

March 5 2004

Appendix C: Women's Centre Survival

Before the 2004 Conference, Leicester City Council chose to make funding cuts to four established Women's Centres in Leicester, the Bhagini Centre, Ajani Women & Girls Centre, Shama Women & Girls Centre and Braunstone's Turning Point Project.

Between them, these four centres had over 80 years of experience of working with women and families in their direct communities. From the start, LeicestHERday created a forum for women's centres and in the two previous conferences they were active participants in the planning and the actual day.

The LeicestHERday Trust Committee were concerned about the funding cuts and wrote both to Leicester City Council and to the women's centres.



The Women's Centres however decided to 'picket' the conference much to our surprise and sadness. Several of the Trust members and indeed, Rt Hon Patricia Hewitt herself, went out to talk to the picketers to invite them into Conference to be heard. Inside the conference, 1,000 women and girls unanimously approved a Resolution that was developed in Irene Paull's Task group, namely:

"We deplore Leicester City Council's decision to cut the grants to Leicester's women's centres and to

therefore force the closure of the Ajani Women and Girls Centre, the Bhagini Women's Centre, Shama Women's Centre and Turning Point Women's Centre. Between them these groups have a proven track record of supporting some of the most vulnerable women in Leicester's diverse communities.

These centres have been built up over many years by the hard work and dedication of their members. Their closure will have a devastating impact, not only on the women of Leicester, but also on the City as a whole. We therefore strongly condemn the closures and urge Leicester City Council to reconsider their decision."

This resolution was passed on with our comments to Cllr Roger Blackmore, Leader of Leicester City Council.

Since the Conference and work by legal teams on behalf of the Centres and Voluntary Action Leicester, Shama and Turning Point have negotiated with the Council and have been given a reprieve. Sadly, Ajani closed the week prior to the Conference and Bhagini the week after. Their excellent programmes will be missed.

None of the groups participated in the LeicestHERday Conference but we have had talks with Shama and Turning Point since. We are also talking with the Community Centres whose funding has also been cut.