

Newsflash... East Berkshire Losing its Mind

It was with shock and a sense of dread that I first heard the news that East Berkshire Mind was to cease trading on the 31st of March. The first rumour I heard was that the Sunrise Centre was to close on the 31st, but this was a Chinese whisper (at least I hope it was). The staff of Sunrise, Laura with 2 years experience and Rosa with 7 years experience have kindly volunteered to run the centre until a new management can be chosen.

There are now a number of choices open to the Council.

1. Take Laura and Rosa on as contractors on a 6 month renewable contract. They have been running Sunrise for years and know what they're doing. There would be no break in service, Sunrise would not have to close.
2. Recruit new staff. This would take time and Sunrise would probably have to CLOSE until the staff were recruited. ONCE SUNRISE WAS CLOSED, MANY OF US SUSPECT IT WOULD NOT BE REOPENED. It would appear to be council policy to close daycentres - their current plan to close the Phoenix Centre is evidence of this.
3. Call in an agency. This would be far more expensive than keeping Laura and Rosa. They would be paying more for less experienced staff with little knowledge of their clients.
4. Appoint another service provider on a temporary basis. I'm unsure of the legality of this in terms of the tendering process. This too would be more expensive than keeping Laura and Rosa.
5. Get some CMHT staff to run it.

CMHT are overworked as it is, could they manage with even less staff? We're not sure if NHS / Council regulations would allow this anyway.



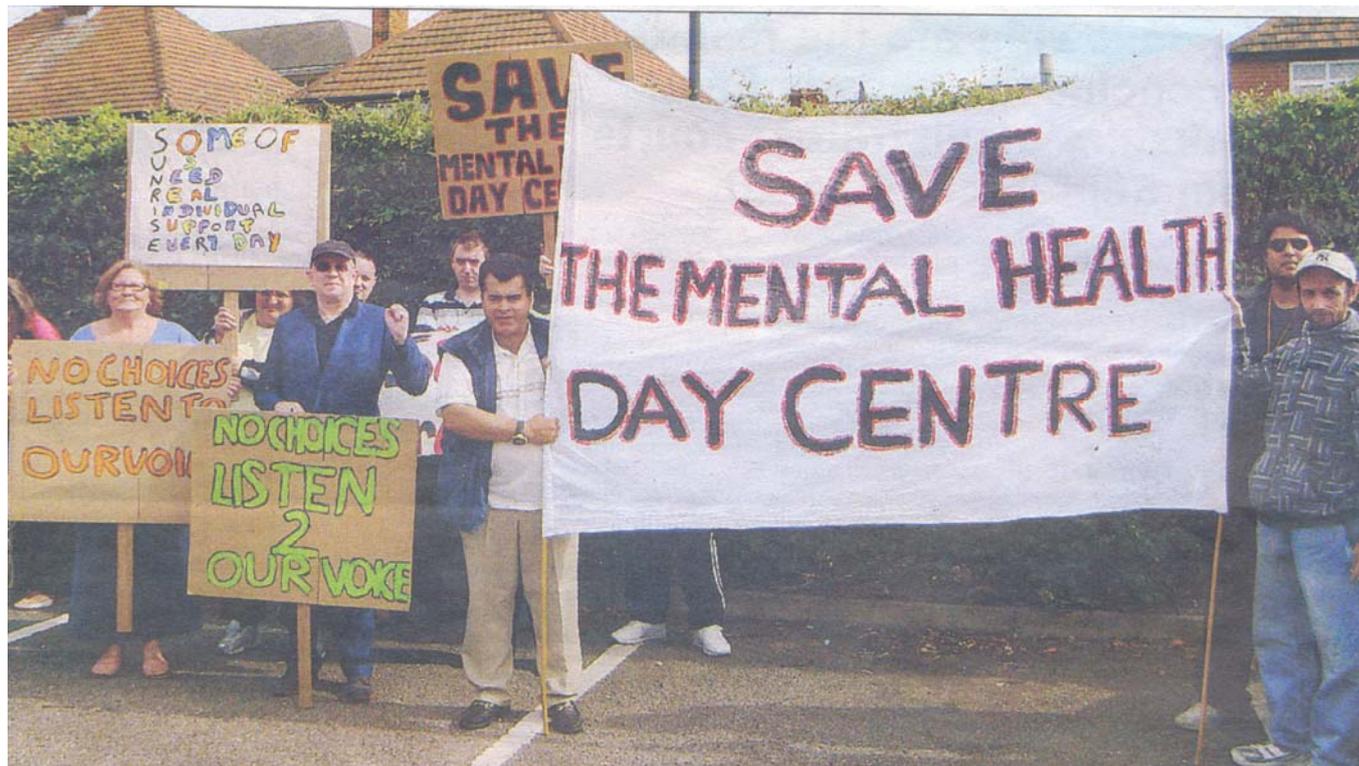
We sincerely hope that the staff who have kept Sunrise running for many years are recognised as the best people to run it for the next few months until the new management are chosen. This will be the best solution for service users as we have been chopped and changed enough already. Insecurity, anxiety and depression about the future can do no good for our mental health. It will allow Laura and Rosa more time to look for new jobs. We also believe it will allow the council to provide a better service within the current budget as 2 workers are cheaper than a service provider.

Had MIND survived the £20000 cut in its budget we understand that Laura and Rosa would have been offered jobs under the new management. If they're prepared to run Sunrise in our time of greatest need, we believe their commitment to us should be recognised and they should still be offered jobs with the new management, it's only fair.

Why is East Berkshire Mind closing? Losing the Windsor, Maidenhead and Bracknell contracts can't have helped. The uncertainty in Slough which meant agency workers had to be hired had to be a drain on finances. The £20000 cut in their budget was a nail in the coffin. The thought of having to manage with even less money under a personalised system must have seemed like a recipe for bankruptcy. When the tender process gets going it will be entirely possible that ReThink will be 'last man standing'. This should improve their bargaining position as their bid will certainly be the most competitive (with no other bidders). There has been talk that Together might bid for the contract but nothing definite as yet.

The Management have made statements that there will be no sudden closure of Sunrise leaving us without a service. Keeping Laura and Rosa on is the best way of keeping that promise. A lengthy recruitment process involving closure of Sunrise would break that promise and leave us roaming the streets with nowhere to go, risking verbal and physical abuse from feral kids who'll attack anyone who looks a bit vulnerable. Some of us will realise it's safer to just stay at home. No doubt 'The Shock of The New' will see many of us damaged, admitted to crowded hospital wards, self harming and worse. The home treatment team will bear the brunt of this due to the shortage of hospital beds and may be unable to cope with the increased workload - not a pretty picture. Come on Slough Borough Council, hire Laura and Rosa, you know it makes sense.

Statement From Sunrise Club User Group



We the Sunrise Service Users Group are deeply concerned about maintaining the future of the Sunrise Centre in it's present form as a place of refuge, and vital support for seriously, mentally disabled citizens.

Every intended outcome, listed in the Service Specification of August 2008 points to a world in which the Sunrise Centre would not exist. The very concept of "care in the community" runs counter to the idea of providing targeted services, where seriously mentally disabled people can enter a protected environment designed for their needs.

Such disabled people may look different from ordinary people or have behaviour patterns, modes of dress and other behavioural disorders that make them frightening or unacceptable to a significant number of ordinary people. A significant number may reveal anger or contempt at the disabled and this may extend to threatening and abusive behaviour.

Under the circumstances, we should like confirmation from you that full funding will continue for the Sunrise Centre in order that services users may be assured that the present opening times and format will continue irrespective of Direct Payments, with possible improvements to the service already in existence.

If the Sunrise Centre was closed, where would the aforementioned people go?

It is not good enough to suggest walking around the Town, Libraries and Bowling Alleys etc.

Under the veil of not stigmatising the disabled, people with a financial or budgeting motive may show utter disregard for the reality of exposing seriously ill people to the demands of the "normal" world. As a result, they will remain in their homes because the one lifeline available to them has been removed.

"Sunrise Club User Group" supported by Diana Coad, Slough Borough Councillor and Prospective MP for Slough.