

Shoppers bemused by mum and son living on bench

A FAMILY who have been living on a bench in a busy high street have "refused help", according to a town hall. The mother and son, thought to hail from Somalia, have apparently been living on the bench outside TK Maxx in Tooting High Street for several weeks. They have

been spotted sleeping there under blankets next to a pile of suitcases and other belongings. They have also frequently been seen sitting there during the daytime. Shoppers first reported seeing the family there in June. A Wandsworth council spokesman said: "We have

repeatedly tried to engage with this mother and son to offer them help and a proper roof over their heads but sadly all these efforts have been rebuffed. "Unfortunately, they are quite adamant that they do not want any help from us, nor from the other agencies who have also

been trying very hard to support and assist them. "We have enlisted the help of their extended family and also representatives of the local Somali community to try and improve the situation, but sadly it remains unresolved. "We are, of course, concerned for

their welfare but unfortunately, if they are determined not to accept any assistance, then that is their choice and ultimately their right. "We will, of course, continue to closely monitor the situation and offer support in the hope that they change their minds."



FLASHBACK: The Save Lewisham Hospital campaign last year

'Our hospital victory can inspire other protesters'

'SAVE LEWISHAM' CAMPAIGNERS TRAVEL TO MID-STAFFS TO HELP 'BOOST MORALE' IN BATTLE OVER SERVICES



OFFERING SUPPORT: Pictured in Stafford are Save Lewisham Hospital campaigners nurse Kathy Cruise, left, and Dr Louise Irvine

SAVE Lewisham Hospital campaigners have taken their fight to stave off assaults on NHS services to another front-line protest.

The number of protesters occupying the Stafford Hospital grounds has been swollen by Lewisham campaigners, who won a historic legal battle against health chiefs' plans to carve up services at Lewisham Hospital last year.

Since July 18, the grounds of Stafford Hospital have been occupied by local residents, hospital workers and staff from NHS trusts across the UK, with 30 tents set up on the site.

The protests were triggered after calls for a judicial review into decisions to downgrade the Stafford Hospital were rejected on July 17. The hospital now risks losing paediatric and maternity wards, with services being transferred to the North Stafford Hospital.

Chairwoman of Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign, Dr Louise Irvine, told the *South London Press* that her fellow campaign supporters would return to stand alongside the fight against cuts at Stafford Hospital. They include Lewisham consultant paediatrician Dr Tony O'Sullivan, hospital nurse Kathy Cruise and NHS counsellor Carolyn Emanuel.

Dr Irvine said: "Plans to move the acute services from Stafford Hospital will make things worse for the 320,000 people that this hospital serves.

"Transferring these services to North Staffordshire Hospital, 15 miles away, will instead cause difficulty for people with small children. Campaigners at

By OWEN SHEPPARD

Stafford have told us that seeing our victory was a boost of morale for them.

"Just as was the case with our hospital in Lewisham, we believe Stafford Hospital is seeing its services cut so the Mid-Staffs Trust can free up money to pay off its debts, which stem from similar private finance initiatives (PFIs)."

The Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust, which is responsible for running both Stafford and North Stafford hospitals, was slammed several years ago following an exposé of its poor standards of care at Stafford Hospital, which triggered the Francis Inquiry, published in February last year. Robert Francis' inquiry cited "systematic failings" within the trust's management of the two hospitals. One of the inquiry's main findings was that care quality had

dropped to unacceptable levels because of understaffing.

But campaigners point to a dramatic reversal in standards at Stafford Hospital.

Dr Irvine said: "The hospital has dramatically improved over the past five years thanks to new investment, and is now one of the top-performing hospitals in the country."

The controversial PFIs were brought in to pay for hospital renovations but have saddled many NHS trusts with debts which they are locked into paying for up to a quarter of a century.

Maggie Oldham, chief executive of Mid Staffordshire trust, said: "We respect the rights of campaigners to express their views on the future of services. I have received reassurances from the organisers that there will be no disruption to patients or visitors."

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ON SITE: Volunteers at one of the protest camps in Stafford