

22 January 2015

Dear Frances,

We have just returned from a lovely evening in Botton. We were invited to join supper and had a delicious meal of freshly baked pizza and salads. Everyone was in high spirits, telling jokes and speaking proudly about their work and hobbies. After supper we sat together, Marcus hammered out a few old tunes on the piano and we joined in when we could remember the words. Afterwards some villagers were keen to show us their rooms, we looked at photo albums, remembered shared times and all in all had a wonderful evening.

We both left with heavy hearts and a tremendous weight of sadness. The house we visited is to be closed and under your consolidation plans, the 'PWS's' will be moved to accommodation more convenient to the trust and the co-workers will have to leave if they do not take up positions of employment. Under the current proposals such employment will reduce the role they play in their community to that of an employed support worker, thereby diminishing or abolishing the integral part they play as equals and co-creators of their community. Under CVT's plans the simple beauty of this evening will be a thing of the past.

Since these unfortunate events began, I have spoken to people from the UK, Ireland, Scotland, America and Germany. Everyone asks the same question "why are they doing it ? ". It's a question I and others find difficult to answer. Even with all the fact sheets, the propaganda videos, the glossy website (you have rebranded the charity without the consultation of those it most concerns) and Huw John's media reassurances, nobody really knows why you are doing this. One by one you have put arguments before us and once unpacked they do not stand up to scrutiny. The co-worker expenses, the tax issues have all proven themselves to be unsubstantiated arguments for the changes. This is confirmed in the latest video when Huw John stated that these changes only apply to CVT communities. In other words you have altered things on the ground in the CVT communities that if continued make these changes necessary.

You have set yourselves on a course of action that will damage the community beyond redemption. and will make it unrecognisable. For some strange reason you feel you have only one course of action to take and have set yourselves on a win/lose if not lose/lose path. It is widely assumed that you Frances are the driving force behind these changes, both in vision and intellectual know how. My asking to speak to you in person was out of a sincere wish to understand your motivation and in doing so, perhaps understand the catastrophic events that are unfolding. I have spoken and communicated with you in total honesty. I have never hid the fact that I might discuss or share my communications with you with others, in the full knowledge that you will do the same with mine. I also stated that I would not share your letters online without your permission which I haven't. You suggested that I use a blog, I would like to clarify that I have never done this. In communicating with you, I have never hidden my motivations or intentions and in doing so have made myself vulnerable. I do not have your training in NVC, Law, management, leadership etc. I do not have an army of professionals behind me, the weight of lawyers, a PR company and huge financial resources at my disposal. I just have a sense of injustice and a wish to uphold the values and the philosophy of a community that I feel is relevant and unique in our times. The balance of power clearly rests with you and I am disappointed that you would not meet personally with me because you are afraid of the consequences.

CVT have an unquestionable confidence in their plans and in executing them their consequentialist approach has shown them to be accountable to no one. The recent video tries to show a utopian future that will be carried by a few faithful smiling employees, fully equipped to carry the community and the ethos through the few difficult months ahead. This confidence is not shared by many and I foresee a different future for Botton once you have control of 'your properties'. I outline this as follows:

- In the beginning you might find enough employees to provide support and care work. This will dwindle when they realise the travel involved, the additional cost of running a car through the country roads and the realisation that there are other support worker jobs available nearer home. The long term supply of carers is not guaranteed in such a rural area where local agencies experience recruitment difficulties.
- Staff reduction policy will eventually reduce the quality of care given to the villagers.
- Young co-workers will come for the next couple of years and then this too will ebb away (They come for community living, shared living with villagers and co-workers, biodynamic farming and gardening, craft workshops and a rich cultural and spiritual life).
- Several of the Geraldts will leave the CVT accommodation when they are in a position to put down a deposit for their own property. This means that there will be few if any non-disabled people making Botton their home and an institution will have successfully been created. CVT will define itself solely as a social care provider losing its identity as an intentional community.
- Only close family members will visit, like in a care home, leaving villagers increasingly isolated
- Some ex co-workers will leave your employment altogether, leaving the farms and workshops without any experienced people to carry them forward.
- No new biodynamic farmers will come to live in Botton as there will be no school for their children and no living community
- The remaining farms and the creamery will close
- The seed workshop will have closed with the eviction of the co-workers, this will be a travesty of international significance.
- No new biodynamic gardeners will come to Botton and the last ones will have left with the eviction of the co-workers.
- There will be no growing of biodynamic vegetables in Botton. Many employed staff may not be familiar with the unusual vegetables grown in Botton and the demand for them will cease
- Rogers House, Stormy Hall, Shepherds Cottage and Nook will either be sold or rented out to generate income
- The store will close as there may be few employees who wish to buy organic products
- As most employees from the local area already have their properties or will buy in their local communities, there will be a surplus of vacant properties. Some will fall into disrepair, others will be sold or rented to unrelated businesses (if such can be found in such a rural environment)
- The donor base will never recover. People donated to Botton because it was different. Already all CVT communications, their website, the new logo, the colours used depict a run of the mill social care provider. The public feels that such provision should be funded by the state.
- The rich social and cultural life of the village that is so unique to the Camphill Model will leave together with the co-workers who live and promote this as an intrinsic part of their community lives. The closure of the eurythmy school is already being felt.
- After a few years and the initial compensatory input, television will be the main provider of culture.
- The land will revert to wilderness in some places, the forestry may not be required as a constant flow of different employees will find the wood heating systems difficult to manage or will not see tending them as part of their job description.
- The church will be funded for a few years but will soon cease to function as the artificially created situation of a congregation made up entirely of learning disabled people will be unsustainable.
- Villagers will leave and some may follow the co-workers to other non CVT communities
- As the cost of co-workers was vastly inflated, CVT will initially declare a victory as co-worker costs will be nil.
- Staffing costs will increase exponentially and bank staff will be required in increasing numbers.
- Costs such as transport and housing which were previously often shared by co-workers will now become the sole responsibility of the villager, making Botton a very expensive place to live.
- Children will no longer be a part of Botton life, if any live in the village, they will not be permitted into villager living space or workshops as this will be considered too high risk and to do so would also create inequality for other employees who have to pay for childcare.

And in 10 years time, people will say "Botton Village, that used to be a community, they used to live together, they had farms and gardens and grew their own veg, it was a fantastic place "

I urge you Frances, before it is too late, to reappraise your actions, use your influence positively to ensure that the Camphill Spirit (in its truest sense) continues to thrive in Botton, so that it may offer a beacon of hope and inspiration for many more generations to come. Show compassion and understanding to the remaining co-workers and their reasons for resistance. In doing so you will recognise that the real hope for Botton lies in the strength that mounts such a resistance and the personal sacrifice these co-workers are prepared to endure for worthy and noble ideals.

I look forward to hearing you and hope that you will reconsider your decision not to meet with me.

Yours Sincerely,
Catherine van Dam