

Botton Village
Danby
Whitby
North Yorkshire
YO21 2NJ

To Members of the Camphill Village Trust

1 August 2014

Dear friends

We are writing to express our grave misgivings at the direction in which the CVT trustees and executive are taking the charity which we believe will lead to loss of the core aspects of what makes it Camphill.

We do not say this lightly, or to be alarmist, but from a sober viewpoint based on facts and recent trends which CVT has adopted, despite many pleas to negotiate a more appropriate course of action and outcome. This letter will try to point out some of these concerns, which we have detailed below.

Consultation. As in any Camphill community, our primary focus is the welfare of those we live with. The proposed changes to their way of life are profound, yet despite major events designed to elicit their views (Search Conference 2011, Groundswell Report 2013, Our Lives 2014), their voices are still being ignored. They chose to join a community in which life-sharing with Camphill co-workers and their families is a central feature, and repeatedly expressed this preference unequivocally in the above events, but that choice is still denied them. This is a flagrant disregard of their human rights.

Centralisation. Over the years we have seen a gradual distancing of the Board of Trustees from the centres. However, since the appointment of executive managers, this centralising tendency has accelerated rapidly. Decision-making was once part of the involvement of co-worker trustees but now rests in the hands of a small, unelected group of officers, recruited largely from the field of social care, with little knowledge or experience of Camphill. The Board relies on the guidance of this executive and has felt it necessary to reduce its numbers from 15 members to 9, none of whom is a resident co-worker.

Hierarchy. With this centralisation has come a top-down hierarchical management structure where formerly the communities were governed by horizontal, consensus-driven decision-making groups. Since the advent of this hierarchy, CVT communities are now subject to a form of management that does not recognise community as a defining Camphill trait. Instead, almost every aspect of life is judged against a market-driven business outlook: community must be made a commercial business.

Employment. On May 13th, CVT gave an ultimatum to all co-workers that they must either give up their volunteer status or leave the charity. It was a devastating blow. Many have spent much or all of their working lives in the communities. Now, they will no longer be able to work for the good of others, guided by experience or prompted by conscience, but instead must accept a contract of employment defined by the limitations of a job description. The ideal of working in freedom for one's fellows is no longer an option. This is a crucial concern for it is the motive which nurtures and sustains a Camphill co-worker.

Further, employed co-workers have been told they will no longer be able to live a shared way of life as formerly with villagers. Nor will co-worker children be allowed with their parents when working. Hence the intricate matrix of human relationships between villager and co-worker families is to be abolished.

Co-workers have thus been disenfranchised and effectively disempowered from their former guiding role as key elements in co-creating with their disabled colleagues the future of their community. At a stroke this changes the entire nature of the charity and the role which co-workers play, and is therefore unacceptable.

Memorandum and Articles. The clause in the Memorandum and Articles describing anthroposophical aspects of the CVT 'charter' makes specific reference to the relationship between co-worker and company. It states:

Rigidity in the matter of control should be avoided and the closest liaison should be maintained between all those responsible for the administration of the Charity and its community or communities in their everyday life.

and

... community members are bound together by will and personal commitment, not by legal constructs, meaning, for beneficiaries, any form of compulsion and for co-workers the rights and obligations of contract.

Taken in conjunction with the employment ultimatum, this clearly shows that CVT is prepared to ignore the spirit of its own charitable framework, which is a further cause of deep concern.

For these reasons the co-workers in Botton felt compelled to declare publicly that they cannot support the actions of Camphill Village Trust. Their declaration was made public on July 24th, and is as follows:

Declaration

We, the undersigned co-workers of Botton Village, have no confidence in those now in control of CVT, or the direction in which they are taking our community.

We believe CVT's actions are:

- Not justified by any legal imperative
- Not in the best interests of the people we support
- Not in the spirit of the charity's own charter
- Not wished for by the majority of residents, families or co-workers
- Not financially viable

CVT has rejected or ignored every appeal by every stakeholder calling on them to engage constructively to find an acceptable alternative solution. Consequently, we have no choice but to make this public declaration:

While our commitment to the wellbeing of our people and our legal obligations remain paramount,
we will not co-operate with CVT in pursuing its disastrous re-structuring strategy.

* * *

In conclusion, we sincerely hope that all members of the charity will make clear their opposition to the present direction in which CVT is going. The issue is urgent and we appeal to your active concern for the charity we have all helped to build and nurture over almost 60 years. It is too precious to lose.

We hope to write to you as and when appropriate to keep you abreast of this fluid but critical situation. If you would prefer to be contacted by email, please let us know. You can either write to me at the above address or reach me via email at: nickpoole22@gmail.com

With best wishes



Nicholas Poole
on behalf of CVT Members in Botton

P.S. Further information can be found on the website www.actionforbotton.org