BMSs. What I did in one house, [the staff] decided to use humour, they found it worked better, which was completely different to the BMS. I got my staff to sit down and tell me, ‘If he does this what would you do? If he does this what would you do?’ All of that feedback. I typed up, I got the staff to proofread it, ‘Yes I agree with that... disagree... disagree’. We came to a team meeting, we discussed it, then I organised a short consultation with BIST where they could proofread my BMSs and give us feedback. ‘Is it appropriate if we say this? Are we being professional? Inappropriate? Etc.’ and then they’d sign it off. Depending on the severity of the behaviours, you could [design] them yourself, but if they’re very complex, then you’re best to get BIST to do it. (HS/14/I)

Unfortunately, good practice begins to be eroded when financial considerations gain a major hold on shaping actual practice (Morgan, 1986) as this manager implied.

I think there’s a lot of emphasis on house supervisors at the moment to be developing these behaviour support plans and there’s not as much emphasis on the BIST team. The BIST team within our region is fairly small, they have a massive workload, there’s not enough BIST workers for the clients that need it. [Developing behaviour support plans is] becoming a huge role for house supervisors. You certainly don’t see that in the training that is provided to them, so they struggle. A lot of the new house supervisors wouldn’t have done challenging behaviour and behaviour management strategies through their training and but are expected to be developing these programs, and strategies, and plans. Really it is not the role of a
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house supervisor. We are [expected] to be implementing them and perhaps gathering information but we’re not really meant to be developing some of these very comprehensive plans that involve chemical restraint and seclusion. I think the role of a house supervisor is slowly increasing into the role of the BIST worker, and that wasn’t the case years ago, [but] that’s certainly been more so in recent years. And I think with the new legislation it’s something that’s getting imparted onto house supervisors, so we meet the new requirements, but I don’t necessarily think that they’re trained to do so. I think that we see that in other areas such as manual handling tools and occupation assault tools. We’re expecting that you’ve got a really good awareness of what [the] issues are and the [preventative] strategies. I don’t think people do. I don’t believe it is a house supervisor role, I think it is clearly a role for the BIST worker. (M/11/I)

It was this manager’s perspective that was crucial in amending the competence from designing to assisting in developing behaviour management plans. Either word could be used but they have different implications for the competencies of house supervisors and the job’s boundaries. Expecting house supervisors to be competent at designing behaviour management plans is indicative of job enrichment, increasing both the responsibility and the level of skill required to do the job. This house supervisor illustrates the breadth and depth of skills required to be a competent house supervisor. Certainly Certificate IV in Community Services (Disability), the minimum qualification required to be a house supervisor, does not equip house supervisors with the knowledge and understanding to undertake a comprehensive assessment and then write a behaviour management plan.

When you’re looking at behaviour management you’re looking at the psychologist, that’s what they’re trained in, that’s what they’re skilled in. I think that this comes back to the thing that the house supervisor is just expected to be able to manage and maintain all the tasks of almost all the health professionals out there, developing a behaviour management strategy, developing a health-care plan, developing this, developing that. (HS/15/I)

This manager highlights her monitoring role but also believes that expecting house supervisors to be competent in designing behaviour management plans requires a training investment.

Most of the behaviour strategies that I have been involved with either come through me and normally through BIST. [There are instances] where
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someone will go through BIST and then BIST will say, 'You put something together and we’ll look at it', so if you’re going to do that then [house supervisors] are designing a behaviour management strategy in a sense and BIST are tweaking it. But I don’t think we should be expecting our house supervisors to just go out and design behaviour management strategies on their own, I think it’s too complex. Some people have skills for it and some don’t....I think they need a lot of training in being able to [design behaviour management strategies]. I don’t think they should have to do it until they have the training. It’s a very difficult thing to get right, and there’s a big consequence at the end if it’s wrong. (M/20/I)

The fact that some house supervisors do not have the skills is implicit in this house supervisor’s anecdote.

I went to a meeting the other day, another person is doing some sort of plan on challenging behaviour and wanted supervisors with a knowledge base to contribute to that. I believed they had a knowledge base, but some of them were talking about their BMSs and not having any kind of proactive strategies. We’ve had almost as many proactive strategies, how to stop the behaviour occurring in the first place, besides how to deal with the behaviour should it still occur. That’s what a BMS is about. You don’t just have, ‘When the behaviour happens you throw them in the room and lock the door’. You need to have people with the knowledge base and you need to be able to have BIST put in the time to actually listen to the staff who know the person too. (HS/17/I)

Inter-group relations

As the competency statement reads now there is a greater obligation on the Department of Human Services to resource external long-term specialist support. This more accurately reflects the strong emphasis on external monitoring in the Department’s own guidelines (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2007a). This implies that employees need to be competent at working across boundaries, working with groups and teams, and forging good relationships where joint work is required. The guidelines also state that behaviour management plans need to be developed with the focal person and the people who support them to ensure it is workable (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2007b). Some house supervisors’ experience suggests that the specialist teams haven’t always followed this principle.
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I wouldn’t have a BIST BMS in my house. I design my own. They don’t have the knowledge base that we have. They have the knowledge base of behaviours in general; they don’t have the knowledge base of that particular person and what actually works for that person. It’s not only that you’re working with that person with those behaviours; you’re working with that particular staff team. You can only do what you can with that staff team too. You can have the ideal of what you’d like to do. You need to be able to work with what you’ve got. With John at East Park Parade we developed a new strategy. We found a better strategy that worked for him was the word ‘No’, we just were saying ‘No’. Even if it was going to happen, it was still ‘No’. BIST were horrified when I told them that. They were, ‘What, you’re denying him doing stuff? You’re not telling him the truth?’ We used to tell him the truth, he just couldn’t accept the answer. We worked out that he has no impulse control, which means he can’t wait for anything. So everything has to be ‘No’, and then behind the scenes you plan for everything, you organise everything in the background. (HS/17/I)

BIST mean well and they’ve got some good ideas. This is more personal than professional, I think BIST sometimes think that they’re right and we’re wrong. Communication can be a huge problem with BIST teams. I’ve worked with them in this house and I’ve worked with them in other houses. They only come in for an hour or a two hour visit. They’ll gather their information and then they’ll go away, then they come in and observe. They may do that for an hour every third day for a week. They’re not going to really get what’s going on, unless you’re involved and you’re hands-on. They can’t come in and do a shift for a month, to really get the feel, so they’re governed by what staff tell them. They mean well but I find them one of the most frustrating services to work with. They just won’t take on board that this will not work. It’s nothing against the BIST worker and their ideas, but, ‘We’ve done it, it doesn’t work. We need help somewhere else, can you come up with something else?’….It’s not wholly BIST’s fault, because they’ve got to come in, create a miracle in a very small timeframe and move on and do the next one. Realistically with some behaviour you just can’t do that. It took them thirty, forty years to create the behaviours; you’re not going to fix it in a month….They’ll say, ‘We’re here to support you and give you ideas and yada-yada-yada’ and I don’t doubt that. It’s like I said before, when they don’t work or they’re not successful, they have a tendency to feel that it’s the staff who have made them not work. And sometimes that is quite probably the case, but that’s not always the case.
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*Their ideas and their strategies aren’t necessarily always right for the client.*
(HS/19/I)

**Behaviour management plans: A summary and a concern**

This discussion of behaviour management plans is a good example of how house supervisors need the knowledge and understanding that underpins the competency statements. Raising the key discussion points about: who is designing behaviour management plans; specific training for house supervisors; and the importance of working across boundaries seems timely given the recent publication of the *Restrictive Interventions Implementation Guide* (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2007a).

The focus of the newly established Office of the Senior Practitioner is to monitor the quality of life and safeguard the rights of people with intellectual disabilities subject to restrictive interventions and compulsory treatment orders (Chan, 2007). In one sense residents subject to restrictive interventions and compulsory treatment orders therefore have ‘advocates’ looking out for them. Our own experience suggests that the lives of most people with intellectual disabilities are subject to various forms of control and that minor restrictions or efforts to change behaviour are outside the range of vision of the Office’s scrutineers. We have made the point that many interactions take place between individual workers and ‘silent’ clients in unobserved settings. This applies to the majority of people with intellectual disabilities, not merely those subject to restrictive interventions. During the course of the research we have come across staff efforts to get people to dress in certain ways, to lose weight, to get used to crowded public spaces, and so on. One house supervisor said:

> *We don’t have to get in BIST if it’s not a complex behaviour, we don’t need BIST approval for it. I can just go off on my own bat, and do a behaviour support plan, if someone’s oppositional*\(^{33}\). (HS/8/I)

Many of these interventions rely on ‘behavioural’ principles that may be poorly understood. This possibly suggests a broader training need around ‘behaviour management’, which should include content related to the ‘ethics of behaviour management’ — not simply training that is targeted to house supervisors who support residents with challenging behaviour. External monitoring can only safeguard the wellbeing of group home residents to a degree. Rather than rely on external checks the point we have made throughout the report is that high quality services are more likely if they are managed well from the inside.

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\(^{33}\) *Characterized by, relating to or of the nature of opposition (in various senses), hostile, or confrontational.* (OED Online, 1989)
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