



Moreton Day Centre

A report on the consultation on the proposed closure of
Moreton Day centre

This document has been collated by Mencap and on June 4th was presented by Mencap Regional Campaigns Officer Stephen John to Wirral borough Council. It outlines the concerns by Mencap and more importantly families, care providers and people with a learning disability directly affected by the proposed changes to Moreton day centre adult social care day service provision.

Mencap is the leading voice of learning disability. Everything we do is about valuing and supporting people with a learning disability, and their families and carers.

Our vision is a world where people with a learning disability are valued equally, listened to and included. We want everyone to have the opportunity to achieve the things they want out of life.

This report was compiled by Stephen John, a regional campaigns officer in the North of England for the Royal Mencap Society.

Mencap campaigns for disability equality for people with a learning disability and encompasses disability hate crime, health, leisure, respite, abuse and more.

An ever increasing campaign demand is placed upon local authority budget cuts. Given the economic situation and the reduction of funding given from central government to local government, it is understandable that cuts need to be made. However, often the local authority places cuts in adult social care, to monies that provide people with a learning disability with an all important and essential assistance.

Mencap also has over 600 local groups. These are independent charities with a close affiliation to Royal Mencap. Wirral Mencap has assisted in the preparation of this document

Wirral Mencap provides an outreach and office based advice and information service, social opportunities for adult with learning disabilities, and more.

Wirral Mencap and Royal Mencap share the ethos of working with people with a learning disability, their parents and carers, to create equality and gain access to society.

In March of 2013 Mencap was contacted by Wirral Mencap, who in turn had been contacted by parents and carers of people who attend day centres within Wirral.

Working in Partnership with Wirral Mencap, Royal Mencap met with parents and carers representing people who attend each of the day centres and who had requested assistance. The parents and carers were extremely concerned about a consultation that was in process and incorporated council services that encompassed not only adult social care but also services that affected every household.

Initial feeling from families was that this first consultation was too generic. It sought response from people who live in the local area and asked their opinions on a variety of services. Most people do not have a close relationship with an attendee of a learning disability specific day centre and so the concern centred on a general response in relation to the general public's own needs.

Further to this consultation the local authority identified that a day centre was to close. This spread unease and trepidation among the families of people who attend the day centres and of course the attendees themselves.

Mencap was contacted by a great number of people who wanted to take up the campaign to retain such provision. At this point, the local authority had not identified, or certainly not communicated, which day service was their "preferred" choice to close. Immediately, Mencap had people who attend the day centres and their families contacting us to stress their concern. The general agreement of the families who contacted us, totalling over 40 at this point, was that the local authority were not only targeting the vulnerable but also pitting one centre against another. From the outset, this put pressure on the relationship between families and the local authority.

When the local authority made it clear that their 'preferred' choice of closure would be Moreton day service, there was very little relief among parents of those attending other centres as through the campaign groups, a unity had formed. There was also great concern that this was the first of many future consultations on day service provision and that in the upcoming years, the local authority was going to be pushing toward personalisation and thus, other centres would follow the path of Moreton.

For those who attend Moreton and their families, the news was catastrophic. Without delay Mencap was inundated with people tremendously concerned over their loved ones.

The local authority did release a further consultation document pertaining to the day centre closure but this did not communicate effectively the alternate options available should the centre close. Many concerns centred on people not having a centre to attend and thus becoming more isolated from society. Parents who had seen provision gradually increase to the interactive, social, educational and positive service they had long campaigned for, were now in fear of their work being undone.

Families, when requesting information on alternate options were told there would be sufficient provision in other day centres or that a more personalised option would be available.

Although the local authority did produce a consultation document, parents, carers and attendees of Moreton day centre feel that not enough has been done to consult people with a learning disability.

There has not been an adequate easy read document made available and there was and is much confusion among attendees. The document formed by the local authority was too text heavy and used wording that was not accessible to many people with a learning disability. Of course, producing an easy read document is just the first stage of an accessible consultation.

As mentioned by Wirral Mencap;

"There must be adequate support available to enable people to complete the consultation and it must be marketed in the right way to ensure that people with a learning disability can access it".

Unfortunately it is felt that the consultation of people with a learning disability fell short.

Most who attend Moreton day centre do not realise their much cherished social and care outlet could be lost, and for those who do realise the centre could close there is little understanding about what the options would be and what it would mean for them.

Those who attend Moreton day centre are among the most disabled in the community, yet at Moreton each person is treated on an individual level. Their needs are met and indeed the attendees 'vote with their feet' and happily attend.

People with a learning disability can often feel lonely and isolated. They are often ostracised by the community due to an inaccessibility of provision and a lack of understanding by society.

Although Mencap actively campaigns for a more inclusive community where people with a learning disability are fully included and valued, there is still a plethora of work to undertake and still much adaptation needed by society for people with a learning disability to have full access.

Mencap champions personalisation and the autonomy for people with a learning disability to access activities in the community but unfortunately there are not enough fully accessible, cost effective activities in the local community that will be accessible for many people.

Personal budgets can and do offer flexibility but in general, there are limits in society on the level of accessibility which excludes many people with a learning disability, including the vast proportion of those who attend Moreton.

Although the merits of personalisation can clearly be seen for many, Mencap is and always will be an advocate for choice. For reasons including familiarity, inclusion and accessibility, many people with a learning disability choose to attend a day centre and where that provision is modern and proactive, as is Moreton, Mencap fully supports this.

Cost and accessibility of activities aside, there are also other issues to consider. According to Mencap statistics, disability hate crime affects 9 out of every 10 people with a learning disability. Transport services are not as easily accessed for people with a learning disability or physical disability. There is not adequate availability of changing facilities (changing places toilets) in the local vicinity with only two registered on the whole of Wirral. (www.changing-places.org/)

Wirral borough council have indicated that personal budgets could be an alternative to day centre provision. This option is not applicable to the majority who attend Moreton day centre. The attendees are among those with the most complex and substantial needs in Wirral and have substantial needs due to their learning disability. Indeed many have additional disabilities such as epilepsy.

There has been little information forthcoming about activities accessible in the community that would be appropriate.

For many people, a push toward personalisation may impact adversely on their life and this is simply not acceptable.

Members of a carers group worked with Mencap to ascertain which activities were accessible, timely and cost effective in the local community. The list was laconic. Attending the cinema or going for a meal were not cost effective and would be limited, attending the leisure centre or a bowling alley would not be accessible for most due to insufficient lighting, a lack of specialised facilities and use by the general public. Appropriate lighting, accessible toilets, quiet activities, transportation, cost and more are all factors that need to be addressed and have not yet or if they have, information is sparse. There is also the issue of safeguarding individuals.

In an ideal world, society would be accessible and people with a learning disability would have access to adequate “mainstream” provision integrating with people who are not disabled. However, society continues to disable these people and prohibit inclusion.

The Equality Act 2010 defines a person as disabled if they have

“a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”.

Everyday leisure activities that most people have access to are not accessible for many Moreton attendees outside of the support they receive at the centre.

Activities such as shopping would not be acceptable as a regular substitute, going for walks would be dependent on the weather and there are not enough enjoyable, accessible, cost effective alternatives such as art classes, music sessions and more. Society does not yet have the reasonable adjustments required for those with more profound needs, such as those who attend Moreton day centre.

Moreton day centre continues to provide support and activities that are educational, enjoyable and modern with support that is exemplary. Any push toward personalisation for its members is a step in the wrong direction and one which will inhibit the lives of those involved.

Moreton Day service

Some 133 people attend Moreton day centre and receive a thorough and enjoyable service which, instead of being identified for closure, should be heralded for its positivity of service.

For those who attend Moreton day centre, it provides not only a sense of support, leisure and belonging, but is also an integral part of their lives.

Mencap created an easy read document to gauge opinions on what people really felt about Moreton day centre. In response, a total of 38 people with a learning disability voiced their opinions. Their families and carers supported the completion of the accessible easy read document.

The consultation found the following:

- 100% of people who responded enjoyed attending Moreton Day Centre
- 100% of people were happy with the staff at Moreton Day Centre

Moreton day centre should be celebrated for its tenure and for its modern approach in an era where many day centres have closed or been panned for closure. In many of those cases the aforementioned centres have not been adequate and perhaps required closure for a better quality of life for its attendees. However, in the case of Moreton people are voting with their feet and find great worth and enjoyment in attending. The service provided is exemplary and much cherished by those who attend and their families. The centre should be held as an example of best practice for its social opportunities, attentive and personable staff and absolute ideal location.

Having successfully consulted 40 attendees with a learning disability, many points have been raised.

Among the points raised by people with a learning disability are:

“the staff are friendly and very helpful to me when I need them. The centre is excellent”

“Moreton is where I meet my friends and where I can be a person like anyone else”

“I do lots of good things. I meet my friends and we do social things together. I like the café and the horticulture unit. I feel very safe and very happy where I am. I don't think I could do good things outside the centre on my own. I don't want to”

“I love all the staff at Moreton. They make us all very happy and teach us things to do. They help us in the community. I like being with my friends and staff from the centre when we visit the community.”

“I would be very upset if my centre closed. I love going to the centre”.

These are a small proportion of responses received. Each response is positive about the centre and about the staff. The only concerns lay with the potential closure of the centre and of the general cosmetics of the building.

Although the local authority have held open consultation meetings and spoken to parents and carers, it is generally felt that they have not garnered a true understanding of the concern and unrest among families. The impact of such a change will be felt among whole families and not just the person who currently attends Moreton day centre.

Should Moreton close, many attendees will find that personal budgets do not work for them. They may also be unhappy with the option of attending an alternate centre. This may result in families having little respite and put a strain on individuals.

In some cases people may be required to leave their employment to care for a loved one. Families could become isolated and mental health issues ensue.

With many carers being older there may be a reliance on them receiving support from the others and this task may fall to the person with a learning disability. Many people with a learning disability are themselves carers. Respite is an absolute must for both parties and day centre provision allows this.

Mencap consulted parents and carers on how they would be affected should the centre close. The following quotes were among responses by over 50 families.

“The effect on me, her mother, I can’t even contemplate since January when we were told. I have become depressed and very worried about her health as well as mine. I am 75 years old and feel that my daughter may face many changes in the future because of the anxiety this is causing. The only comment from the local authority is that they will ‘receive a service’ but what kind and will it meet their needs? It is likely it will be unsuitable for their needs and wellbeing as of now there is nothing in place at all”

“In January 2012 my mother (my sisters last remaining parent) died unexpectedly. The difficulty was made so much easier by knowing that Jo and the other staff at the centre would be the one stable aspect of my sisters day. This enabled us to carry on with our lives as best we could while still being there for my sister. If this centre closes, All of our lives will be affected. It will be very difficult”

"We are the carers of a gentleman who has attended Moreton Training Centre for about 25 years, with a short break in the middle where he was moved to Riverside. This had a massive effect on Mr X and us. Mr X's lifestyle is run by a routine. Any deviation in this affects him greatly as we have tantrums, bad behaviour and his stress levels go through the roof which results in him scratching himself until he is red raw. At night this affects him when he is awake at all hours.

We have heard the news that Moreton will be closing. We don't think the council realises the effect this will have on all students and staff. As we speak now the effects are beginning to show on Mr X as he is one of the few attendees aware of what is happening.

We are being woken in the early hours in the morning and being bombarded with questions; "why?" "what for?" "what's going to happen to me?"

We cannot answer these questions for him. We cannot stress the importance that this centre is in his life. He receives excellent support; he is active in the day and is meeting friends and new people all the time. If it closes all this will be taken away from him.

This centre is not just a big part of Mr X's life it's also a massive part of ours. We are getting quality advice from this centre and breaks through the day where we can carry on our normal lives. We ask that you recognise and look again at all the student's lives this will affect"

"Some 18 months ago, the Riverside Centre was closed and the trauma and distress it caused our daughter was immeasurable. She became withdrawn, angry and anxious – when upset she soils herself and his behaviour became more extreme during this period. With a great deal of support from her parents, Julie began using the services of Moreton Day Centre and, although she lost many friends in the transition from Riverside, some friends had also transferred and she began to re-gain some of the confidence that she lost. With the help and understanding of the staff at Moreton Day Centre, She has begun to settle down again and has established a really good rapport with her key worker. Our Daughter has started to become socially outgoing with her friends from Moreton and is beginning to try new things, such as museum trips, which is something that she hasn't done for a very long time."

“Our son doesn’t always show his emotions and very rarely tells you when he has any problems, but all of a sudden and without warning he can start to kick out and throw whatever he can get his hands on and that can land on the floor or against the television – he doesn’t care where!

Sometimes you can ask him what seems like a simple question and he may think he is getting told off, or he may just start to scream and shout. This could be in the street or in the middle of a supermarket!!

In the past we have tried to get outside help but this was just a waste of time. We have realised that the staff at Moreton Day Centre understand our son much better than social workers etc. and they have a special way with them. We now rely on Moreton Centre to help us with our problems, as and when they arise and we don’t have to wait weeks or months for them as you do for a social worker.”

“Our daughter has Down’s syndrome. She was a bright, happy girl – went to Fairfield school, Moreton, then on to Withens Lane College after various little jobs in a coffee bar and the church nursery in Moreton.

When the college closed she was directed to Heswell Training Centre – all her school and college friends went to Moreton ATC. Very soon she became depressed and cried all day and every day. On one occasion the bus driver didn’t see her at the back of the bus and drove her to the bus depot! On arrival at home at about 6:30, she said “I’m not going to Heswell any more!”

We were very distressed. She was not accepted there by students or staff. She stopped talking and didn’t utter another word for about six years. Her doctor diagnosed clinical depression and prescribed anti-depressants. Eventually we were able to transfer her to Moreton ATC where she met up with her friends again – the staff were very kind and patient. She was placed in the reading and writing group, then to the drama group.

She was taken out with her friends into the community. After several years of still not talking (we had dispensed with the antidepressants) I had a phone call from her key worker telling me she had asked her group who would like to read in church at the carol service. Our daughter put her hand up so Moyra, key worker, said she would stand behind her and read for her. Next day I had another phone call – when it was our daughters turn to read she took the paper and in a very loud voice read her verses! We had our daughter back amidst clapping, cheering and floods of tears!

I am telling you all this because it was the result of moving to where our daughter is happy and secure – amongst friends and key workers who knew her and who were interested in her progress and welfare. She loves going to the Moreton centre. She knows everyone – they know her. She has her daily routine and it is secure. Her bus drivers are all kind and cheerful and the bus load is happy.

When it snowed the bus was unable to come – Our daughter didn’t understand and cried for two hours because she couldn’t go.

She now has a rollator to help her walking. She has been given help and guidance at the centre and is now confident.

If the centre closes how will She cope? You can see what one big change did to her.

We are now in our 80s and cannot keep her motivated as we used to. Where will her friends and carers be? We find all this very distressing. Our world will be turned upside down”

Wirral Borough Council have indicated on occasion that there is sufficient availability of space in other centres within Wirral should Moreton close and people wish to retain day centre attendance.

This is not simply just a case of people moving from one building to another.

There are many concerns from Moreton attendees and their families about attending an alternate day centre. These include;

- losing long term friendships
- adapting to change (especially for attendees with autism)
- behaviour issues when adapting to change
- being in an unfamiliar area with different road layouts and road safety features
- staff not knowing individual needs and having to take time, in some cases years, to fully appreciate individuals needs and personalities
- families having to take time off work to aide the transition of their loved one
- Mental Health issues arising from substantial change
- Social exclusion

People with a learning disability who have been assessed by the local authority as requiring assistance are entitled under the chronically sick and disabled persons act to retain access to services that are recreational and educational such as those on offer at the Moreton day centre.

The chronically sick and disabled persons act of 1970 section 2 subsection C states;

" the provision for that person of lectures, games, outings or other recreational facilities outside his home or assistance to that person in taking advantage of educational facilities available to him"

As mentioned previously, Society is not yet adapted enough and does not have enough accessible provision that is compliant with the disability discrimination act and reasonable adjustments are not in place in most day time activities to warrant 'rolling out' personalisation.

Of the attendees at Moreton day centre, around 50 people have voluntary work placements. These are a valid feature attained through the day service and allow people to feel more a part of society.

They allow people to feel as though they are 'giving back' and contributing to the local community.

Around 70% of people without a disability are in employment. This figure drops significantly to 30% for people with a disability and lower yet to 10% for those with a learning disability.

Voluntary placements are difficult to attain and can be complex to retain for a period of time. Through the dedication of staff at the centre, the option works perfectly.

Voluntary placements provide an opportunity for people to learn a trade, gain experience in the community, interact with others, build social skills and give a real sense of inclusion.

The centre provides the support, and physical base to enable volunteer opportunities to remain in place. Without the day centre, many people will lose this most important option.

The Moreton day centre is a valid asset to the people who attend it and certainly should retain services.

Conclusion

Having visited the building on numerous occasions, one would agree on the need for cosmetic renovation as would, presumably, most parents and carers. However, the building still serves a purpose and is practical and spatial enough for provision.

If only Wirral borough council invested in addressing this minor flaw, the centre would be enhanced enough to a physically acceptable standard.

Staff members understand the individual needs of each person and appreciate their individual personalities. This creates a feeling of safety, unity and friendship. It is a “home from home” where people can feel secure, educated and content.

The local authority have not been clear enough in the alternate options available should they centre close but general consensus is that personal budgets are not going to be positive for most attendees due to lack of accessibility, cost and isolation from peers.

Attending a different day centre would result in too much unrest and upheaval severely impacting on the lives of most of the people affected.

It is felt that Wirral borough council have not fully grasped the negative impact this consultation has had already and the catastrophic impact placed on people if the centre should close. Parents and carers and also attendees feel the local authority have not made clear enough the option of retaining the service or providing an alternate solution that would be acceptable, and have not carried out a full and thorough impact assessment on the effects of closure.

The 133 attendees of Moreton attend due to the thorough and positive approach by the staff, the familiarity of surroundings, the central location, the relationships held within its walls and the sense of belonging.

Mencap strongly advocates and supports the campaign to retain a FULL and retaining service at Moreton for all of its attendees and will continue to work with parents and carers in the campaign to retain provision at the centre. Should the consultation end in a satisfactory way for families and people with a learning disability, Mencap will continue to campaign with those who are adversely affected.

If you should require anything further please contact me.

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