06. 02.2006

Memorandum

We write with a genuine concern for the future of Mayfield house Day Centre for the Somali Elderly. We are now faced with a closure and everybody is asking why the only day centre for the Somali Community is regarded as a saving in the Social Services' Budget.

Today the Somali Community in the Borough is estimated roughly at between 15000 & 20000. This is the 2nd largest ethnic group after the Bengalis. 10/15% of the population are 60 years and over and their need for extra care is increasing day by day. Despite the long history of Somali settlement in Tower Hamlets, the response of the authorities to the health and social needs of the Community has been patchy. This is derived from a number of interrelated factors: Lack of Somalis within the local Government as staff, planners, councilors and language communication difficulties. The Somalis are the victims of institutional handicap.

Adult Services have changed and shaped the future development of adult services in Tower Hamlets, but the Somali vulnerable elderly can hardly understand what that means for them. Example, Mr. A was prescribed to attend the day centre for two days a week but he wanted more days. If he tries to come to the centre other than the prescribed days, the staff will tell him "you will not get any services, not even a cup of tea and snacks, because you are not expected to come today". It is the procedure and there is nothing wrong to give services to the expected only. But in the Somali culture this is an insult. Mr. A felt humiliated and stopped attending the centre. In the framework for determining the changes to services and eligibility some elderly believe they are not being adequately catered/listened.

The Somali community, mostly refugees lost everything that was individually valuable to them in a hurry, unit families are still dispersed in far away locations. It is no wonder that in all needs assessment meetings/situations the Somalis express the value of a community sense.

The present crisis in Mayfield House was created at the planning stage. The Centre was earmarked as a Resource centre with a maximum capacity of 30 lunch club users at any one time. The place was turned into a Day Centre and the Lunch Club moved out but the figure 30 has never been revised for the health
and safety of day centre users. We have visited the centre, the activity /dinning area can safely accommodate:

Male section-3 tables x 4 Clients  
Female section - 2 tables x 4 clients  

The capacity of the centre cannot be above 20 D/C clients at any one time by our estimates; this will allow wheelchair users and frail elderly to move around freely and safely.

Whether the matter is under-usage or an earlier over-estimation the fact is the statutory service providers cannot communicate with their clients, there can be little expectations of positive and relevant services. The fact is, there is a low uptake of services by the whole Somali community especially the elderly. This doesn’t mean there is no enough number of users who need the services. We are all here to develop services for the vulnerable and the needy.

Can we try to find out the actual reasons and come to the best value for money/care solutions? We do not believe closure is in the interest of any party. We need the existing services to be developed and to ensure that they continue to respond to changing care standards as well as market needs.

Yours Sincerely

Isman Warsama  
Coordinator  
For and on behalf of Tower Hamlets Organisations Network (THSON)