

Nick Assirati, 12, Sheens Meadow, Newnham, Glos., GL14 1BP

4/2/14

Dear CVT Trustees,

I am writing to express my concern that Oaklands Park is now no longer a Camphill Community in any true sense, and I fear that The Grange will follow a similar fate within months.

I believe that the fundamental issue threatening the future of CVT is that the trustees have unilaterally decided to ignore the CVT Memorandum and Articles of Association (MAA) in order to be 'compliant' with legislation in the eyes of the local authority. Oaklands Park is now a 'compliant' care home with a farm – but what are the consequences of this approach to 'compliance'?

In Oaklands Park there are no children (*i*). There is no spiritual, social or cultural renewal taking place (*ii*). The Camphill household model no longer exists in Oaklands Park (*iii*). There is no commitment to Steiner principles in education, medicine or the three-fold social order. There's nothing wrong with this approach if this form of 'compliance' is the main goal - as appears to be the objective of the trustees – it is simply not Camphill.

When Huw John was asked why the MAA was not being used as a basic plan for the future of Camphill he dismissed it as "a document written fifty years ago" (*iv*). If one assumes that CVT's constitution is defined by the MAA then the management and trustees are steering a clear course away from this in the pursuit of perceived 'compliance'.

The Trustees have unilaterally decided that of the five categories of 'beneficiaries' stated in the MAA (*v*) that "in practice" only those with a mental disability will be considered as such (*vi*). This decision has been made with no mandate from the members.

CVT trustees regularly refer to the 'Strategic Plan' which is based on the 'In Control' report produced in 2012. This report is fundamentally flawed in that it makes no reference to the MAA, and only mentions Christianity and Anthroposophy once in passing. The report demeans the co-worker contribution (*vii*) and effectively calls for more management and employed staff, but astonishingly does this without taking into account any costing whatsoever (*viii*).

If CVT Trustees want the honey, they had better stop killing all the bees.

The CVT worked very well indeed in the past with a 'federal' structure as opposed to a 'hierarchical' structure. The drawing in of power to the centre and the consequential bureaucratic costs in financial terms, but also in human terms has been a disaster that spells the end of a Steiner/Konig philosophy in favour of political correctness. Camphill has become a weather vane rather than a signpost.

Dissent is not tolerated. When CVT members voted against a change in the CVT constitution in 2012, the vote was re-taken after members were threatened with expulsion if they voted against the proposal a second time (*ix*).

On Monday 11th March 2013 The Grange LMC (Local Management Committee) met with CVT managers (*x*) and questioned the appalling treatment of co-workers in the draconian and inappropriate interpretation of the suspension policy. In particular they questioned the legality of the actions of CVT managers in this context and the subsequent breaching of human rights legislation (*xi*) in the summary expulsion and enforced social ostracising of co-workers. The Grange LMC was not given sufficient time to examine the relevant report (which they were neither allowed to preview nor retain) and so requested a second meeting wherein their concerns could be addressed. On the next day, 12th March 2013 The Grange LMC was disbanded by CVT (*xii*).

In my opinion there are two contrasting views;

1) The Family model

If a family member requires care, then a son, daughter or other family member will do whatever needs doing to look after them, be it washing, toileting or simply spending time with that person. No forms are completed, no boxes are ticked, and no managers are required. The care comes from love, not legislation.

2) The Welfare model

In this model, care is commissioned from low-paid workers to wash, toilet and be with those in need as long as there are funds to do so. Many forms and risk assessments are completed managers and accountants are required and the care must be monitored to be sure that no abuse happens. The care comes from legislation, not love.

The Family Model (1) above is the 'old Camphill' way (i.e. The Camphill Household Model). It is not and never has been perfect - sometimes things may go wrong, but things also went very right indeed and Camphill's reputation for excellent, high quality care was built on this model. It was also comparatively inexpensive and was thus financially (as well as socially) sustainable because community members shared resources. It is a system built on interdependence, not independence. Research and common sense both show that the basis of a happy and fulfilled life is rooted in social interconnectedness and sharing - not hedonistic materialism or selfishness.

The Welfare Model (2) is a much more common version in the UK and is the one implemented by CVT management. The system attempts to ensure that nothing bad can happen (but sometimes does) however; nothing particularly good can happen either. Despite the best efforts of staff, the quality of care is mediocre at best. What is more, the financial costs are high – probably unsustainably so.

CVT managers have worked hard to make Camphill compliant and in doing so have reverted to the mainstream model they know best (model 2). The result is 'compliant' and 'safe' (to a point). What it's not is Camphill.

CVT managers are not bad people; they just implement a bad system. CVT trustees could step back and look at alternatives. Systems analyst consultants such as

‘Vanguard’ (*xiii*) could assist CVT to make sense of the paradigms behind the current mess, whereby the tail is busy wagging the dog.

Camphill families and Friends (when asked) “strongly urge(d)” CVT Trustees and management to consider the following aspects; Intentional communities, Steiner philosophy, The Camphill Household Model and the importance of co-workers (*xiv*).

I believe that CVT trustees have four choices;

- 1) Continue on the present course. Accept that Steiner/Konig principles are subordinate to ‘compliance’. Continue haemorrhaging co-workers, employ more managers (on high wages) and employ carers (on low wages). Use the CVT name and reputation to pretend we are something we are not. In this path lies the future destruction of CVT.
- 2) Continue on the present course. Accept that Steiner/Konig principles are subordinate to ‘compliance’. Continue haemorrhaging co-workers, employ more managers (on high wages) and employ carers (on low wages). Be honest and forget any reference to Steiner or Anthroposophy completely, thus becoming a legally ‘compliant’ but sterile, run of the mill care facility with some farms and workshops. Rename the organisation and remove all references to Camphill, Steiner or Konig. At least this would be truthful.
- 3) Step back and gain a better perspective. Look again at the Government white paper which makes specific allowance for ‘Intentional Communities’ (*xv*) and argue the case for the original CVT model, based on the ‘Family model’ as one that gives better quality care that is sustainable from a social, environmental and financial point of view. Less Chiefs (managers), more Indians (co-workers).
- 4) Break up CVT. Disband central trustees and management. De-centralise and let communities set up their own trustees and management. The communities could then co-operate with each other or not as they wish.

The radical choices 3 & 4 above will both result in a massive reduction in management costs, so beware – no turkeys will be voting for Christmas any time soon.

Nick Assirati (CVT member, former co-worker, volunteer and employee)

cc. Mary Pearson and anyone else who cares about CVT.

NOTES

- (i) In 1997 there were 25 children in Oaklands Park. In 2014 there are none.
- (ii) The Christian Community chapel in Oaklands Park closed in 2013.
- (iii) This is despite a plea from Camphill Family and Friends (CFF) to retain it - In Control report 2012 - Appendix C.
- (iv) Family forum held at Oaklands Park 26th March 2013.
- (v) The CVT Memorandum and Articles of Association clearly define 'beneficiaries' as "...*people with a disability (whether mental or physical), the young, the old, or people otherwise in need...*"
- (vi) Letter from Chris Cook to Max White (undated - received 17th April 2013). Also, see In Control report 2012 p.38.
- (vii) "In our view, retaining a form of co-working is possible and *may* be desirable in *some* of the communities" (my italics) - In Control report 2012 – p.9.
"The view of the review team is that a 'traditional' co-worker model is not sustainable" - In Control report 2012 – p.39.
- (viii) "We understand that there may also be issues about financial viability though we were not asked to explore this" - In Control report 2012 p.39.
- (ix) Letter from Chris Cook to CVT members 5th December 2012.
- (x) Meeting of Grange LMC with Mark Denny and Frances Wright 11/3/13.
- (xi) Articles 8 and 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights detailing the right to a home and family life, and to freedom of association.
- (xii) The Grange LMC was summarily dismissed by e-mail to the chairman (only) on 12th March 2013.
- (xiii) www.vanguard-method.com
- (xiv) CFF submission to CVT review 6th September 2012
(In Control review Appendix C).
- (xv) "*Local councils should therefore ensure that all housing options are considered when they are exploring the future housing, care and support needs of people with learning disabilities and their families... These options should include small-scale ordinary housing, supported living and village and intentional communities as well as residential care. None of these should be ruled out.*" HM Government White Paper 'Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability' for the 21st Century' (Ch.7) issued 2001.