

BOTTON UPDATE: 18 February 2015

Dear Families,

We are now entering a decisive stage in the on-going stand-off between the Camphill Village Trust and the many families, residents, Co-workers and supporters across three communities now resisting their controversial strategy. There follows an attempt to update you on current developments, and to correct certain misrepresentations.

ACTING GENERAL MANAGER

In a letter you should have received on 11th February, CVT Operations Manager Mark Denny wrote announcing that as Botton's General Manager remains on 'compassionate leave', he himself will be managing the community in the interim, in conjunction with Tony Hegarty. While the letter refers to him as 'a very experienced manager', it is unclear what (if any) experience he has in the field of social care. Indeed, he has never been introduced to the community, and his brief as 'Project Manager' never explained. What is known about Mr Hegarty is that he appears to be the author of the now discredited 'Property Consolidation Strategy', which the charity has 'firmly rejected' as 'not appropriate', yet many of the steps detailed in it are being effected already.

CHARITY REBUFFS COMPROMISE

Mr Denny goes on to state that many of Botton's Co-workers are now looking at becoming 'conventional volunteers'. While it is true that we were eager to explore this possibility as a potential short-term compromise solution, the conditions set out by the charity served only to prove again their determination to get rid of us at all costs. In a recent letter to Co-workers, Huw John offered that we could take on a position similar to that held by young Co-workers. He made clear this would entail expenses at about £25 per week, with no access to transport or pension provision, and no long-term security. It would also entail our accepting reduced responsibilities, commensurate with the young Co-workers. You will understand that besides being an entirely inadequate package for a family, this offer is also deeply insulting to a workforce with a collective experience pool second to none in the social care sector. It has now been rejected.

DRASTIC CHANGES

Mr Denny wishes to reduce the issue to one involving 'only 17 life-sharing Co-workers'. In reality, we are 27 long-term Co-workers in life-sharing situations, with a further 12 offering considerable contributions in workshops and community life. There are then a further 35+ young Co-workers, who between them carry a vast number of responsibilities across the village. Overwhelmingly, these young people are telling us that they came for the community / life-sharing experience, and they would have no interest in working in CVT's new managed institutions. The experience of other CVT centres is that young people no longer wish to volunteer under the new arrangements. Consequently, we believe we are looking at the eventual loss of almost 80 long and short term Co-workers, with the profound implications for the village's future.

We are told by CVT that life-sharing will still be possible, and the changes will have only a 'limited impact' on your relative. It should already be clear from the above analysis of Co-worker numbers that CVT's attempts to minimise the likely consequences of the changes are disingenuous to say the least. There is now a considerable body of evidence from CVT's other communities that the impending changes are anything but minimal. Many of you will have read the report by the Centre for Welfare Reform entitled the 'Unintentional Destruction of intentional Communities', which raises profound concerns about the effects of CVT's reforms in its Gloucestershire centres. Elsewhere, in Delrow (Hertfordshire), there is now a powerful campaign being run by a large group of families who believe that the recent loss of the Co-worker community there has had disastrous consequences for their relatives.

UNDERMINING THE CO-WORKERS

Already in Botton, we can see a daily chipping away at the pillars that have supported our community for 60 years. CVT is now appointing new care workers and managers on a weekly basis. Whilst CVT talks about

'maintaining the ethos', their actions tell a different story. For example, they have recently instructed all employees **not** to attend our long-standing Foundation Course induction into Camphill community life, led by Co-workers with decades of experience. CVT's new training appears to make no more than tokenistic references to 'the ethos'.

Botton has a long and proud tradition of embracing employees into our community. This has resulted in an employed workforce that has displayed exceptional commitment and loyalty over the years. In contrast, we are today being overwhelmed by wave after wave of new employees who do not appear to be receiving any strong messages from management about the uniqueness of Camphill, and how it differs from standard care provision. Our homes and our workshops are being invaded by people speaking the language of the care home. One has the sense of a hostile takeover, and many of the residents appear to share our anxieties. Significantly, large parts of the employed workforce are also privately expressing deep disillusionment with the direction of travel. Many observers have the sense that the community is being run into the ground. Even judged on their own terms, the changes CVT are making appear to be creating a Botton that is humanly and financially unsustainable.

Owing to the outcry following the leaking of the Property Consolidation Strategy, CVT's management appear to have been forced to change strategies. They now appear intent on forcibly introducing care workers into Botton homes and then cutting off all financial support to the Co-workers. We are concerned that this tactic is being pushed through despite the clear opposition of many residents. It will be extremely invasive to their homes, and is likely to be deeply unsettling for many.

LEGAL ACTION

In conjunction with families and Co-workers in Delrow and the Grange, and Action for Botton, extensive senior legal advice has been sought over recent months. We believe that we have now constructed a compelling case against the charity. On 12 February, a 'Letter Before Action' was issued by the solicitors Crombie Wilkinson against Camphill Village Trust on behalf of 23 individuals. We are currently assembling a substantial legal fund, and with this we intend to issue proceedings against the charity in the very near future. Our solicitors are requesting that CVT desist from its strategy of moving care workers into Botton homes, which will be prejudicial to any impending action. Any attempt by the charity to do so will be robustly resisted.

THE FUTURE

It is, of course, a tragedy that events have reached this point. We believe this results from the unwavering determination of the charity's management to push through their agenda, to steam-roll all legitimate expressions of concern, and to resist all attempts to explore acceptable compromise solutions. That a major charity is now facing wide-ranging law suits, and mounting national media attention is a very sad state of affairs, and one for which the Board of Trustees will be held accountable.

Even now, the door remains open for *genuine* dialogue. We call on the trustees to take a step back from the brink. We ask them to look at the many thriving non-CVT Camphill communities which manage to maintain the core shared living / volunteer model. They are living proof that it is possible to stay true to our ideals, and still run modern, financially sustainable and legally compliant communities in the 21st Century.

Yours Faithfully,

Botton's 39 permanent Camphill Co-workers