

Save Our Respite Essex

Our stance as a group on the situation

Essex County Councils trends on the usage and demand for Maples & Lavender House appears to show a decrease in demand for the service in these residential respite homes over the past four years but we as a group just simply cannot and will not believe this to be a true reflection on reality for families such as ours across Essex.

The problem appears to be pointing towards this all to familiar panel, which to families such as ours within our group has our lives quite literally in their hands.

We do not get to sit on these panel hearings when our children are reviewed, we get very little feedback and more often than not the members of the panel do not even know the child in question!

We know of lots of families desperate for overnight respite, simply desperate, and have been either told not to bother applying for respite or if their social worker does get a slot on panel they are given a no, sometimes time & time again.

It seems to us that the panel is the root of the problem! Who governs the panel? Who manages the panel? And more importantly who has the final say and dictates who can have the respite given.

Example: A family we know of, reliable source, has been asking for overnight respite for six years now and has only just this year been awarded out of area respite in Bury St Edmunds! School holiday time only! And this family lives in Clacton on sea! Why? When we have perfectly usable, safe and practical service right here! Lavender House.

We also know of other families with children who go to our son's school in Clacton on sea now also receiving respite in this very same centre, 55 miles away! Hours drive away! Again why???

We as a group have also recently been advised that now since the councils new changes have taken place since April 2019 with maples and lavender house going from 2 flats to just the 1 that if a families child is ill on one of the allocated nights in which they receive and cannot attend the likely hood is that they will loose their allocated night all together! This is not helping the families in question represented by our group.

Our group Save Our Respite Essex simply implores Essex County Council to reconsider their stance on the counties children with complex special needs overnight respite service, we recently carried out a survey amongst our group members and of those that did reply to the question asked would your family happily and/or comfortably have their child go to a shared care home environment the answer was always no, just not comfortable with this at all.

The two Council run and Ofsted regulated purpose made children's centres Lavender House & The Maples have always been a massive support & life line to many of our group member families but unfortunately there are still many desperate to access this vital service but keep getting denied it which is simply not acceptable.

These families are probably living their lives sleepless, stressed out, alone some of them such as single parents because the other parent could not cope and more often than not are at breaking point!

We have seen mums walk out of the school our son goes to in tears not because they are upset but they are tears of relief that they are about to have potentially 6 hours rest, peace and quite maybe just to sit and recover.

I would now like to read out the following quote from one of our family members.

"Without respite at Lavender/Maples we definitely would not have coped and we would have ended up possibly in hospital ourselves or quite probably divorced, and our little boy would have been in exactly the sort of setting the transforming care programme is trying to get children with complex special needs out of.

That is how important the respite centres are to the people who need them, and they haven't now suddenly stopped being diagnosed now new referrals have stopped"

The facts speak for themselves that these centres simply cannot dwindle and be taken from our families reach otherwise there could potentially be more and more of these children destined for full time residential caring and schooling which obviously will cost immensely more than the short breaks respite currently being accessed.

Gary Knowles
Lead Petitioner
Save Our Respite Essex