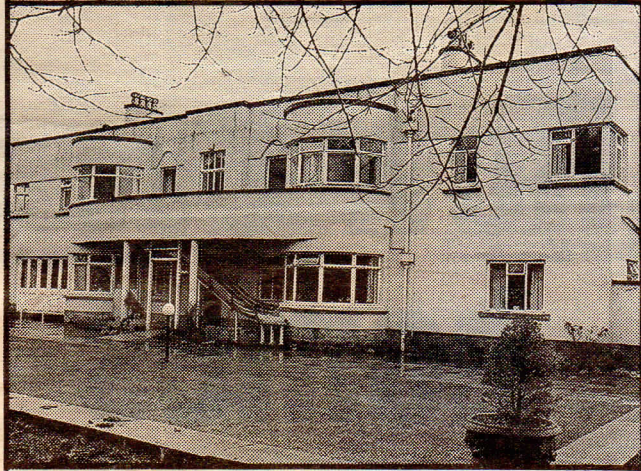


Centre shutdown is blow to residents



THE closure of a unique training centre for spina bifida sufferers has dealt a devastating blow to its residents.

It has been revealed that the Five Oaks centre in Ben Rhydding Drive, Ilkley, will shut next September because of falling demand.

And that has cast a shadow over future plans of trainees, some of whom will not have time to complete their expected two-year training stint.

Lucy White, 19, from Essex, moved to Five Oaks just three months after living with her parents.

"There's no way I could live on my own at the moment. I'm just not ready," she said.

"If I had had my full two years here then I should have been

**by SIMON
ASHBERRY**

ready but by September it's going to be pushing it."

Lucy, who is doing a computer course at the Ilkley campus of Bradford & Ilkley Community College, added: "There no other place like Five Oaks anywhere. There's a lot more care and knowledge here, I'm very sad that it's closing."

Former resident Kirk Watson, 31, who now lives in a sheltered housing scheme in Middlesex, has been back at Five Oaks recently for a course on being a DJ.

"If it hadn't been for this place, I wouldn't be where I am today. Five Oaks has really helped me a lot.

Robert McDowell, 24, from Chesterfield, who has been staying at the centre, said the short courses and holidays were invaluable for people who lived independently but found it difficult to get out and meet people.

Long-stay residents Kim Knowles and Helen Clay, both 22, are also upset by news of the closure of Five Oaks.

● Five Oaks' manager Joan Pheasant said the centre's annual Christmas event featuring sherry and mince pies would go ahead as planned on Sunday from 11.30am to 1.30pm.



**UNIQUE
SITE:**

The announced closure of Five Oaks, above, has saddened former resident Kirk Watson, right

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Shock over closure of pioneer centre

STAFF and residents at a pioneering centre for the disabled in Ilkley were today reeling from the announcement of its closure.

The award-winning Five Oaks centre in Ben Rhydding Drive, Ilkley, has fallen victim to a slump in demand.

It is the country's only specialist training centre for spina bifida and hydrocephalus sufferers.

The charity which runs it blames the

by **SIMON ASHBERRY**

introduction of the Government's Care in the Community measures.

Five Oaks, which won the prestigious European Helios Project award in 1989 for promoting independent living for the disabled, will be wound down by next September and 23 staff face redundancy.

Until then, the centre will continue to care for its four current long-stay

residents and to run short holidays and activity courses.

Andrew Russell, executive director of the Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus, which expects to spend £150,000 on the centre this financial year, praised the work of the staff.

But he said: "Since the responsibility for funding residential care and training was switched from central government to local social services departments, it has been clear that authorities regard send-

ing clients 'out of county' as a rare luxury."

The centre's manager Joan Pheasant said today she and staff and residents were very sad about the closure.

She said she feared local authorities which tried to carry out similar assessment and training of their own would not be able to offer such a high quality service because they did not have the specialist skills and knowledge of staff.

Residents' reaction: Page 13