

What does good culture look like as a Supported Independent Living (SIL) service provider?

How can an organisation begin to build a culture that will deliver better quality of life outcomes for people who access SIL support?



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Introduction

Late last year, Tendable hosted a webinar to investigate the importance of culture within Supported Independent Living (SIL) environments, and how disability service providers can develop a culture that produces better quality of life outcomes for those who access SIL support.

Over the hour, panellists discussed a broad range of topics, including:

1. The basics of what culture is
2. How an organisation's culture impacts the lives of service users
3. The systems and structures required to embed and monitor culture
4. Shared learnings from their own practice and research

This first article, inspired by the webinar, starts at the beginning. What is culture?

What does good culture look like as a SIL service provider? And how can an organisation begin to build a culture that will deliver better quality of life outcomes for people who access SIL support?



Access the recording of the SIL Webinar

You can access the webinar by clicking the button below:

[Click to watch the
SIL webinar](#)

If you are reading a printed version, type in this url:

[**https://www.tendable.com/blog/improving-supported-independent-living**](https://www.tendable.com/blog/improving-supported-independent-living)

What is ‘culture’?

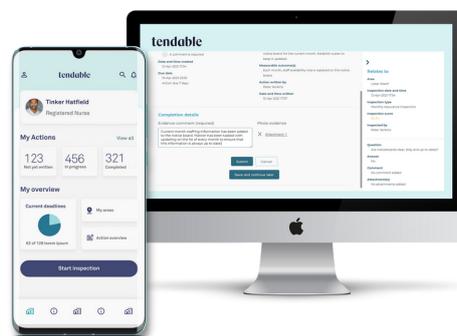
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The definition of culture that I like to use is, staff members shared values, beliefs, norms and patterns of behaviour; that influence how they think, feel and act. ”

Dr Lincoln Humphreys

Given culture is something regularly discussed but often misunderstood, the webinar started with Dr Lincoln Humphreys, a lecturer and researcher at the Living with Disability Research Centre at La Trobe University, providing a practical definition of culture for organisations. Dr Humphreys pointed out that while there are many interpretations of culture, all versions contain a few key elements:

- 1. Any culture, good or bad, is a shared set of beliefs, values, norms and patterns of behaviour**
- 2. These shared beliefs, values, norms and patterns of behaviour influence how staff think and act**
- 3. Culture can vary across the same organisation – for example, in the SIL sector, cultures can vary from home to home; and within a disability service provider by service type, team, department and at different organisation levels**
- 4. Culture can enable and restrain people in what they do with a direct impact on the quality of services they deliver**



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What does a culture look like that supports quality of life?



“

I think what is most important is knowing the culture in the services has a direct impact on the quality of life of the people they support.

”

Dr Lincoln Humphreys

There was a clear consensus among panel members, that the culture of an organisation has a significant influence on the quality of life of the people being supported. They identified five features of good culture at an accommodation level, that ensure better outcomes for those being supported.

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Effective team leadership

Front line leaders work to embed a culture across the team that focusses on quality-of-life outcomes. Team leaders explain and regularly communicate the shared values, beliefs, norms and behaviours that the organisation expects.

Staff support the well-being and quality of life of people in accommodation

The priorities and activities of the team on a day-to-day basis focus on supporting the well-being and quality of life of residents

Shared ways of working

There is a shared understanding of how to best support the well-being and quality of life of the people being supported. The organisation has a standard of how to best provide support. All team members know how to meet this expectation.

Good relationships between senior managers and the staff

Management and frontline leaders know what is happening in the service on a day-to-day basis. Staff feel comfortable to go to their manager to discuss issues, get help, and ask for advice.

Alignment of values and a common focus

There is consistency across levels of the organisation so that everyone is working to support the well-being and quality of life of residents, regardless of their role within the organisation.

Develop a good culture in your organisation

“ Good culture doesn't happen by accident. It's real, intentional. ”

Naomi McCorkell, COO Disability, Ability Options

The panelists agreed, developing a good culture within an organisation involved commitment, hard work and time. The group provided guidance for organisations to begin developing a culture that will provide improved quality of life outcomes for those who access SIL support.

The key steps in the process were

Observe

Visit sites to understand what is happening on the frontline. Watch support workers interact with residents and their families. By observing the team, leaders can identify the specific challenges faced by support workers, and the style and level of support provided to service users. Authenticate this with tools that provide real-time data and an objective measure of what is happening, especially when management cannot be present. An organisation must understand its starting point, before deciding what aspects of their culture they want to keep and those they want to change.

Make frontline team culture the priority

It is the foundation of improved and positive outcomes for those being supported. SIL supports happen in someone's home environment. This means the culture of an organisation can have significant and immediate impact on the life of those who access SIL services.

Have consistent standards

Make it easy for support workers to understand what good quality support is and what is expected of them by the organisation. Use templates and check lists for the team to record how they provide support. Share and learn from the findings, especially around good practice.

Communicate & refine

Communicate and discuss the culture regularly among the organisation, not just the frontline. Ensure everyone understands the role they play in improving the quality-of-life outcomes for those the organisation supports, from the board down. This engages the whole team in the quality agenda, regardless of their role. Refine expectations based on measurable outcomes and feedback.

Look to established models

Draw inspiration from proven cultural leadership models, such as the Five Behaviours model, from Patrick Lencioni's 'The Five Dysfunctions of a Team'. During the webinar, Daniel Carter discussed how the Allevia leadership team had used this model to develop a clear understanding of good culture for their organisation.

“

You know the job's never done and even when you get close that's when you need to go back and start again and have another look.

”

Daniel Carter, COO Allevia

Links to research

The organisational culture of a disability service provider has direct impact of the quality of life of those who access their services. It determines the style of support provided, the attitudes and actions of those within an organisation, including frontline support workers.

This is especially important in SIL settings, as support workers operate in the homes of those they support. By embedding a culture that focuses on quality-of-life outcomes for those being supported, disability service organisations can have a positive impact on those they support.

If you would like to know more about Dr Lincoln Humphreys research, please visit the La Trobe website. Lincoln has kindly allowed us to provide the links below:



Dr Lincoln Humphreys

Living with Disability Research Centre, La Trobe University

- [Development and psychometric evaluation of the Group Home Culture Scale](#)
- [Dimensions of group home culture as predictors of quality of life outcomes](#)
- Patterns of group home culture in organisations supporting people with intellectual disabilities: A cross-sectional study

Bios for the panel



Dr Lincoln Humphreys

Living with Disability Research Centre, La Trobe University

Dr Lincoln Humphreys is a lecturer and researcher at the Living with Disability Research Centre at La Trobe University. His PhD examined organisational culture in group homes for people with intellectual disabilities. Lincoln has developed the Group Home Culture Scale to measure staff perceptions of culture in group homes.



Naomi McCorkell

COO Ability Options

A seasoned professional with over 20 years' experience working within community services, disability, government and non-government; holding senior executive, board and advisory roles for numerous organisations. Naomi's experience combined with a demonstrated capacity to build and maintain effective community partnerships, has enabled her to form a well-earned reputation for exceeding expectations, delivering results and achieving value added services across multiple organisations.



Daniel Carter

COO Allevia

Daniel has been involved in the not-for-profit sector for twenty years. For much of his career, Daniel has specialised in developing, implementing and improving systems within disability service providers, including in the areas of service quality, safety and worker development. Having lead cultural change in organisations with 200 staff, up to those with over 1000, Daniel understand the challenges of influencing a diverse organisation with a mobile workforce.



Karen Stace

NDS

Karen is the Senior Manager of State and Territory Operations for National Disability Services. Karen has been active in supporting the disability sector to understand the implications and operating environment bought about by the NDIS. With a long standing interest in quality and safeguarding Karen works with providers to assist them with implementing the NDIS Practice Standards.

About Tendable

Tendable is a health-tech company that brings people together to better understand and improve quality. Our products lead a transformation in the culture of quality across all care and clinical environments. At its core, Tendable is a quality inspection app and web platform for health and care professionals. Making quality inspections easier and more effective by bringing the mobile user experience we all know, to the frontlines of care. Using Tendable reduces the time taken to complete an inspection by up to 60%, freeing up time to care for the frontline teams. The data collected enables managers to easily identify issues or risks, and systems supports issue resolution. For senior leaders and the board, Tendable gives instant access to critical quality data and with our analytics systems helps generate insights to make better informed decisions.

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