

## Stag Community Arts Centre

### 1. Stag Community Arts Centre

In 2008 the Town Council took a more defined decision to become more involved and responsible for the economic development and business growth for the town. The above decision coincided with the Stag venue going bankrupt for a second time. The Town Council put together a project plan and new business model and took over the venue on a 25 year lease from the District Council.

The facility consists of 450 theatre, two screen cinema operating commercially seven days per week and a function suite.

During 2013 Sevenoaks Town Council purchased a much need £45,000 digital projector for the cinema and rented it to the Stag Charity.

The management of the Stag was subsequently transferred to an independent charity and the Town Council's subsidises this to a cost of £27,000 per year.

The Stag Community Arts Centre now operated as an independent charity using over 200 volunteers and attracts over 300,000 visitors per annum and is a major factor in the economic development of the town, particularly for bars, restaurants, local retailers and car park income.

Sevenoaks District Council provided a grant of £100,000 per annum for the first five years of operation.

The Town Council is not able to demonstrate year on year savings for the Stag compared to its previous operation as these figures were not available. It can say that the facility has operated successfully for six years compared to going bankrupt twice before and that the cost of £27,000 per year to the rate payer is extremely low compared to other theatres and similar venues in the country.

Please visit [www.stagsevenoaks.co.uk](http://www.stagsevenoaks.co.uk)



## 2. House in the Basement Youth Café



The Youth Café has now been open for approx. 2 ½ years. The Youth Café receives funding via KCC Commissioning which ends in March 2016 of approximately £42,000 per year. The Town Council will be applying for a further three years of funding. At present this facility is provided without any cost to the local ratepayer.



On Tuesday evenings the youth café is open for children with special needs sponsored by the St James Wealth Foundation and VAWK. This evening not only provides them with somewhere safe and comfortable to go, but also provides them with the confidence in the venue to attend at other times and integrate with the other young people, which has proved to be immensely popular.

### **Wednesdays Safe Steering Group**

Every Wednesday from 5pm-6pm a group of sixth form students meet at the café to talk through how they can support, mentor and connect with other teenagers about mental health issues. This time is known as a Safe Space where it is advertised that any young people that would like to talk about mental health issues, can come and chat to train a youth-worker and team of sixth form volunteers. It is out of this weekly meeting that the idea of a launch event came.

**OPENING HOURS** the Youth Café is open at the following times:-

*March 2015	Tuesday*	18.00 - 21.00
	Wednesday	16.00 - 21.00
	Thursday	16.00 - 21.00
	Friday	16.00 - 21.00
	Saturday	12:00 – 14:00
		14.00 – 21.00

The facilities within the youth café for ages 11 – 18 include:-

Free Wi Fi	Pool Table
Food & Drinks	Information & Support
Chill Out Area	Events
Special needs evening	Chess Club
Informal Music Lessons	VOICE
Qualified Staff	

The venue is often used by others to discuss matters the young people are interested in and as such surveys and consultations take place there during opening hours.

Please see below two case studies as examples of the provision provided for young people

### **HOUSE in the Basement Youth Café - Case Study 1**

#### **Young Person's Perspective**

At House in the Basement I have learnt how to play the electric guitar and also the drums because in House in The Basement there is an electric drum kit, a bass guitar and an electric guitar. There is also an acoustic guitar - when I learn the instruments the youth workers are always very helpful and teach me new songs and riffs. I can also play pool and have become really good at it at it thanks to the youth workers who are always keen to have a game or two. There are frequent music events including a DJ and MC night called Soundwaves and a open mic night called Voices - this helps young people show off their musical talent and has seen the likes of "Sleeping Naked" and "Chameleon" play live. There is always a great atmosphere when we have live music, it's great to see so many people getting along together and having lots of fun.

I have never had any problems with bullying at HiTB, the youth workers are very quick to notice if someone is getting a bit loud and have a bit of a chat with them, this usually sorts things out. They also give you the feeling that you could talk to them if you had anything worrying you and they would be able to help you out or find a way round your problem. I sometimes go to HiTB when things are getting hard at home, I

have a disabled brother and he takes up a lot of my mums time, it's nice having somewhere that feels so different to home to escape to if I need time out.

I like being able to go to HiTB without my mum having to take me or sign me in, it's great to feel that we are treated like adults and not like school kids. I think I have grown up a lot since I started going there, I am now helping out at events and have been shown how to use the tills and cash up. It certainly feels as if I have a separate life now, not just school and home. I also have made lots of friends, with all sorts of people from different parts of Sevenoaks, I think the mixing of people from various schools in the area is great.

I would like to finish by saying how much I enjoy HiTB, and I think it would be fantastic if even more people could come along to see how much fun it all is.

### **Parent's Perspective**

My eldest son has been going to the HiTB for just over a year, we live quite close to the Stag so he is able to get himself there and back without any input from me. This independence is a key thing for me, and him, and I have been literally amazed how he has blossomed and flourished over the last twelve months. He has, until now, been very much an observer of life, and has never really joined in any group or social type activities. He has found it very hard to make friends and has had problems in the past with bullying, as is so often the case with children who don't fit inside a typical box. I must admit I was reluctant to let him go to HiTB when he first mentioned it, I didn't think he would be able to cope without my support. How wrong I was! He has thrived in the inclusive atmosphere, he has not had any bullying and has carved out his own niche, even going so far as to be an official helper at the regular Voices events. He gets on really well with the staff and volunteers, they are incredibly kind and understanding with him, and currently he is being taught how to play the electric guitar by someone who must have the patience of a Saint!

He goes to HiTB whenever it is open, he quite often pops in for a couple of hours, comes home for supper then heads back again. He loves the fact he can come and go as he pleases, there is no set time he has to be there. This also fits in very well with the rest of the family, if we are going out somewhere he just goes to HiTB a little later, he doesn't feel as if he has let anyone down by varying his usual times. He also often uses HiTB as a temporary escape, his younger brother, whom he shares a bedroom with, has complex disabilities and things can sometimes get very stressful as home. Just getting away for a couple of hours to play pool or a few computer games gives him the chance to be "normal" for a

while. It also relieves the pressure on the rest of us, we can concentrate on dealing with his brother's issues without feeling guilty that he will be feeling left out.

I thought the other day how much more difficult our lives would have been if he hadn't discovered HiTB a year ago, and how he would have carried on being a shy and socially excluded teenager. As it is, he has made friends, had loads of fun, developed new skills (pool and guitar playing!) and shown a completely different side to his character. I really can't thank the HiTB team enough and look forward to them having the same positive effect on my younger children, who are desperate to reach the age of eleven so they can come along too.

### **Youth Worker's Perspective**

The young person is 15 and lives locally and visits the café every day. Learnt guitar from café staff and now teaches other young people casually at the café he also lives with learning difficulties but he doesn't let them beat him, he is probably the most active member of the café and as well as airing his own voice is great at encouraging others to do the same. In the time he has been a member of the café he has challenged MP's, planned open mic nights and spoken in front of 300 young people in a year 7's assembly.

### **Case Study 2 from user at House in the Basement January 2015.**

**Date of Interview:** 21<sup>st</sup> January 2015

**Interviewer:** Gail Grieves, Youth Café Manager

I have been coming to the café for about a year now and I generally come 3 times a week, Wednesday, Friday and Saturdays. I like Wednesday and Friday best as the café is busier.

My favourite part of the café is the food now, it's much better, If I didn't eat here I wouldn't get a proper meal at home because we don't have a cooker and we just have microwave meals which aren't very nice or healthy. I like getting involved in making cakes with the staff. I also like the fact it has the internet as I don't get it at home. I also really like most of the staff they are cool.

It's difficult to get here, I live in a village and if my mum can't drive me, I can't get here and that's annoying. Also sometimes when it's quiet, it's boring because none of my friends are here. In the past my mum has had issues and this has affected me, if the café wasn't here I would just be at home with my mum, eating, sleeping and watching TV, I would be bored and isolated and end up rowing with my mum, which would cause more problems.

The staff at the café have been very nice, JP has tried to help out with my home situation and my mum in getting her some support that's been nice and he was trying to get us a cooker, I was sad that WKE didn't follow things up though, supposed to help my mum get some support, but nothing happened. But it's good that I can talk to the staff about things, so I don't bottle things up and get stressed, I've been stressed in the past, when I was in care, I don't want to get upset about my mum again.

If the café wasn't here I would be sad as I couldn't meet up with my friends, especially the ones that I don't go to the same school as anymore. It would mean that I'm stuck at home and this would cause me and mum to argue, which goes in cycles, we have no cooker so I would not get proper hot food. I would miss having the staff to talk to, as it helps me with my past issues, they understand, my mum's has had some problems with alcohol and drugs in the past and my Dad isn't around and he doesn't send us any money, which is horrible, one day I'm going to find him and tell him what I think. The staff know all this and let me talk things through.

### **3. St John's Toilets**

Sevenoaks District Council stated that it would not be operating public toilets in the town centre in the future and if the Town Council did not want to operate them they would close.

The cost to operate the toilets was anticipated to be in the region of £15,000. The Town Council distributed a questionnaire for local residents and this was also printed in the local paper asking the public whether it was willing to have its council tax increased to cover these costs which was approx. 2% of the precept.

The public responded that it did want the Town Council to do this and the St John's Toilets are now operated on a lease from the District Council without any financial support.

The revenue costs for operating the toilets are thought to be approximately 50% of the costs when it was operated by the District Council.