

Cultivating Community:

Neighborhood Dynamics in Communities with Group Homes for the Developmentally Disabled

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Executive Summary

Project Overview

New England Residential Services (NERS) runs 11 group homes for the developmentally disabled across central Connecticut. The agency asked five students in Wesleyan University's Community Research Seminar to investigate how the agency can most effectively neutralize opposition to group homes as they expand into new communities. They also wanted to learn how to improve relations in neighborhoods where existing group homes are located. The Wesleyan research team conducted interviews with neighbors and staff members of six group homes to gather relevant information. Once all of the interviews were completed, the researchers looked over the interviews and found common themes that emerged throughout the communities.

Findings

Most neighbors did not have a problem with the group home in their community. Their concerns stemmed from not having sufficient information about the group home. Specifically, neighbors wanted to know the nature of the residents' disabilities and who they could contact in case of any problems. Many neighbors were also bothered by staff conduct. Numerous neighbors complained that staff members treated group home sites as places of employment instead of as homes in residential communities. Additionally, a pattern of increased community isolationism emerged. According to these findings, a good neighbor is defined as someone who does not cause any problems in the area and stays out of other people's business.

Recommendations

We offer four proposals that could help NERS limit opposition to group homes:

- NERS could reconsider its practice of not notifying the community before moving into a neighborhood. Informing residents that the group home is specifically for the developmentally disabled would limit opposition since most neighbors did not express concern over group homes for this segment of the population. Notification would also satisfy neighbors' desire for NERS contact information.
- Enhance staff training for NERS employees working in group homes. This training could emphasize the importance of treating the group home as a place of residence and not a site of employment.
- Make every effort to limit staff turnover at group homes. This would provide a sense of community cohesion and continuity for neighbors, allowing a greater rapport to develop between neighbors and staff members.
- NERS could increase the frequency of community-building activities that are within the character of the neighborhood. These events could include open houses and neighborhood tag sales.

INTRODUCTION

New England Residential Services (NERS), established in 1987, is a nonprofit organization that currently operates eleven group homes for the developmentally disabled in central Connecticut. The Wesleyan research team, comprised of five students in Wesleyan University's Community Research Seminar, was asked by NERS to investigate the relations of these group homes with neighbors in the communities in which the homes are located. We completed interviews with neighbors of the group homes and with staff and managers of the homes.

The chief objectives of the research included identifying sources of resistance to NERS group homes and investigating how these oppositional stances can be neutralized, alleviated, or combated both in the present and the future. The concern that isolationism within communities across the United States is increasing was a driving force behind the investigation, and inspired NERS' desire to understand how this phenomenon affects relations between group homes and their neighbors. The main intention for the research was to investigate how neighbors can feel positively about the presence of the group home in their community, so that, in turn, the residents of the group homes may be known, accepted, and valued in their respective neighborhoods.

We found that neighbors' feelings toward the group home in their community are affected by a number of factors, including a lack of notification, insufficient information and communication, and a general increase in community isolationism. These themes manifest themselves in broad complaints regarding the presence of the home as well as more specific feedback surrounding staff behavior. These factors are explained in detail in this report and are complemented with a series of recommendations which

suggest possible ways to establish and improve relations between group homes for the developmentally disabled and their neighbors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The establishment of group homes for people with disabilities is a relatively recent phenomenon in the United States. A wave of deinstitutionalization of people with various types of disabilities, largely mental and developmental, began in the late 1960s. The process of deinstitutionalization has contributed to the need for new housing facilities (Borinstein 1992). The establishment of group homes emerged as a way to meet the needs of people being discharged from institutions (Piat 1999). As group homes started appearing in communities across the United States, so did opposition to these homes. Opposition is strongest from neighbors who live closest to the group homes and exhibits the characteristics of the “Not In My Backyard,” or “NIMBY” phenomenon (Dear 1992). NIMBY refers to the opposition to facilities and projects in one's neighborhood.

Most of the studies on group homes focus their attention on better understanding the nuances of the NIMBY phenomenon. Numerous studies investigate whether individuals are supportive of the *concept* of group homes for the mentally and developmentally disabled. According to Borinstein, most Americans agree with the establishment of group homes for people with special needs. However, support for group homes of any type is affected by the general attitudes people harbor towards the establishment of facilities in residential areas and a “hierarchy” of acceptable types of group homes (Borinstein 1992; Dear 1992).

Borinstein's "hierarchy of acceptability" is based on survey data addressing the different kinds of facilities most Americans would find acceptable in their neighborhoods. Facilities that ostensibly all members of the community could benefit

from, such as schools and hospitals, are the most acceptable and form the first tier of this hierarchy. Group homes for the mentally ill and developmentally disabled compose the second tier. Facilities for "unwanted" and/or "dangerous" populations, such as prisons, are at the bottom of this hierarchy.

Borinstein's study focuses on the attitudes that Americans have towards people with mental illness and group homes for the mentally ill, but it also provides useful data on the acceptability of group homes for the developmentally disabled. Most Americans conceptualize those with mental illnesses and those with developmental disabilities differently. In these perceptions, mental illness is linked to drug use, stress, and chemical imbalances, while developmental disabilities are seen as conditions that people are born with. Despite these conceptual differences, the data provided by Borinstein's study remain applicable to this study. The public's acceptance of group homes for the developmentally disabled and for the mentally ill is comparable. Group homes for the developmentally disabled and for the mentally ill share the same tier in the study's hierarchy of acceptability of neighborhood facilities. However, it should be noted that group homes for the developmentally disabled appear to be slightly more acceptable to the public (Borinstein 1992).

While the majority of Americans do not disapprove of the establishment of group homes, most do not want to live next door to one. The reasons behind this paradox are thought to stem from attitudes associated with the NIMBY phenomenon, but it is important to underscore the tensions between Americans' supposed social attitudes and their actual willingness to live near group homes. Andre & Velasquez (1989: 2) describe an influential philosophy underlying the American social order in which citizens "aspire

to a society that will ensure the common good, a society in which the burdens (perceived or actual) that must be borne to achieve this good are distributed equally among all members—and not to the backyards of a few.” These aspirations illustrate the potential for conflict between creating social good and bearing the associated social burdens. Andre & Velasquez (1989: 3) highlight not only the aspiration to “ensure the common good,” but the self-interest involved in such an effort. The NIMBY phenomenon, by definition an expression of self-interest, stems in part from a fear of the increased burdens associated with what are viewed as unusual developments in the neighborhood. Thus, many arguments against group homes stem from citizens' concerns about their own property values, upholding a neighborhood “character,” and safety.

Property Values

At least two major studies have shown that the establishment of group homes has no effect on property values. Dear (1992: 290) notes that changes in property value "tend to be associated with broader market movements, such as changes in interest rates." The 2005 American Housing Survey also shows that property values are unaffected by the establishment of group homes. Despite this evidence, many Americans remain unconvinced and ambivalent about this issue. For example, the respondents in a study cited by Borinstein were divided when asked if they thought property values would be threatened by the establishment of a group home for people with mental illnesses. In this study, 29% thought that property values would be affected, 33% did not, and 35% were neutral, meaning their responses fell "between the belief that 'harm' and 'no harm' to property values would occur" (Borinstein 1992: 191). The persistence of this unfounded

fear of many Americans accentuates an argument made by Myers & Bridges (1995: 139): "NIMBY protestors do not believe data disproving the ill effects of community residences." Myers & Bridges (139) base their argument on neighbors' contention that "their neighborhood is different from those studied."

Neighborhood Character

The "character" of a neighborhood and concern over property values seem to be closely related. Borinstein cites income as an important variable in the likelihood of opposition to neighborhood facilities, with such opposition centered primarily in affluent neighborhoods (Borinstein 1992). Borinstein describes an inverse relationship between income and acceptability of facilities. Zippay's (1997: 303) study on siting strategies enumerates a number of other variables that contribute to opposition, including a "high degree of social cohesion and strong neighborhood leadership." Zippay's study shows that neighborhoods with lower rates of opposition tend to be "dense, diverse, [and] low-income." Such neighborhoods have "higher proportions of renter-occupied housing, greater racial homogeneity, and fewer financial and political resources with which to sustain organized opposition" (303).

Borinstein cautions that "opposition to any type of facility appears to be somewhat commonplace," but also includes information from the survey revealing the previously mentioned "hierarchy" of acceptable facilities, also noted in research on the NIMBY phenomenon by Dear (Borinstein 1992: 192; Dear 1992). In Borinstein's survey 45% percent of respondents welcomed group homes for the developmentally disabled in their neighborhoods (192).

Group Home Siting Strategies and Community Integration

The term "siting strategy" refers to the methods by which agencies establish group homes. The entry strategies that housing agencies use in the establishment of group homes and the degree to which they communicate with other residents of the neighborhood are important factors that affect acceptance or opposition. Zippay distinguishes between the two major siting strategies employed by mental health administrators: the "autonomous" and the "collaborative." In the former approach, neighborhood residents are not notified of the decision to establish a group home. Usually, the rationale behind using the autonomous strategy is based on the argument that "notification is a stigmatizing process that violates the civil rights of consumers" (Zippay 1997: 301). In the collaborative approach, however, efforts are made to inform and interact with community members. Advocates of this strategy insist it is "a key element in promoting the long-term community integration" of the group home (302-303).

Dear (1992: 293) offers an analysis of an additional strategy based on "risk-aversion," in which agencies seek out areas "with flexible zoning classifications." This strategy has "reinforced the tendency to favor inner-city locations." As it focuses more on the issue of location than that of notification, this method could be used alongside the autonomous or collaborative strategies. This strategy also introduces some of the legal issues, such as local zoning ordinances, that affect agencies seeking to establish new group homes.

The way agencies interpret germane local, state, and federal laws and regulations also has an effect on their interaction with the community. New York State Site Selection Law, or the "Padavan Law," includes "notification guidelines" and recommends "public

forum opportunities" within a scheduled period of time before a group home is established (Myers & Bridges 1995: 138). However, some have argued that the requirements of this law violate the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988 (FHAA). Many legal advocates have also argued that the legislation supports the rationale behind the "autonomous" strategy (Stavis 1991: 7; Zanner 1996). The Padavan Law and other state laws that impose requirements such as "notice to the town, an opportunity for comment from the town and neighbors, public hearings, Commissioner's appeals hearings, [and] judicial review" are legal insofar as they address zoning issues in a non-discriminatory manner, respecting the legal rights of the disabled as specified in the FHAA (7). Interpreting the purpose of the FHAA, Whitman & Parnas (1999: 4) explain that:

Congress did not intend the FHAA to preempt all local zoning authority. Rather, Congress simply intended to remedy discrimination on the basis of disability and familial status that occurred as a result of the application of local zoning laws. Localities may continue to enact zoning regulations that create single-family districts, preserve the character of the neighborhood, prevent congestion, and mitigate the effects of automobile and other traffic.

The U.S. Department of Justice and the Department of Housing and Urban Development support this interpretation, acknowledging that the Fair Housing Amendments Act is "not a land use or zoning statute" and does not "pre-empt" local laws. The federal law will only intervene if the local or state laws are applied "in a discriminatory way" (Joint Statement of DOJ & HUD 1999). Georgiou (1999: 11) finds that "Congress has provided clear intent that the FHAA, be applied to prohibit discriminatory zoning practices." Based on the legal precedent at the time of writing, Georgiou predicts that the "Padavan [law] would likely survive a challenge under the FHAA" (9).

The major goal of the different siting strategies is to increase positive neighborhood relations and integration into the community. Since the 1990s, a trend of "aggressive autonomy" in siting strategies has been observed (Dear 1992). Characteristic of this trend is an effort on the part of agencies to avoid areas in which zoning hearings are likely to be contentious. According to Zippay (1997), agencies that notified neighbors in advance of the establishment of a group home had a higher chance of facing opposition than those agencies who used a low-profile approach. Zippay does, however, cite four similar studies, two of which also found a correlation between notification and opposition and two of which found "an association between collaborative strategies and community support" (303). Zippay also found that those agencies who notified neighbors were more likely to undertake post-entry integration efforts, though it is not clear if this is a result of increased opposition or an increase in positive relations within the community.

One study cited by Zippay shows that approximately one-third to one-half of group homes face some opposition. However, a study cited by Myers & Bridges (1995: 139) claims that negative responses to group homes decrease dramatically over time. Their conclusion: "once established, the homes blend into their neighboring communities" (145). Whatever the likelihood that group homes will simply "blend in," the initial steps taken by an agency seeking to establish a new group home are an important consideration as they may influence its potential post-entry strategies. Myers & Bridges (1995) recommend that agencies begin "informal informational outreach" at the stage of decision making, before a group home is established. Whether such an approach is appropriate may be evaluated according to its coherence with the larger policies of an agency and its overall strategy to address neighborhood relations.

An agency may use an "autonomous" or "collaborative" approach during the first stage of the establishment of a new group home, but its post-entry strategy, or lack thereof, contains the policies that will continue to influence community relations. Dear (1992) discusses two forms of post-entry strategy: "community service" and "community education." The first approach suggests that residents of group homes increase their visibility and interaction with their neighbors through activities such as "clean-up days or flower planting." The second approach suggests the creation of programs that would invite neighbors to interact with residents and/or participate in a social activity that brings residents and neighbors together, such as an open house. The major difference between the "community service" and "community education" strategies concerns the level and focus of the interaction with neighbors. Whereas the latter strategy focuses on an expressly social activity and addresses the education of the group home's neighbors, the former places the emphasis on an external issue, such as a neighborhood beautification project.

Finally, Piat (1999) reveals that some advocates and most opponents of group homes have questioned the feasibility of integrating deinstitutionalized people into the community. The barriers to improving relations in neighborhood where group homes are located are thus magnified by many neighbors' perceptions that integrating developmentally disabled individuals into the community is not feasible, regardless of any siting or post-entry strategy.

Community Isolationism

Community isolationism has become more prevalent over the past half-century in the United States. Neighborhoods have traditionally consisted of a cohesive group of individual families that socialized with and depended upon one another, but recent trends indicate that this social arrangement is changing. In *Bowling Alone* (2000), Robert Putnam argues that the current health of society is threatened by an erosion of relationships, networks and interactions, factors which come together to form a term that he defines as “social capital.” Social capital, Putnam writes, allows greater productivity, promotes benevolence and encourages a concern for the greater good. Putnam identifies the decline of social capital as the lack of involvement in political or social organizations, decreased participation in groups and clubs, and particularly relevant to our study, widespread ignorance of the names of one's neighbors.

According to Putnam, informal social connections have decreased dramatically over the past half-century. He argues that Americans have chosen to allocate substantially more time to their immediate families and away from the wider community. While informal social involvement is found to be higher among young people and the elderly, it has generally declined in all parts of American society and regular contact with friends and neighbors has been steadily decreasing. Putnam speculates that "if the sharp, steady declines [in informal visits with friends] registered over the *past* quarter century were to continue at the same pace for the *next* quarter century, our centuries-old practice of entertaining friends at home might entirely disappear from American life in less than a generation" (100). These patterns suggest that attitudes toward group homes may, in part, actually be a reflection of an increase in overall community isolationism.

METHODOLOGY

Neighborhood Selection

We selected six neighborhoods for inclusion in the study out of the eleven homes operated by NERS. The neighborhoods selected for the study had histories which included positive, negative, and neutral interactions with group homes. Neighborhoods with group homes more than forty minutes from the Wesleyan campus were eliminated from the study for the sake of convenience. The geographic layout of each neighborhood was mapped out and the neighbors to be interviewed were chosen based on their proximity to the group home. A minimum of four interviews was obtained from each neighborhood. To incorporate a more holistic perspective, interviews with managers and support staff from the group home in each neighborhood were completed as well.

Procedure

We first sent letters to the selected neighbors informing them of the study. (See Appendix A for sample copy of letter.) These explained the basic premise of the research project and requested the neighbor's participation in the study. If we had been able to obtain the neighbor's phone number, the letter stated that a member of the research team would contact them in the coming days to arrange a convenient time to interview. For neighbors with unlisted telephone numbers, the letter explained that researchers would be in the neighborhood over the coming days and asked residents for their willingness to participate in the study.

The letters were either hand-delivered or mailed to the neighbors. We then called neighbors with available phone numbers to schedule a convenient time to meet in person.

We generally called the neighbors on weekday evenings between 6 and 8 pm and on weekends, called each neighbor no more than three times, and did not leave voice messages. Face-to-face interviews were scheduled with many neighbors. For those neighbors who felt uncomfortable with researchers coming to their house, researchers offered phone or email interviews as an alternative. If the neighbors were unavailable by telephone, researchers went to the home in order to schedule or conduct an interview. In total, we conducted 20 face-to-face interviews, three phone interviews, and one email interview.

Two members of the research team went to neighbors' homes for each face-to-face interview. Before each interview, respondents were assured of confidentiality by signing an agreement of anonymity (see Appendix B). During the interviews, researchers often asked if the residents knew of other nearby residents with strong positive or negative feelings toward the presence of the group home in the area. Using this snowball method, the research team was able to identify other neighbors who might be interested in participating in the study. These newly-identified neighbors were then sent a letter. In the cases in which a phone number was listed for the home, a member of the research team called the neighbor to schedule an interview. These neighbors were then interviewed using the original format, either over the phone or in person.

In addition to interviews with group home neighbors, members of the research team also conducted interviews with managers and/or support staff at each of the six group homes studied. These interviews were scheduled by Mo Feitelson, one of our NERS contacts. The interviews were conducted by one or two members of the research team and took place with one staff member at a time. We decided to include

staff interviews for two reasons. First, we believed staff interviews could act as a foil to the information gathered from neighbors, allowing staff to respond to many of the complaints expressed by neighbors. Second, we thought staff interviews were the best way to give a voice to the residents of the group homes since staff intimately knew and understood their condition. The staff could also share alternative perspectives on the integration of group homes into communities.

In the process of conducting this qualitative study, the research team encountered various obstacles to establishing a consistent format for interviews. Group home staff and neighbors were interviewed using two different interview schedules due to their different positions in relation to the group home. Although we would have liked to use the information obtained from interviews with neighbors to guide the staff interview questions, time constraints forced us to conduct both types of interviews simultaneously. Consequently, staff interviews do not necessarily directly respond to issues posed by neighbors.

Schedule

The interview schedule for neighbors was designed to gain an understanding of how neighbors view the group home in their community and group homes for the developmentally disabled in general. Another goal of the interview schedule was to elicit a picture of the overall character of the neighborhood and the extent to which neighbors interact, both with each other and the residents and staff of the group home. Questions focused on issues surrounding the establishment of the group home in the neighborhood,

the manner in which notification was disseminated, and the general maintenance of the home.

The interview schedule for managers and staff sought to obtain a picture of how the group home and neighbors interact from an alternate viewpoint. The staff members perceive neighborhood relations from within the group home and thus were able to impart their perspectives on how the homes and neighbors interact. (See Appendix C for the interview schedule for neighbors and Appendix D for the interview schedule for NERS managers and staff.)

Limitations

The very nature of a qualitative study requires that the research team investigate the "how" and "why" aspects of the project, which are often more complicated to discern than the quantitative elements of "what," "where," and "when." Exploratory studies such as this may lend themselves to qualitative analysis, generating categorical patterns from focused samples, but they do not produce mathematically conclusive data. From the start, the research team recognized that qualitative research would be the most appropriate approach for this project.

As expected with qualitative forms of analysis, there were necessary variations in interviews with neighbors. Some neighbors requested that the interviews be conducted over the phone instead of face-to-face; in one instance, a neighbor requested an email survey. Some subjects did not have listed names or telephone numbers and some were unreachable by telephone. Thus, while a number of subjects were reached over the telephone and an interview was scheduled, others were approached at their homes by the

researchers in an unplanned manner. Consequently, these respondents had less time to think about their answers before speaking with us. Moreover, while almost all letters were addressed using the names of the residents found through a reverse directory, a few neighbors without listed information were addressed using the generic term “Resident.” These neighbors might have been less inclined to participate in the study because they were not approached using personal information.

During the interviews themselves, the research team often had to gauge the interest level of the interviewee and respond accordingly. If the subject did not demonstrate an investment in the research topic or preemptively answered the remaining questions, the research team would abbreviate the interview. As a result, not all face-to-face interviews generated the same amount and quality of data. Furthermore, we felt obliged at times to alter our manner in order to better engage the subject. That is, if a neighbor offered positive or negative views about the group home on their street, we would sometimes target our responses to empathize with the subject’s point of view. If a response from a subject was especially poignant or interesting, we would ask a follow-up or related question not previously included in the interview schedule. In the case of phone or email interviews, the fact that we were unable to incorporate the body language and general demeanor of those interviewees in the study created variation in the interview conduct style. While this resulted in inconsistent interview styles, we believe it produced more truthful and extensive answers from the respondents because it allowed us to better engage with the neighbors.

We further tried to minimize variations in our analysis of the interviews by having each researcher read through every interview transcription in order to locate trends within

interviewee responses. With this information, we came together to create an overarching framework and tease out recurrent themes that permeate the interviews. Interspersed with these overall trends are specific examples and direct quotations from respondents, rendering the observed generalities more tangible.

It is also important to note that our sample size is relatively small. We were able to obtain at least four neighbor interviews and at least one staff interview in each of the six neighborhoods we researched. While this comprises most of the immediate neighbors in each community, it is not a large sample to work with. Accordingly, there are limitations on the extent to which this information can be generalized to other neighborhoods beyond the scope of this investigation.

Finally, we have also considered the extent to which both staff and neighbors offered honest feedback. The subject of group homes for the developmentally disabled is a contentious issue, and given the nature of the interviews, some neighbors might have felt compelled to give politically correct answers. Our association with Wesleyan and NERS may have caused other interviewees to alter their responses as well. Throughout the project we alternated between presenting ourselves as representatives from NERS and students from Wesleyan. While not addressed in our study, the affiliation with either institution may have had an affect on neighbors' decision to participate in the research study because of preconceived ideas about Wesleyan or NERS. It is impossible to determine the extent of this problem. We worked to mitigate these issues as much as possible by trying to develop a rapport with interviewees, allowing them to feel as comfortable as possible with the questions we asked them and minimizing our affiliations with either organization.

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The data analysis is divided into five sections. First, we examine differences in reactions between neighbors who lived in communities before the group home moved in and those residents who moved into the neighborhood after the group home was established. Second, we examine issues of confusion and lack of information about the group home. Third, we analyze themes of general isolationism and declines in overall neighborliness. Next, we look at positive feedback from neighbors regarding the group home in their neighborhood. Finally, we explore administrative issues and subsequently examine problems pertaining specifically to group home staff members.

As mentioned in the methodology, we initially intended to incorporate data from staff interviews into our report. However, much of the data we found proved to be unrelated to the central issues that arose following interviews with neighbors. Thus, while we obtained a significant amount of data from the staff interviews, only information relevant to our study is included in the report.

Acclimation to and Acceptance of Group Homes

We found that almost all of the neighbors, almost all of the time, were not bothered by the presence of a group home in their neighborhood. As one respondent stated, “Everything is fine until something happens.” As this quote suggests, we found that most neighbors are indifferent to the presence of a group home in their community until a problem arises. When that happens, neighbors express significant discontent with having a group home in their backyard. Interviewees’ initial and eventual awareness and

acceptance of the group home differed, however, based on whether they moved into the neighborhood before or after the group home. Those respondents who moved to the area after the group home were less likely to have any history of opposition. They were more likely to accept the group home's presence, regardless of whether or not they knew of its existence before purchasing their home. For example, one such neighbor described the group home as simply “part of the street, part of the neighborhood.” On the other hand, most people who lived in the neighborhood prior to the group home described initially feeling uneasy about its arrival. However, this feeling passed with time after seeing that their lives were not negatively affected by the home. “I wasn’t too happy about it at first,” recalled one neighbor. “But, you know, it’s been fine.”

Of the 24 neighbors we spoke with, ten had moved in after the group home in their neighborhood was already established. All ten respondents said that they were not and had never been bothered by its presence. Two of these homeowners were informed in advance by their realtors and said it did not have an impact on their decision to buy their house. Seven of these homeowners did not realize that there was a group home on their block until they moved in: three “figured it out” on their own, three were informed by neighbors, and one was informed by the interviewer. In another case, a current neighborhood resident told a respondent about the group home while her house was being built. All of these respondents said that they were not upset when they learned that there was a group home on their block. When asked if, in retrospect, they thought knowledge of the home would have affected their decision to move in, all of the interviewees answered that it would not have.

We interviewed thirteen neighbors who were already living in the neighborhood when the group home moved in.¹ In cases where the group home had moved in more than a decade ago, respondents were less certain about how they learned of the home and a few of them could not remember at all. Four respondents explained that they found out about the home from angry neighbors who were trying to rally opposition, while three said they discovered its presence on their own. Four interviewees said they were fine with not being officially notified and six told us that they would have liked advanced notice, though some felt much stronger about this than others.

Lack of Information

A significant percentage of all interviewees voiced opinions on the issue of official notification, even if they did not have strong feelings about the presence of a group home in their neighborhood. Many of these residents had become accustomed to the idea of a group home on their block, but they still think that dissemination of specific information about the type of group home is important. This was a primary source of anxiety for neighbors living in the community before the establishment of the group home.

Specifically, neighbors' concern stemmed from not knowing "what kind" of group home was moving into their neighborhood. A couple of neighbors who reported currently being comfortable with the group home cited this as their main concern when first hearing that the home was coming. One commented that "[NERS] should come and visit the neighbors [when they're opening a new group home], let you know who's in the

¹ Out of the 24 respondents, one was particularly uninterested; apart from stating that she had no problems with the group home, she did not give us any other information, including whether she had moved in before or after the home.

house, ...what kind of individuals they are.” These concerns demonstrate an important element of the NIMBY syndrome: the fear of the unknown, which, in these cases may be fueled by a lack of information about the residents of the group homes and the agency itself. As one particularly concerned neighbor put it, “[What] kind of people are living there? Are they sex offenders or simply mentally retarded or criminally mentally retarded? We don’t know.” In the same vein, another neighbor with a teenage daughter was worried that state law excused sex offenders from being reported if they lived in a group home. She commented: "My only trouble with [the] group home is they don't have to report sex offenders... Whether you're challenged or not, that is my only concern. I would want, you know, to know, because if they were in the general population, they would be identified."²

Respondents who lived in the neighborhood before the group home was established *and* respondents who moved in after the group home made comments supporting the existence of “a hierarchy of acceptability” in terms of types of group homes, as was discussed in the Literature Review. In this hierarchy, people see group homes for the developmentally disabled as "preferable" to homes for recovering drug addicts, ex-convicts, or sex offenders (Borinstein 1992; Dear 1992). Three neighbors, all of whom had moved in after the group home, implied that it was not necessary to give

² This respondent is misinformed about group homes and sex offenders. According to NERS, convicted sex offenders living in group homes must, like any other convicted offender, register and be entered into the database. However, if an individual is deemed incompetent to stand trial, he/she cannot be convicted and therefore will not be registered.

According to the State of Connecticut Department of Public Safety, the current published list of sex offenders in Connecticut contains only sex offenders who have been convicted or found not guilty by reason of mental disease or defect. Offenders who were released into the community prior to October 1, 1988 are not required to register. Some offenders convicted or found not guilty by reason of mental disease or defect of certain offenses specified under PA99-183 and released into the community after October 1, 1988 are required to register. An additional number of offenders convicted or found not guilty by reason of mental disease or defect and released into the community after October 1, 1998 are also required to register. See Connecticut General Statutes 54-250 through 54-261 for specific offenses.

official notification about a group home if it were specifically for the developmentally disabled. The following excerpt from one interview is typical of these responses by neighbors:

Interviewer: Would you have preferred to have been notified by the agency that runs the group home about its existence in the neighborhood?

Neighbor: I don't know, honestly. If it was drugs and alcohol, probably. But since it's other issues....

Respondents who had similar sentiments cited "hoodlums," "dangerous people," "criminals," and "sex offenders" as other examples of the kind of people that necessitate notification of current and potential community members.

A few neighbors said that although they personally didn't feel that they needed to be told in advance about the home, they thought that people should know. "I was fine with it because I knew they weren't violent people or anything like that, you know?" one neighbor told us. "I mean I think the other people just are concerned with the type of people that were in there. Obviously we don't want any rehabilitated sex offenders or anything like that, with children around...I guess if they would tell people who lives there and what kind of home it is, it might relieve some anxiety." This neighbor felt that the lack of information about the group home was fueling neighborhood fear of and opposition to the group home, since "some people confuse that with a half-way house."

There were only two interviews (from different neighborhoods) in which respondents were unabashedly concerned with the group home on their block. In both cases, a husband and wife with similar views were interviewed together. While the bulk of the following issues were expressed by a small percentage of respondents, it is important to note that in many documented examples of NIMBY action against group

homes, opposition is usually spearheaded by one or two vocal community members among a majority who are more apathetic. Therefore we feel that it is worth reflecting on and exploring the comments made in these two interviews. For these neighbors, the desire for more information on the type of group home was part of a greater frustration with a lack of information about the agency. In response to a question clarifying that the couple in Neighborhood X had not received official notification about the group home's arrival, the husband responded, "Correct. This has been a major problem we've had-- never any communication."

One fear that both couples had was that the group home on their block would change its purpose and become a home for populations lower down in the residential health facility hierarchy. This concern seemed directly related to a perceived lack of adequate information about NERS and its specific mission of providing housing for developmentally disabled individuals. As the wife in Neighborhood Y told us:

Also, when they first moved in they said it was a home for the mentally retarded but they could switch their clientele. ...I used to have a house in Norwich and I had Norwich State Hospital people living next to me and it was terrible, it was a bad neighborhood. So we were afraid they might change their purpose to rehab or something.

The husband in Neighborhood X was similarly concerned: "You know, right now they could be mentally challenged people living there and the company changes their focus and they start running some halfway houses. And that is definitely a concern."

The lack of knowledge about the group home and a general suspicion of the managing agency may have led to false speculations about it. One of the couples was

under the impression that “they keep changing management and I think they keep changing who owns the group home. So we never really know what’s going on over there.” The other couple described efforts to “get the facts” from local authorities and to address specific concerns to NERS. They expressed disappointment that the agency did not follow up. Both couples were frustrated that they did not know who to contact if they had problems. The husband in Neighborhood X, whose major problems were with staff conduct (see below), spoke of wanting “to find someone who can hold [the staff] accountable for their actions” and complained that “[we] don’t have anyone to go and talk to, we don’t have a contact.”

The couple in Neighborhood Y said that in addition to not knowing who to contact when there was a maintenance issue, they also worried about not knowing what to do if they suspected an emergency, such as abuse:

I wouldn’t know who to call because it was so many years ago and I would have to find the name and phone number of the agency and they may or may not be responsive and I think all of that is bad. ...I think it should be very clear to the neighbors, maybe this is the point, that it is very clear to the immediate neighbors...who the managing agency is. It shouldn’t be an inconvenience or a problem for me if I hear something that really concerns me in that house, what do I do? Call the police?

Both of these sets of neighbors clearly express a need for more communication with NERS group home staff and administration. They believe that increasing the flow of information between NERS and neighbors would facilitate improved community relations.

Community Isolationism

A general increase in community isolationism and decrease in neighborliness in the United States in recent decades has affected the extent to which most neighbors, including group homes, interact with each other. The degree to which the six neighborhoods studied exhibit signs of this isolationism varies, depending on the specific neighborhood.

Interviews with neighbors repeatedly revealed that all residents generally exhibit a lack of closeness with their own neighbors. Neighborhoods are defined as quiet “hi/hello” types of areas, with interaction between neighbors often limited to waving to each other while walking their dogs. Only three informants defined their relations with fellow neighbors as “very close.” The remainder reported that they “barely know” their neighbors but described the overall neighborhood character as “friendly/nice.” Eleven neighbors said they do not interact with the group home residents at all, and two reported “minimal interactions,” such as saying hello when passing on the street. Only two neighbors reported interacting with the residents regularly, stopping by to visit, attending birthday or holiday parties, and even having the residents over to their homes. Still, only two neighbors characterized the group home as “bad neighbors” and one of these negative responses was attributed to complaints about yard maintenance. These numbers demonstrate that neighbors do not exhibit extraordinarily strong opinions about their neighbors (including the group home), and that in neighbors' eyes, neutral or limited interaction with fellow neighbors is not necessarily negative.

According to our interviews, this different perception of the meaning of community and its associated lesser degree of neighborhood intimacy is understood to

have evolved over the past twenty years. Though information acquired from all interviews support this point, conversations with elderly neighbors most clearly demonstrate recognition of this development. According to an elderly neighbor who lived in her neighborhood for thirty-five years,

Our society today is just much different than it used to be. People are so busy [now] that they're gone all day. Neighborhoods aren't like they used to be... Neighbors used to know each other very, very well, mothers used to be home, kids playing outside, people always talking. Now you can have someone live right next door to you and you don't even know them.

This recognition of people's busy lives limiting interactions between neighbors is not limited to elderly respondents. One staff interviewee commented that "I'm the type of person who tries to be friendly with everyone. I wave or smile at the neighbors, but I don't necessarily stop and talk with them, usually just because I'm on my way to my next destination."

Another pattern accrued from the data suggests a possible reason for the decrease in cohesive community relations and interaction: neighbors seem satisfied with limited contact with other community members. As one house manager explained: "This house has been here for years and years and everyone pretty much keeps to themselves. That's how America is these days – they rather watch TV than talk to their neighbors." One neighbor reports that while she would feel comfortable calling upon her neighbors for a favor, they are not "at each others houses like 90210 or any of those other sitcoms, where they're always popping in [at each other's homes.]" This same neighbor was happy to have little to no interaction with her neighbors, defining herself as "the type of person who

prefers more space around me and less...interaction with neighbors only because during the day I'm busy with people all day long.”

When asked if they would be interested in attending a social event or open house at the group home, neighbors varied in their responses: eight neighbors reported that they would not be interested, five answered that they "might," and five responded that they would be interested in attending such a gathering. This demonstrates a level of apathy and very little interest in involvement with the group home, but does not seem attributable to the nature of the home itself.

Neighbors were generally satisfied with the state of their community, not because it exhibits a communal spirit or is strongly positive, but rather because it is neutral or has no problems. The perfect neighbors were generally defined as those who are not loud, not in your face, and never a problem with each other. Neighbors were positive about their communities when they had nothing to complain about, and characterized the group home as “successful” when they “never hear or see anything about them.” One neighbor expressed her satisfaction with her neighborhood by saying, “we don’t see the other neighbors all that much and none of us see them [group home residents] or interact with them all that much. Most feel like they don't even exist.” This is a far cry from the idyllic American neighborhood, one with strong relationships and a sense of cohesion which define it as a community. These patterns suggests that the fact that the NERS group homes have limited contact with neighbors is not necessarily due solely to their status as homes for the developmentally disabled, but also because interactions between all types of residents are less common and less desired than they once were.

Positive Feedback

Throughout our research, most neighbors reported having no problems with the NERS group homes and had few negative comments during interviews. This dearth of complaints should not be overlooked. It can be taken as a clear sign that NERS is operating their group homes in accordance with neighbors' expectations for their communities.

Overall, neighbors were very pleased with the exterior appearance of the group homes, especially the yard maintenance. Many neighbors explicitly mentioned improvements made to landscaping on the group home property since it was established. These upgrades included planting new trees, shrubs, and flowers, as well as regularly-scheduled lawn maintenance services that mow the lawn and trim shrubbery. One neighbor even characterized the yard upkeep of a particular group home as "exceptional." The respondent noted that the lawn service was "always mowing, replanting... They put pretty flowers in the summertime." The interviewee then remarked, "I think we've all noticed that," speaking of the positive reactions from other neighbors on the street.

Interviewees in at least two neighborhoods also approved of tag sales sponsored by the group homes. One neighbor commented on how they "were having a tag sale over there and I went over... that's like being part of the neighborhood." This type of activity was understood to fit the character of the neighborhood while bringing together group home residents, staff members, and neighbors.

Administrative Issues

While most neighbors generally spoke positively about the appearance of the group homes, several interviewees expressed concern over specific aspects of the homes' upkeep. In one particular neighborhood, a neighbor voiced discontent about the presence of a garbage dumpster located in the driveway of the group home for months. The interviewee said that "for a while they had a commercial dumpster out there. A big thing out there for years." This type of visual eyesore was defined as out of character with other houses in that community. Additionally, another interviewee from a different neighborhood felt that the group home's lawn maintenance service arrived too early in the morning and that the mower disturbed neighbors while sleeping.

In addition to these specific complaints, there was a general trend in which neighbors often object to the number of cars outside the group home during NERS staff meetings. In particular, neighbors were opposed to over-parked driveways and cars parked on the lawns of both the group homes and the neighbors. Occasionally, such overparking resulted in blocking driveways and intersections on the immediate streets. One neighbor commented: "I think it's the traffic that creates problems – when they have a meeting or something. When they park, people can't get out and that creates tension." These remarks were most pronounced in communities where each house's driveway could hold a maximum of four cars; thus, the presence of several more cars in the group homes' driveways was inconsistent with neighborhood character and was considered hazardous for neighborhood driving. One neighbor was annoyed that group home staff would park on the neighbor's lawn on a nightly basis. Again, this behavior was seen as

out of character for the neighborhood and made neighbors perceive the group home as different from other houses in the community.

Many neighbors were also wary of the perceived high rate of staff turnover in the group homes. While house managers seem to stay in one location for a considerable period of time, support staff appear to be less consistent in the length of their employment at the homes. Consequently, some neighbors sensed that the support staff often lacked a comprehensive understanding of neighborhood dynamics. One neighbor explained: "There were staff members who we were more friendly with, but now there's mostly new ones who we don't know." Frequent staff turnover may preclude a deeper connection with individual neighbors and the community as a whole.

Other neighbors link turnover to the group home's function as a business. An interviewee from another neighborhood highlighted some of her apprehensions: "it seems like there is a high staff turnover rate in that line of work. My only concern is that it's a commercial issue... It's a business so it brings in more people to the neighborhood." Similarly, another interviewee mentioned: "It's a business you got going on next door and that's what you don't want." These comments reflect the belief that the group home is fundamentally a business, not a residential home.

Issues with Staff

After reviewing neighbors' sources of opposition to group homes, it was apparent that the most glaring point of contention was with staff conduct. Many neighbors suggested that staff treated the group homes as a place of employment rather than as an actual house in a neighborhood. Since group homes fit delicately into the balance of a

given community, neighbors deemed it essential that staff behave in a manner that does not upset this equilibrium.

In particular, we identified four major complaints directly connected to staff actions. First, several neighbors in multiple communities were concerned that staff members drive too fast on residential streets, which usually have a speed limit of 25 miles per hour. This posed a safety issue, especially in areas with young children. Neighbors often complained that staff members would not drive so quickly in their own residential neighborhoods, but that because they may think of the group home simply as a job site, they disregard the posted speed limit.

Neighbors repeatedly expressed discomfort over noise issues. Whereas few neighbors directly complained about noise from group home residents, many said that staff played music too loudly in their cars. This occurred while staff were driving their cars to and from the house, as well as when they left their cars running in the driveways with the radio playing at high volume. One neighbor observed:

They're not always quiet when they're outside. I don't know if they go outside to smoke or something or to go to their cars...and once in a while I think they maybe have visitors who come. They just leave the car running and running... Like after 11 o'clock it gets loud sometimes, and we're all early birds.

A respondent from a second neighborhood commented: "Sometimes you'll hear loud rap music, cars coming and going." As these observations suggest, such behavior is incongruous with what neighbors consider to be their "quiet" neighborhood and emphasize how staff actions can perpetuate the belief that group homes are businesses and not residences.

Furthermore, numerous neighbors spoke of problems with how the staff takes care of the homes' garbage. One long-time neighbor remarked: "I had a few little problems when they would put their garbage out. They would put it into the barrels loose. I called to complain and talked to a woman over at the office and asked why they have to have so much garbage." Neighbors also reported that the garbage is often put out on the incorrect day or that garbage bin lids are often not securely fastened, thus causing garbage to spill out of the bins and blow onto neighbors' lawns. One interviewee commented that "When they put their trash out on Sunday night for pickup on Monday, I guess it's windy or there's weather, lots of time stuff blows out into our yard." A second respondent noticed that "their trash cans blow over a lot and their trash goes all over the lawn and can blow all the way to the stream." One respondent noted that "they sometime put out their recycling on the wrong day, and sometimes their trash blows all over the place." Many neighbors thought that the abundance of trash left at the curb, which frequently scattered throughout the neighborhood, was aesthetically displeasing and detracted from the group homes' efforts to blend in to the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In formulating recommendations for NERS, we considered the fact that neighbors' sources of opposition are dual-pronged. First, our interviews demonstrate that neighbors evinced a marked confusion in regards to the group homes. This was manifested by a lack of information about the nature of the homes, in addition to little knowledge of who ran them. Second, there was some opposition concerning the manner in which group homes were operated, at both the administrative and house staff levels. These two areas are linked, but we suggest several prescriptions in order to fully address their individual nuances.

Notification

Across the board, opposition to group homes often arises from a lack of knowledge about the nature of the home. This issue could be combated by implementing a notification strategy. We would recommend that this notification take the form of a paper announcement, disseminated to neighbors before the group home residents move in. This announcement would state that there is a group home for the developmentally disabled operated by NERS in the neighborhood. It would include the NERS contact information so that neighbors would know who to speak to regarding the group home. This strategy would address one of the main issues that we discovered in our interviews with neighbors: a lack of information contributing to confusion, speculation, and judgment. We understand that a notification is an acknowledgement of difference and may draw additional attention to the group home, but we believe that this notification strategy would serve as a unique opportunity to increase understanding about the home

and subsequently reduce opposition to it in the long term. We believe that an acknowledgment of difference would not necessarily lead to discrimination, but may serve to encourage acceptance and open channels of communication.

Implementation of Staff Training

We propose the creation of staff training in community and neighbor relations. This training would include two parts: a general training for all group home staff focusing on overall community integration strategies and a neighborhood specific training for staff highlighting issues particular to each neighborhood. In both types of training, the goal is to convey to staff the importance of treating the group home as a residence and the surrounding area as a residential community and not only as site of employment. This would reduce and/or eliminate many of the neighbors' sources of opposition to the group homes.

General staff training would focus on complaints observed in multiple communities. Part of this general training would inform group home staff on overall neighborhood etiquette and part of it would address specific complaints we noted in interviews with neighbors. Group home staff should also be briefed on the specific neighborhood where they will be working. This training would include the history of relations between neighbors and the group home as well as specific complaints that neighbors have expressed about the group home. This type of intimate knowledge of the local community would give staff a much better sense of current neighborhood tensions and problems and provides staff with an opportunity to help ameliorate some of these conflicts.

There are a number of issues stemming from staff's perception of the group home as a place of employment rather than a residential home. One example of these issues is trash maintenance. The solution to this problem would be a combined effort of both NERS administrative staff and individual group home staff. While group homes will inevitably produce more trash than other homes in a community, a concerted effort should be made to deal with trash in an appropriate manner.

Staff Meetings

If at all possible, staff meetings should not take place at group homes. Many neighbors complained about over-parked driveways that were out of character with the rest of the neighborhood. Perhaps staff meetings could take place at NERS administrative offices or another off-site location that would not cause so much traffic congestion in residential communities. If staff meetings cannot be relocated, perhaps NERS can encourage carpooling or other techniques to reduce overparking in residential communities.

Staff Continuity

While we recognize that NERS works hard to hire and retain the best staff possible, we think it is very important for staff to remain in one location for as long as possible. This greater familiarity with the local neighborhood will facilitate better community cohesion. Whenever possible, NERS should refrain from rotating staff to different sites in order to foster a sense of family and community in each group home's

neighborhood. This would offer an immediate benefit not only to group home residents but to neighbors as well by offering them a sense of continuity in seeing familiar faces.

Cultivating Community

Development of community-building events may be beneficial in helping to integrate the group home into its surrounding neighborhood. The appropriateness of these events would depend on the specific character of each neighborhood. During interviews with staff, several employees expressed mixed feelings about the appropriateness or feasibility of such events, reporting that an open house, for example, would likely violate the privacy of their residents and/or make them uncomfortable. Thus, we recommend that staff behavioral specialists and NERS administrators determine the extent to which such an event would be beneficial. In several interviews, neighbors spoke highly of events such as tag sales sponsored by the group home as a means of community integration, and we would recommend that this option be explored in other communities.

CONCLUSION

NERS provides essential services for the developmentally disabled in this age of deinstitutionalization. Despite successfully opening eleven homes in Connecticut since 1987, the organization has run into some problems with neighbors in a few of the neighborhoods where their group homes are located. We sought to identify the origin of these issues and develop possible means of neutralizing these tensions.

After categorizing these bases of misunderstanding between the group homes and their neighbors, our group made recommendations to NERS detailing possible courses of action. These prescriptions include a notification strategy and staff training. If the implementation of these recommendations seems feasible to NERS, we contend that such changes could greatly improve the community dynamic in neighborhoods with NERS group homes.

As evident in our literature review and throughout the report, it is essential that group homes take into account the character of individual neighborhoods. Evaluation of a particular neighborhoods' character prior to establishing group homes could determine how to develop successful neighbor relations in that area. Additionally, group homes for the developmentally disabled are situated fairly high on the hierarchy of acceptable facilities. Organizations such as NERS could benefit from this distinction, since neighborhoods are more likely to accept them. We recognize that our findings are not applicable to facilities lower on the hierarchy, such as those housing ex-convicts and drug addicts. As we primarily focused on homes for the developmentally disabled in this report, we think that future research on acceptance of other types of group homes would be helpful in deepening the understanding of group home acceptance.

While communities may not be as warm and welcoming as they were in the past, we suggest that could change for the better by adopting some of the recommendations suggested in this report. Despite an increase in community isolationism, neighbors still care about who is moving into their area. It is significant that NERS commissioned this report, for it demonstrates the organization's desire to better understand the present and future communities in which they operate group homes.

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APPENDIX A: LETTER TO NEIGHBORS

February 26, 2007

Dear Resident *[insert name of resident here]*

In the coming weeks, researchers from Wesleyan University's Community Research Seminar will be coming to your neighborhood. We will be conducting a study on neighborhood relations in Connecticut communities with group homes for the developmentally disabled. Two researchers will be in your neighborhood on Sunday, March 4 and during this coming week, and your input would be vital to the study. The interviews will take no longer than 15-20 minutes to complete, and will be an opportunity for you to voice your opinions on the integration of community members within your neighborhood.

In the next few days, a member of the research team will call to arrange a convenient time to schedule this short discussion. We hope that you will be able to speak with us.

Sincerely,

[insert one researcher's name, phone #, and e-mail here]

Wesleyan University Research Team

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

for participation in a research project on how to improve community relations in neighborhoods with group homes

This form requests your consent to join our research team in gathering information to assess and improve community relations in the neighborhoods where group homes are operated.

Your contribution to the research will be as a participant in one interview which will last approximately ten minutes.

You are free to decide to take part in this project or not. If you do choose to participate, you may later decide to stop - at any time and for any reason.

Your identity will remain strictly confidential in any written report or analysis of the data. We will change your name and any other identifying information before it is seen by others. No one but the Wesleyan research team will have access to your identity and any information collected during your interview. The transcript from this interview will be kept either with the researchers or in a secure box at the Sociology Department at Wesleyan University. These files will be erased once the project is completed.

If you would like to know more about this project, or to contact us for any reason, feel free to call research team member and Wesleyan student Talia Barrett at (202) 215-2099, or e-mail: tbarrett@wesleyan.edu. You may also contact Wesleyan Professor Rob Rosenthal who is overseeing this project at (860) 685-2934, or rrosenthal@wesleyan.edu.

We respect and appreciate your help! Thank you.

“I do hereby give my consent to participate in this research project regarding community relations in neighborhoods my group homes.”

Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR NEIGHBORS

1. (Interviewer notes respondent's gender)
2. Why did you decide to move to this neighborhood?
3. What are relations like between neighbors in your community?
4. How long have you lived in this location?
5. How old are you?
6. Do you rent or own your home?
7. Prior to our letter, were you aware of the fact that there was a group home in your neighborhood?

1. YES

- i. How did you first learn about its presence in your area? Were you satisfied with this notification?
- ii. How would you describe your interactions with the members of the group home?
- iii. What are your feelings about having a group home in your neighborhood?
- iv. What types of interactions would you like to have with the residents?

2. NO

- i. Is there another way in which you would have preferred to have been informed, other than our letter?
- ii. How do you feel about having a group home in your neighborhood?

8. (This question depends on how long the resident has lived in the neighborhood)

1. LIVED IN NEIGHBORHOOD PRIOR TO GROUP HOME

- i. Would you have preferred to have been notified by the agency that runs this home about a group home moving into your area?
- ii. If yes, why?

2. MOVED IN AFTER GROUP HOME AND ANSWERED "YES" TO QUESTION 6

- i. Was your knowledge of a group home in the area something you considered when deciding whether to move into the neighborhood?

3. MOVED IN AFTER GROUP HOME AND ANSWERED “NO” TO QUESTION 6

- i. If you had known about the existence of this group home in your neighborhood prior to your moving in, would this knowledge have affected your decision to move here?
9. Do you think group homes for the developmentally disabled are a good idea?
10. Do you get the sense that other residents of the neighborhood have an opinion about the presence of a group home in this community? If yes, how do they feel about its presence?
11. Would you consider the NERS home to be a good neighbor? Why or why not?
12. How would you describe the house and yard maintenance of the NERS house?
13. Would you be interested in attending an open house or social event at the group home if one were held?

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR NERS STAFF

- 1) Why did you decide to work with NERS?
- 2) How long have you worked with NERS?
- 3) How long have you been working at this group home?
- 4) How do the neighbors in this community interact, and to what extent do they interact?
- 5) How would you describe your personal interactions with neighbors?
- 6) Would you feel comfortable asking one of the neighbors for a favor, as in asking for a cup of flour?
- 7) How would you describe the residents' interactions with neighbors?
- 8) Do you get the sense that the neighbors have opinions/feelings about living near a group home?
- 9) How has this neighborhood changed, if at all, since you started working here?
- 10) Has the relationship between neighbors and the group home been true for as long as you've worked here, or has this relationship changed over time?
 - a. Ideally, would you like to see the relationship between neighbors and the group home change in any way? How would you envision this change/improvement taking place?
- 11) If you were to change the current interactions that you have with these neighbors, how would you do so?
- 12) Do you have any ideas about what sort of activities or events would best foster positive relations or interactions between the residents and/or the staff of this home and the neighbors?

a. Do you think that holding an open house and inviting the neighbors would be a good (or bad) idea? Do you think your residents would be interested or receptive to an event like that?

13) In your opinion, how should NERS go about setting up new group homes in the future? How do you think that neighbors should be notified when a group home has been established in their area, if at all? Why?