

Letter of Delrow young Co-workers to CVT, 3.7.2014

Dear Mr John.

We are a group of young guest volunteers from Delrow Community. Due to the changes which are happening here since months we are quite concerned about what Delrow is going to be in the future in terms of cultural life, the quality of life for the people who live here as well as the institutionalisation of this place.

Most of the long term volunteers have left by now, either because they got suspended or they did not want to stay here any more in consequence of the way their role and the the spirit of Delrow has changed. This is not surprising because the people who live and lived here, specifically chose to live a lifestyle where you share life, experience community and create a home rather than a care home. And this counts for long term volunteers as well as for the people with special needs and guest volunteers. They all chose a way of living that Delrow cannot provide any more as a result of radical changes.

Besides the fact that we would prefer Delrow as the place it used to be we are also struggling with how difficult the changes make all our lives. The stability within the houses got much weaker with house coordinators leaving which could not be brought back to balance by sending employed staff into the houses because the last months showed that the stability of a house depends mainly on the people who are constantly there and not on the ones who are going when their shift is done.

Unfortunately there often was only a very short transition time between house coordinators leaving and support workers arriving which led to the situation that a lot of weight landed on the guest volunteers shoulders. This also means that some of us suddenly have much more responsibility and have to pick up tasks that where not meant to be done by us before.

We experienced our community life within the houses more like family life before, where everybody gives their share and should be on the same level. Now we often hear people call the residents "clients" or "service users", this is really frustrating because we did not choose to come to Delrow and work as staffers who are only trying to gain the satisfaction of their clients. Due to the fact that we live with the residents we have a relationship on a different level to them which is carried by love and care not only from us to them but also the other way round. This is based on the believe that there should not be any inequality that gives the impression, that the residents need us but we do not need them.

Another big question that comes up is what is going to happen with the cultural life in Delrow. As a place based on the values of Anthroposophy the cultural life in Delrow has a big importance. Especially celebrating festivals creates a feeling of community, a sense of belonging and brings a lot of colour in our lives. These events have been carried by the long term volunteers, who partly lived in Camphill since decades and have a wide knowledge about the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner. But also for many of our people with special needs, these celebrations have a major role in their lives and they seem to gain a lot in it as in enjoying the singing, the plays and more.

And even though some of us guest volunteers have not been in contact with this way of living and celebrating before, we experienced these events as a wonderful part of our time in Delrow.

It will be a big loss if that cannot be maintained in the future and some people, co-workers as well as residents, already expressed their concerns about this.

Also the workshops seem to lose their significance more and more. There is a lot of talk about that residents need more choice, should be more independent and have more possibilities to go out which could happen during the workshop time.

As a part of our daily routine the workshops give us continuity but especially dignity. It is amazing to see how proud most of our people are about the work they do and how annoyed some get, if they once cannot attend their workshop.

Creating things with your own hands gives you the feeling of ability and self esteem, isn't that what we wish for every human to have? So doesn't it make sense that we encourage our residents to see the workshops as something important that needs each one of them to take place and that attending them is their duty like it is our duty as co-workers to do our work? If we want equality for everyone then everyone should have the same standards.

We have the whole weekend to do things, to go out and do something else then during the working week just as people usually have it in their life, so there is no need to use other days for these activities.

It is also a bit confusing that the main aim for our work with people with special needs seems to be their full independence. Somebody who lives a totally independent life is probably lonely and quite self-centred which is the exact opposite of what makes life valuable. There is nothing wrong with not being able to do everything yourself and to be dependent on other people because everyone has something they can do good and that counterbalances things one can't do that well. So isn't it much better to support people's interdependence?

Of course it is good to help people to learn to improve skills, to learn more things and to have the possibility of doing things more independently and if somebody expresses their wish to live on their own than they should have the support to achieve that but generally it seems as if people appreciate to live a shared life where everyone has their role, gives their contribution and receives something in return.

The changes in Delrow happened incredibly fast and that probably made it impossible to consider the full effect it would have on the people who live in Delrow and it obviously raises a lot of questions and concerns. We do not really know who we should refer to with that because we were used to just talk to our house coordinators in the past but the few who are left are in the same situation now of not really knowing what is going to happen next and where it is leading to. So when we saw your letter that invited to write you in case of any concerns, we thought that may be the best way to make ourselves heard.

Yours sincerely,