

FAO London Borough of Sutton

Dear Ms Helen Bailey,

Re Sutton Community Dance

We are immensely saddened to hear that Sutton Community Dance finds itself in imminent threat of closure due to an unaffordable increase in rent. This would be nothing short of devastating for our family. SCD is a huge part of our lives, with three of us attending two classes each every week (made possible by the amazingly generous family membership price), plus attending additional events and workshops wherever possible.

What Sutton Community Dance means to our family:

- We have been with SCD since it opened in September 2019 and have watched as it has grown into a thriving Community Interest Company with a team of incredible teachers, offering a huge range of dance styles, catering for all ages and abilities and with a consistently happy atmosphere across both the studios and waiting areas.
- Sutton Community Dance was our lifeline during both national lockdowns. SCD TV (dance classes on zoom) was up and running within a couple of days of the first lockdown being announced and provided a fun and safe way for all of us to exercise alongside other people on a daily basis. As well as the obvious physical and mental health benefits, this ensured a fragment of normality was retained for our children as they were able to stay connected to their teachers and fellow pupils.
- I (Gemma) have attended many of the adult dance and fitness classes they offer over the last few years. No where else in Sutton offers what SCD does in terms of classes on offer for adults for whom dance is their preferred exercise (gyms are not for me!) in such a supportive, friendly way. Many of my fellow adult dance class members travel for miles to attend classes which is testament to their quality and ethos.
- The team itself is unique. The teaching is of a very high quality - both in terms of being able to impart technique, but also in terms of the way they nurture every single student, finding the thing that they love about dance and working to enhance that in every lesson. The practice working towards watching weeks at the end of term for most classes (rather than exams and competitions) is what makes the ethos of this school extra special. Watching weeks are an incredible way of celebrating a child's love of dance while also demonstrating progress and achievement.
- SCD provides incredibly affordable holiday clubs, which is a lifeline for working parents who can't take annual leave throughout every school holiday. Our children get to have an amazing time, doing what they love, in an environment that they are already very comfortable in.
- Our eldest daughter has recently been selected to participate in Dance Lab - SCD's only selective class - on a Friday evening. Dance Lab is for SCD students (age 10-16) who are looking to enhance their technique and performance ability. The teaching team have devised a beautiful piece based on *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, which will be performed to Year 6 students across Sutton as part of their transition activities

before moving to High School. This is an inspired plan - the children and teenagers in Dance Lab will be supporting their peers across the borough by storytelling through dance.

- Finally, SCD is a lovely place to hang out while waiting for our daughters to finish class. It is literally a community hub where parents can catch up, have a cuppa, all while watching beautifully made films of local people dancing.

But Sutton Community Dance is not just a dance school with a great team and a beautiful ethos. Its impact on the community goes well beyond the offer of high quality and inclusive dance teaching. Our family attending Sutton Community Dance five times per week - in its location in the heart of Sutton - also means that we inevitably give our custom to the shops and cafes in the St Nicholas centre, in a way we wouldn't otherwise.

SCD is the reason we visit the St Nicholas centre at all, and because we are there at least four days per week (sometimes more) we inevitably end up making the most of our visits.

- We visit Next or New Look for clothes shopping; although they are not the largest of stores, we often choose to order items online for collection at St Nicholas centre because it saves us postage.
- Before, during or after classes we buy food and drink from the cafes in and around the centre.
- Having Toy Barnhaus, Party Shop, Smiggle and Claire's means we can use trips to SCD to buy all necessary birthday cards and presents and party supplies for the endless kids parties our children attend.
- We found the furniture shop downstairs and Frame Shop upstairs because of coming to St Nics for SCD and they are our first port of call for relevant items.
- Robert Dyas keeps us supplied with water bottles, christmas decorations and camping supplies.
- After Dance Lab on a Friday evening we often get Pizza at Antonios - best pizza in Sutton!
- We pay for parking four or five times per week, which can work out to be over £80 per month.

If SCD wasn't in St Nicholas centre we probably wouldn't do any of the above. We would be more likely to order items online for home delivery or travel to Kingston or Wimbledon where there is more choice of shops.

And we are just one of hundreds of families who will have their own version of the above points.

So a closure of SCD would not just affect a few children's dancing hobby; it will have a substantially detrimental effect on the vibrancy and success of the St Nicholas centre, and will leave a gaping hole in the life of many local people and their families.

We implore you to do everything you can to support SCD to flourish in the heart of this community.

Best wishes,

Gemma & Mark Renard

markandgemma2021@gmail.com | Sutton Residents, Family members of Sutton Community Dance