

Council-funded rescue package rejected by Charity for the disabled

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Families of disabled children and young adults in Birmingham are set to lose a vital lifeline as a leading charity refuses to be saved, despite a Birmingham City Council (BCC) council rescue package.

At a time when most struggling charities would grasp at any lifeline in order to stay open, let alone a guaranteed golden-ticket source of funding to safe-guard their future, one 61 year old charity that previously "led the country" (Rt Hon Geoffrey Lloyd, MP for Sutton Coldfield, 1955-1974) in providing respite care for disabled children and young adults, remains hell-bent on rushing to close its doors by the 20th December, 2020.

The Normal Laud Association (NLA; previously the Norman Laud Nursery), a council-designated provider of vital respite care for disabled children and young adults in Birmingham, announced at short notice in October this year that due to a short-fall in funding, they will close in December 2020. Statements released by the charity's Board of Trustees claim that the financial viability of the NLA has been under pressure for some time and indicate that additional financial pressures due to the COVID-19 pandemic are the final nail in the coffin. A fast-paced campaign led by local Councillor Alex Yip who, along with charity users and supporters including immediate relatives of Norman Laud himself, achieved over 11,000 signatories on a petition to ask the NLAs Board of Trustees to reconsider their decision to close and instead consider offers of help from supporters and the authorities. As result of the campaign, Paulette Hamilton, Cabinet member for BCC, met with NLA CEO Elaine Mountford last Friday (27th Nov) for an open-book discussion to establish the viability of the charity. Recognising the urgent need to safeguard respite care in Birmingham for young disabled adults with complex needs, the council quickly offered to increase their funding to the NLA by 30%. This increase would secure the future viability of the charity. This increase, along with the existing reserves of the NLA, coupled with likely additional funding from an emergency government COVID-19 pandemic fund provides a series of lifelines that any charity working in the genuine interests of the community in which it served, would delight in.

In a bewildering move, the unprecedented release of increased council funding has not been accepted by the NLAs Board of Trustees – who remain hell-bent on winding up their charity as quickly as possible, citing their duty of care in safeguarding redundancy packages for staff. Interestingly, these redundancy packages would also include a pay-out to Cornwall based Elaine Mountford, who in addition to being CEO, happens also to be a member of the Board of Trustees that is championing the closure of the charity & the disposal of it's not inconsiderable assets, including bespoke, state of the art facilities and real estate.

The closure of the NLA leaves the respite care users & their families who have attended the charity over many years, in a desperate situation, with the only option to seek respite care in care homes for the elderly. This is in heart-breaking contrast to the personalised, high-quality care they thrive on at the NLA - the visionary care that was set out by founder Norman Laud over 6 decades ago.

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