

From the Coalition to Save the VSH Canteen:

▶ *"This is bad for patient care. It's bad for staff at the hospital. And it's bad social policy."*

Ken Libertoff, Exec. Dir., Vermont Association for Mental Health, interviewed by WPTZ, Nov. 6, 2009

▶ *"The Canteen is the last straw! By closing the canteen patients are restricted to confined areas and not taught skills to return to living outside a confined ward... By stripping away services, **it will take longer for people living at the state hospital to return to their lives outside the hospital, costing the state more in the end and costing our communities a great loss.**"*

Sarah Launderville, Exec. Dir., Vermont Center for Independent Living, Nov. 6, 2009 press conference

▶ *"When I was in VSH, the canteen was the one place where I really felt alright. Being there gave me hope that one day I might return to the real world."*

Joshua (Malcolm) Sawyer, former VSH patient, Nov. 6 press conference

Joint Statement

"The Vermont State Hospital canteen has been serving patients, visitors and staff for over four decades. Last month the Department of Mental Health announced that as part of planned budget cuts, the canteen would close on December 5.

"We oppose the planned closing of the canteen and ask that this decision be revisited. The canteen is integral to the quality of life for patients and significant to the quality of care they receive.

"It is also vital in reducing the pressures on the hospital wards by providing a positive incentive and a humanizing and integrated setting where patients can get away from the crowded, volatile ward environment. It is a place where patients can meet with visitors off the ward, and for some patients, the canteen has also provided vocational training.

"In the past seven years, the hospital has become an increasingly restrictive setting as patients have lost access to the gym, the library, the Hideaway (an off ward social space) and Father Logue's camp in Duxbury. Now the State is taking away the only place patients have left outside the confines of the secure area.

"Cutting costs is the stated reason for closing the canteen. But at one time it was reportedly breaking even, and it might do so again. Just how much would be saved is open to question; what would be lost is clearer. Regardless of whether the canteen is considered directly connected with patient care, its loss would have a serious negative impact on that care, and on the living and work environment at the State Hospital.

"We urge the administration to reconsider the planned closing and to maintain this unique and invaluable service".

Signed by:

Vermont Psychiatric Survivors; Disability Rights Vermont (formerly Vt. P&A); Vermont Center For Independent Living; Vermont Association for Mental Health; Vermont State Hospital Workers; Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights; Another Way, Inc.; National Alliance on Mental Illness-VT; National Association of Social Workers-VT; Mental Health Law Project of Vermont Legal Aid; Vermont Psychological Association; Rep. Warren Kitzmiller; Rep. Anne Donahue; Rep. Paul Poirier; Rep. Mary Hooper [as delivered to Gov. Douglas on Nov. 6, 2009]

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Today's House calendar, pp. 171-172

Senate proposals of amendment Sec. 112b. VERMONT STATE HOSPITAL; CANTEEN PLAN

(a) The director of the Vermont State Hospital, in collaboration with staff who provide professional mental health services to patients of the facility, shall develop a plan to be included in the fiscal year 2011 appropriations act to reopen the canteen or commissary on July 1, 2010, which shall be accessible to patients, staff, and visitors to the facility. The plan shall be submitted to the house and senate committees on appropriations and house committee on human services and senate committee on health and welfare on or before March 15, 2010. The plan shall be cost neutral to the general fund, but shall recognize that patients may have limited funds to purchase products.

Amendment to be offered by Rep. Heath of Westford to H. 534

Moves that the House concur in the Senate Proposal of Amendment with further amendment thereto by striking the ... Sixteenth (Vermont State Hospital canteen) Senate proposals of amendment.

Budget Adjustment today:

Save the Senate language to help restore a ***cost neutral*** Vermont State Hospital canteen.

Vote NO to the House amendment.

The budget recision last fall to close the VSH canteen and “save” \$150,000 was based on *false facts*. The Senate took testimony and added language in budget adjustment to require the administration to come back with a cost neutral plan to restore the canteen in FY 2011.

An amendment on today’s calendar would strike that language.

The VSH canteen was cost neutral until 2 years ago, when administration decisions made changes that created an artificial deficit. The administration has said the canteen only served a small percentage of patients, but this is contrary to what the VSH Executive Director says.

Here are the facts in the words of VSH leadership:

- ▶ ***“I think we are on dangerous grounds arguing this cost issue. The fact is we could raise prices, cut back on staff and not eliminate the service.”***

Terry Rowe, Executive Director of the Vermont State Hospital 10/29/09 email to Mental Health Commissioner Michael Hartman

- ▶ The canteen is *“the most normalizing experience”* patients have; closing it will have a ***“huge clinical impact.”***

Jay Batra, MD, Vermont State Hospital Medical Director, NAMI conference presentation, 11/6/09; reported in Counterpoint, 12/09

- ▶ ***“Most patients at the VSH have a gradual increase in privileges which allows them to leave the Brooks building and go to the canteen as part of their preparation for community placement... (and) to develop new skills to manage their psychotic symptoms or difficult behaviors.”***

Terry Rowe, Executive Director of the Vermont State Hospital 10/1/09 email to DMH Finance Commissioner Heidi Hall

Others speak out:

- ▶ ***“Patients, who have had no hope in their lives, found solace and comfort at the canteen. It has served a critical rehabilitative function for clients.”***

Sandy Steingard, MD, Director of Psychiatry, HowardCenter, and former VSH staff, letter to Governor Douglas, 11/6/09

- ▶ ***“The canteen can be a totally self-sustaining operation that does not cost the taxpayers of Vermont any money while providing a valuable service to the patients at VSH. I have attached a copy of figures from the 2005-2006 fiscal year that show the canteen operating at a \$1,036 profit. The canteen could have kept running in the black, but for some reason the VSH administration decided that it was not necessary. In the following years I was denied permission to raise prices as costs increased.”***

Curtis Sinclair, former VSH canteen manager, letter to Sen. Health & Welfare Committee, Jan. 2010

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