

St Austell Community Kitchen

Today St Austell Community Kitchen (STAK) provides a warm and safe environment for the vulnerable, needy, socially excluded and homeless within the St Austell area. However the early beginnings of STAK commenced



over 25 years ago as explained Kim Mathews, the Project Manager of STAK. Around this time a group of Methodist ministers and lay people felt they should experience, and show empathy, for those living rough on the streets by joining them for one night. As is usually the norm in Cornwall, it rained, and from this experience they felt driven to help these vulnerable people in their community. From there on a soup run was organised by the churches and was delivered to those in need by volunteers in a van.

The van run grew and a soup kitchen was commenced in premises in the town. However there was no permanent home and the soup kitchen moved from various church buildings and other premises in the town. In expansion to serving soup, the service progressed to serving a couple of lunches a week as well.

Eight years ago, STAK was functioning out of the Baptist Church premises (Kim was at this time the church's secretary). The Baptists' needed to use their kitchen for one-parent family work and STAK was given a year's notice to move out. It was near Easter and STAK held a poignant Last Supper. Influential people were invited to attend. One such person, a councillor, encouraged STAK to branch out into the private sector. This was no mean feat. At that time a subsidised rent for STAK was £900 per annum. In the private sector this would be in the region of £6,000. At this point Kim's husband, David, went on Radio Cornwall outlining the plight of STAK. As by a miracle within one hour an elderly gentleman said he would donate £1,000 to STAK for each year until he dies, and today he is still providing this.

Another venue for STAK was found, until STAK moved into the current premises at King's Road three years ago. Transformation Cornwall helped with this transition and assisted with the compilation of a business plan which has been recently launched. Kim is now STAK's paid project manager. Her first two year's of funding for her salary was half funded by CUF topped up with other grants, and her third year is yet to be funded. STAK relies on the generosity of donations ranging including money, food, warm clothing and blankets. Last year £12,000 was donated in food items alone.

STAK is now open six days a week from 10.30 am to 5.00 pm. The service provided has gradually grown from the early days. Affordable 3-course lunches and tea time snacks are available daily. On average about 20 meals are prepared a day. In between times STAK is now a place for service users to socialise and meet up. Hot drinks are always available for that get together and chat.

Kim, the only paid worker, oversees the day-to-day running of STAK and manages a 40-strong team of volunteers. Eight of these volunteers are trained up to supervisor level, which allows flexibility. Each day is run on a tight-shift (morning and afternoon) rota system – a lunchtime meal between 12pm and 1pm and a teatime meal between 4pm and 5pm. STAK also offer courses, clubs and signposting in partnership with a number of other agencies, charities and statutory bodies. Clubs include knitting, art and more recently computer classes. Recently twelve thousand pounds was secured and, in addition to Wi Fi and a telephone being installed, 4 laptops and a printer were purchased and a tutor has been employed to run IT sessions. STAK is also open on Christmas Day. The big Christmas Meal is served on Christmas Eve and in total STAK is



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open for 5 days (closing at 2.00 pm enabling the volunteers a break) over the Christmas and New Year period. There are plans too to start running a debt counselling service and the volunteers are shortly going to be undertaking training with Community Money Advice.

STAK is well respected in the local community and adorned on the walls of the premises are many certificates of accolades of support which have been awarded, non less that of the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in recognition of the hard work and dedication of all the volunteers and supervisors. They have also just launched a new website.

The future

The locality of the current premises is central in St Austell but the main activity of STAK is situated in one small sized room and the services provided are expanding. Storage is also a problem so that goods and provisions are kindly stored in nearby shop premises. Kim's office desk is tucked in a corner of the room, and all donations are placed and recorded on a table in another corner. Ideally STAK would like to purchase the whole building which currently comprises of 2 shops and 3 flats, or purchase another building. They could then provide further services for their users eg laundry and shower facilities, office space and a private consultation room.



STAK's journey over the last 25 years has gone from strength to strength, and with STAK's determination, together with the continued support given, they will surely achieve their future vision. Kim describes STAK like a family with the good and bad times as in all families. STAK recognises that life isn't always straightforward and sometimes, usually due to a combination of life events, people can find themselves in difficult situations. STAK aims to continue and expand the safe, friendly and supportive service they provide to those in need for many years to come.

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