

Hedehjem
High Street
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26 July 2014

Frances Wright
The Kingfisher Offices
9 Saville Street
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Dear Frances,

Firstly I would like to express my appreciation for the time you took out of your day on Friday 3 July to listen to my concerns. I hope I managed to convey to you my deep love and concern for the Camphill movement and especially for the future of Botton Village. Whilst a lot has happened since our meeting I would like to reiterate the salient and pertinent points of our conversation which I feel remain urgent for you and CVT to address.

Discussed was the current (and I believe flawed) driving force in CVT to exclusively serve the interests of the beneficiaries. By beneficiaries you mean the villagers. Camphill has never existed for the sole purpose of providing care for those with a learning disability. Whilst the movement stemmed from a group of socially conscious people responding to an urgent need to provide a haven for those with learning disability, explicit also in their endeavours was a wish to create communities committed to social renewal. Camphill Communities strive to enrich the spiritual, social and cultural lives of their own communities and the world at large. They are ecological communities dedicated to environmental sustainability most notably through their approach to the land. The holistic approach to life and work, encompassing aspects as diverse as farming , gardening, building, nutrition , education, medicine , culture, crafts and last but not least their love and care of the person with learning disabilities makes them increasingly relevant in today's society. The co-workers who join these communities do so out of a sense of vocation and out of a commitment to furthering this impulse. Their place and living presence in the Botton community and their role in creating a living and functioning village is essential in the manifestation of the Camphill vision. CVT's and Mr Knowles and more recently Huw Johns's (on look North) continued reiteration to villagers, families and the public that nothing will change and that all can continue as before is an untruth which I feel you need to correct. Not being honest with those whom your changes most affect is belittling and with respect to the villagers is a breach of the Mental Capacity Act.

The CVT does not have a sole responsibility to serve the interests of the 'beneficiaries' as they consistently cite but has equal responsibility to the co-workers who dedicate their lives to the communities. This moral (and I can also imagine legal if challenged) responsibility CVT has towards co-workers needs to be conveyed to all co-workers and unambiguously stated in all communications to all stakeholders, most importantly villagers and families. Anything less is a serious abdication of responsibility and is either a glaring admission of their lack of knowledge of Camphill or illustrates their true position in relation to its values. By responsibility I do not mean giving co-workers an

ultimatum of either employment or financial assistance to leave; I mean engaging with them in an honest, open and compassionate way, from a position of equality and a true and sincere wish to understand their position and achieve a mutually beneficent and satisfying solution. When we discussed this, I believe that you too were moved by the plight of the co-workers, especially when considering that some of the founding member of Botton and the CVT still live in the village, alongside others who have devoted decades of their lives to the creation of the amazing community that Botton is today . I asked you to equally allow voice to the recently arrived, those enthusiastic and vibrant new families who have moved countries to carry the Camphill impulse into the future.

I requested a copy of the Complaints Procedure and Bullying and Harassment policy because the reply I had from CVT following my letter did not address any of the concerns raised. I also have good reason to believe (with numerous examples cited) that Mr David Knowles the current manager in Botton is divisive and exclusionary in his approach and that many co-workers and some villagers feel bullied, silenced and intimidated by him. He has been known to shout and use abusive language. His aggressive approach to me both in his office and again at the open day confirms this. As the manager of Botton Village, Mr Knowles (who is paid a very generous salary) needs to be able to address competently the considerable concerns raised by your proposed changes, especially those by local people who have grown to know and love Botton over the years. As you are a long standing advocator of non-violent communication and the human resources manager for CVT, I can only hope that his actions and approach go contrary to your beliefs and values and that you will see fit to address this issue with him. I would also like to add that his chastisement of me and the theft of the leaflets I was distributing at open day (witnessed and confirmed by Andy Paton and his wife Dorothea) seriously jeopardises the repudiation and creditability of both himself and the CVT. It was out of a spirit of generosity and a wish to remain engaged with you that I/we chose not to pursue this legally. None the less an apology would be welcome.

I highlighted to you that CVT is proceeding with the recruitment process with an increasing sense of desperation. You are in the midst of the biggest dispute and crisis in your history, one that potentially threatens the very existence of the CVT and /or may result in Botton Village - your founding community demerging from the trust. In spite of this and you appear to carry on with relentless zeal and little appreciation of the risks. Having failed to gain the trust of the majority of co-workers you are prepared to recruit from a very small pool of potential applicants. I highlighted to you that you may not be recruiting the best people. You acknowledge this but stated you can only work with those who are available. I have reason to believe that you/ CVT are making promises to this limited group of co-workers which you cannot and perhaps should not deliver upon. It is possible that these co-workers feel vulnerable and fearful and are not fully informed about the full consequences of employment for themselves and their children. CVT's and especially Mr Knowles's attempts to create division among the co-worker body only serves to isolate them from their fellow co-workers.

We discussed the substantial risk inherent in CVT's master plan of creating an isolated moorland ghetto of learning disabled people. When the living presence of the co-workers is removed so too are a large amount of visitors to the village. My experience of living in Botton is that the villagers relished these visitors. Unfortunately the general public does not visit a care home for the afternoon and this will make the village and villagers increasingly isolated and vulnerable. The continuous stream of visitors invited to share in the life of the village not only provided a rich social life for

everyone but I also believed such an open and transparent approach is the single most effective strategy in protecting the vulnerable adult – far greater than the most compliant of documentation .

We discussed the immeasurable asset co-workers are. Not only do they provide continuity and stability but on the whole they are an educated and talented cohort of people with an inspirational and creative approach to life and work. They are your greatest asset! Concern regarding the low wages that CVT are offering (slightly above the minimum) was also raised and one which you stated you shared. I believe you will not attract and retain the calibre of employee in the numbers that Botton requires to deliver the quality of life (social, cultural and spiritual) and care that is the hallmark of Camphill. The valuable contribution employees have made to Botton life over the years is acknowledged by everyone; however, they are not and cannot be expected as is suggested by the CVT to carry the festival and cultural life of the community in a voluntary capacity. This is no reflection on them as individuals but a recognition that as an employee with a direct separation between home and work, life takes place elsewhere. Confirming this reality was the notable lack of contribution on open day from Botton's and CVT's senior management and you are the most highly paid employees who could most afford financially to give voluntarily of your time. This becomes impossibility for low paid shift workers juggling childcare. You will appreciate the insurmountable issues of inequality employment raises with respect to community living. The valuing of one persons efforts as lower than the efforts of another runs contrary to one of the basic tenets of Camphill life – equality.

I asked you to explain CVT's rationale for not releasing the legal opinion on which CVT's decision to enforce employment is based. My understanding of your answer was that to do so could make the trust liable for a considerable backdated tax payment if co-workers were deemed to have been employees all along. We acknowledged the definition of a co-worker as a 'vocational employee' for the purposes of tax and I stated that the CVT must act within the law and pay any tax it may owe. I encouraged you to release the legal opinion without delay or else acknowledge that you have a moral and ethical responsibility to provide financial means to the co-workers in Botton to seek their own. I put it to you that in consultation with HMRC, CVT you asked the 'wrong question'. and I challenged you to return to the table with HMRC and the charity commission and ask the 'right' question, i.e. 'As the Camphill Village Trust we are committed to retaining the co-worker model, can you advise us of the measures we need to take to ensure we are compliant with the Trevett opinion and charity commission requirements? The conversation we had looked specifically at Botton's situation and it may be necessary to consider the Botton situation separate from the other CVT communities.

We discussed the issue of excessive spending by some co-workers as this is a point often raised by the CVT with the intention I believe to discredit co-workers. I advised you that co-workers do not take a vow of poverty when joining a community but rather their needs are met from the collective effort of the whole community. If indeed there was excessive spending by some co-workers, this needs to be seen in the context of the 'spirit of abundance' that I believe exists in Camphill (this exists independent of financial means) and also the very privileged financial position Botton found itself in until quite recently. Very few of us deliver on our ideals all the time and this is human nature, nevertheless I believe that the vast majority of co-workers live in the spirit of vocational employees.

I recently represented the co-workers (the majority who do not support your plans) at the open meeting held in the village hall in Danby. They fear serious repercussions if they are seen to speak out. As you know by now the hall was packed and the evening was very inspiring and moving. It was truly heart warming to see the local community turn out to support the village with an unprecedented 100% support given to the cause. CVT's absence was noted and seen as cowardice.

Botton is a living village with a vibrant community at its heart. It has a glowing and wonderful future as a Camphill Community relevant in the 21st century whilst nurturing in founding principles. It cannot be turned into a care home with frills and perks. I ask you Frances not to be responsible for such destruction. When researching your interests on the internet I came across your name sake – the Scottish Frances Wright born in 1795, she is described as a freethinker, social reformer and utopian. I wish you some of her vision in your approach to the difficulties ahead. I look forward to hearing your response to these comments and hope for honest and open discussion that will serve the interests of all the beneficiaries of Botton Village.

'I have wedded the cause of human improvement, staked on it my fortune, my reputation and my life' (Frances Wright).

Yours in hope

Catherine van Dam