

Caring: The Policies and Practices of Care in a Residential Home.

Summary: Recent policies state that services for people with learning difficulties should emphasise clients' abilities and promote their rights, independence and inclusion. This raises the question of how those working in services can comply with government policy, whilst also fulfilling their other duties of managing clients' dependencies and protecting them from risk. This thesis explores the work of support workers and their managers in a residential home specialising in the care of adults with Prader-Willi syndrome (PWS) and in particular, how they fulfilled their sometimes conflicting responsibilities. PWS is a genetic disorder that is associated with learning difficulties and certain behaviours that are understood to be genetically determined, including a tendency to over-eat and 'challenging' behaviours, such as violent outbursts. The study comprised of ten months of observation, interviews and a review of the home's policies. Four themes are explored in detail: 1) Responsible residents: surprisingly, care staff mostly treated residents as being responsible for their behaviours, including those understood to be genetically determined. Occasionally however, care staff treated residents as not responsible for their conduct. These contradicting interpretations allowed care staff to perform different tasks. 2) Promoting residents' independence whilst protecting them from risk: by encouraging self-regulation and by using their knowledge of both PWS and individual residents, care staff attempted to balance the degree of independence with the level of support provided. 3) Inclusion and exclusion: care staff actively promoted residents' social inclusion through employment and education. Instead of being included in the mainstream however, residents were included in alternative spheres of work and education. 4) Affection and professionalism: care staff were seen to be affectionate towards residents however, they also managed their feelings and presented themselves as professionals. Rather than hindering care staff, the ability to be both affectionate and professional facilitated them in doing practical tasks and sustaining care relationships. This thesis concludes that care staff's knowledge of PWS, the promotion of residents' rights and the formation of positive care relationships between care staff and residents are essential to the provision of good care. Attention is drawn however, to our current failure to fully acknowledge, support and reward care relationships and their role in services.