

Mental health facility residents, family and care staff issue plea for White Rock home to remain open

Looming closure devastates Buena Vista residents

Sobia Moman
Staff reporter

Nick Miller is hanging on to a “hope and a prayer” that the White Rock assisted living facility where his brother resides remains open instead of closing, as scheduled, in the summer.

“When it happens to your younger brother... it is the toughest thing I can imagine,” Miller told *Peace Arch News*.

Buena Vista Lodge is a mental-health housing facility for long-term care with a dozen individual bedrooms.

It has been operating in White Rock for more than 50 years. Current operators of the space were looking to sell the facility, but a representative from Fraser Health told them that the funding the house receives would not be transferred to new owners.

The space is set to close in June, but residents and their family members are pleading for it to remain open.

Before coming to Buena Vista Lodge, David Miller was a resident of Good Shepherd Lodge, another housing space in White Rock, which closed in 2018.

After learning that Buena Vista is to now close, David toured a home in Burnaby, which his brother described as a group home for men. The biggest issue with the facility is that David would have to share a bedroom with two other people.

Miller fears that if his brother were to move there, “he’ll be out on the streets in probably a week, maybe two weeks.”

The other option would be a housing facility in Chilliwack, which is also not ideal.

“His family is here... the amount of time he would actually see his family members would be maybe once a month,” Miller, who is David’s only family in Canada, said.

“I always think about how I’m older than him, so I pass away six,



Russell Garrett has not been at Buena Vista Lodge long, but already describes it as the best facility he has lived in. He can often be found reading his favourite books. (Sobia Moman photo)

seven years before him and then he’s alone.”

David has been living in White Rock since 1994 and has built many friendships in the community. Miller describes his younger brother as “happy and lucky” to have stayed at Good Shepherd and then move to Buena Vista Lodge, which eased his worries.

Having a routine and a nurse to supply David’s medication is vital, Miller said.

“It’s a very small world he lives in, but it’s unfortunate that they’re going to take away that also... Is this how we’re going to be treating our people who are mentally ill?”

Stability is key

Stability is one of the most crucial elements in the residents’ care, said Kathleen Wrinskelle, mental health nurse and manager

of care at Buena Vista Lodge.

“It’s difficult to see them struggle so much now. There’s a lady who’s never been paranoid, but now she’s paranoid,” Wrinskelle said.

One of her greatest fears is that if the residents move away, the progress they are making will be disrupted.

“Will their new staff recognize their signs that something’s wrong? I don’t know,” said the nurse, noting the trust staff have built and continue to work on with every resident.

‘I would lose all my friends’

Resident Christina Fellas has been living at Buena Vista Lodge for 15 years and loves the

familiarity of her home as well as the wider community around her.

“I would lose all my friends here, like the staff, I would lose contact with my friends outside of this place, I would lose contact with my sister,” said Fellas of the consequences of being moved out of her home.

“This is a dumb decision and it’s never the wrong time to do the right thing.”

Trevor Halford
MLA

When Russell Garrett was informed that he would likely have to move come June, he was “devastated.” He has only been living at Buena Vista Lodge for about 10 months, having lived in several assisted living facilities and hospitals throughout the Lower Mainland before that.

“It feels like I just got here almost, I’m still trying to get adjusted to everything’s that going on,” Garrett said.

He shared that his anxiety has improved since living in the White Rock home due to some of the techniques that staff have shown him.

“This is the best facility I’ve stayed at, I just wish they could keep it open... I want to be close to my sisters,” Garrett said, adding that he sees his family almost weekly.

‘Short-sighted’ decision

Meanwhile, Surrey-White Rock MLA Trevor Halford has brought up the pending closure of Buena Vista Lodge in the BC Legislature and said that ending the facility’s funding is “shameful.”

“I can’t get an answer from the minister and I can’t get an answer from Fraser Health... I think it’s short-sighted and I think it’s doing the families and the individuals that live there a complete disservice,” Halford told *Peace Arch News*.

“I think the fact is that this government talks a lot about helping those that need it, those with mental-health challenges but at the end of the day, you’re seeing this closure not be one of their priorities.”

Halford hopes that the decision to not go forward with new operators will be reversed, but how likely that is remains to be seen.

“I’m not (confident) but I’m going to work hard to make sure that it does (remain open)... Keep it open, don’t close it.

“This is a dumb decision and it is never the wrong time to do the right thing and this government needs to admit that they’re wrong and they need to fix it,” Halford said.

“We saw the government try to do this with the maternity ward at Peace Arch Hospital and we were able to be successful and I’m hopeful that we’ll be successful with this.”



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