

SQUARE 1 CAFE YEAR REVIEW 2022

Conducted by Danielle O'Shaughnessy
New Malden Town Centre Partnership



Background

Square 1 Cafes are a model devised by Tony Williams, originally as a means of social recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and the envisaged mental health consequences; the cost of living crisis and social isolation in society generally, and in the Royal Borough of Kingston specifically, have become drivers subsequently.

The New Malden Square 1 Café is a partnership between local charities the Kingston Environment Centre, who have provided the venue, Save the World Club, who provide food supply, fundraising and insurance, and Royal Borough of Kingston, who have supported the café financially.

The New Malden Square 1 Café opened on 9th October 2021. This is a review of the first year of operation. Another café is now in operation in Chessington Sports Centre, a partnership between New Era Community Projects CIC and Angels of the Hood. Further cafes are in prospect in Kingston and neighbouring boroughs.



**SQUARE 1
CAFE
NEW MALDEN**

**YOUR
FACE
GOES
HERE...**

Kingston
Environment
Centre

1 Kingston
Road,
New Malden
KT3 3PE –
by the
Fountain
Roundabout

Saturdays,
12:00midday
until 4:00pm

THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF
KINGSTON
UPON THAMES

**SAVE THE
WORLD
club**

Square 1 Cafes are for social recovery from Covid-19 and life generally.
A safe, inclusive space, where everyone is welcome, and everything is free.

Square One Cafe review 2022

This review looks at the experience of the users and volunteers of Square One Cafe, New Malden, it was conducted by New Malden Town Centre Partnerships "Community Connector" Danielle O'Shaughnessy as a result of interviews taken place on 13/08/22, 10/09/22 and 08/10/22 and observation of the progress of the group since its inception in September 2021. Café participants were told verbally and via a playful poster about the interview process, 10 males and 13 females took part in the consultation, one child aged five also gave feedback. A further number of participants young and old were observed during the process. The average age of interviewees was 65+ years, however there were half a dozen younger people (mainly volunteers) aged between 20 - 40 and a couple of children aged between 5- 12 years who were also in attendance and observed during the review.

Overview

The Square One Cafe is open on Saturdays between 12- 4pm. It is a place where everyone is welcome, and everything is free. The purpose is to provide an opportunity for those who may feel isolated or lonely to have company.

The cafe is in a small community hall, there is a comfy seating area for approx 6 people. On two tables there are board games and activities such as scrabble and colouring for people to partake in. In the corner of the room there is a projector screen showing old black and white silent films and documentaries. Upbeat music is played at a low sound level and in front of the entrance to the kitchen is another table festooned with cakes, biscuits, fruit, breads, sandwich fillings and sometimes crisps. Outside there are table and seating areas at the front and back of the building. The Cafe is signposted on the street outside, the gate and door are left open for people to come and go as they please. When people first arrive they are greeted by a volunteer who helps sign them in and take their temperature (for covid measures) and then they are welcomed into the space by fellow cafe attendees and volunteers.

Café Conversations

The consultative approach was to hold informal conversations and take notes with participants' approval. The intention of the conversations were to find out what people like about the cafe, namely

- What is important about the cafe?
- How should the cafe improve?
- What difference has the cafe made to people?
- How do people find out about the cafe?
- Whether or not cafe users considered themselves as lonely and isolated and whether or not the cafe had changed that for them.

Cafe attendees were asked the following questions

How did you find out about the cafe?

The majority of people heard about the café from word of mouth, either as a recommendation from a friend or contact at a community group they were already engaged with, such as Kingston Churches Action For Homelessness, Save the World Club and Kingston Environment Centre. Five people joined in by following signage they had seen outside the building, one person saw it on the local neighbourhood FB page and one other had received an email from Save the World Club.

Two people who were interviewed were attending for the first time, the rest of the interviewees said they attend the café weekly, "*nearly every week*" or fortnightly.

When asked about their weekly routine three people said they look forward to coming and most people gave the impression that attending the café had become an important part of their weekly activity schedule.

Why do you come to the cafe?

The main reason people gave for coming to the café was that it was an enjoyable experience. A consistent comment was "*the welcome is good*" the people interviewed described an atmosphere of warmth and friendliness. The interviewer observed when people arrive there is a culture of most people saying hello, even if they don't know the person. Then a volunteer signs them in on a register and takes their temperature for Covid reasons. This simple ritual is delivered with good humour; jokey and playful attitudes, one participant said "*It is like an endless Laurel and Hardy*"

People said they enjoy the social aspect of meeting new people and having "Interesting chats" . One person described fellow attendees as "lovely clientele" . There is a sense of appreciation for each other that is based on the assumption most are attending to make new friends and meet different people.

Others are using the space to "*take it easy*" . They like receiving free tea and biscuits and like to sit quietly listening to the music. One woman brings her five year old son to play the board games because "*it feels like a family friendly space, I can bring in the buggy*" she likes that her child can mix with different people, a couple of the older people also bring their grandchildren aged between 8 - 13 years old. There is often a feeling of times gone by when elders and young people mix, talk about the way things used to be and show the younger volunteers and children some "*good tea humour*" i.e. geniality on who makes the best cuppa out of the team.

Mental Health Support

Aside from the games, chat, biscuits and music, people confided in the interviewer that they feel the cafe is a safe and supportive space. Four people spoke of bereavements- one person's sister had committed suicide that week and another was a widow, deep in grief and in need of solace.

One participant (male mid 40's) described their mental health journey in relation to the cafe

"After lockdown I suffered very bad with my mental health and the first day I found this was very helpful (the cafe). I was depressed for 20 years, just in bed sleeping not doing anything, this has helped me feel not alone. I don't have anybody, my family have all passed away, when my mood is good I walk here, I've lost weight was 150 kilos now 90 kilos"

Many of the participants said that most of them live on their own and the social aspect of being around people was important to them, they said they had made friends and looked forward to meeting new people. When asked

What would you be doing if you were not at Square 1 Cafe?

The majority replied *"watching TV"* two people said *"down the pub"* and another said *"Gets me out of the flat, not much to do at home"*

When asked

Would you be with other people?

Everyone replied *"probably not"* in response to this participants were also asked

Do you go to any other groups similar to this?

The answer was a resounding *"No"*

Access for disabled

A notable factor observed by the interviewer was the level of integration and accessibility for neurodivergence. For example during the consultation process a new person arrived who has had a serious brain injury, during the cafe session she had a lengthy fit that required an ambulance to be called and for the members of the cafe to retreat to other parts of the centre, to give her some privacy. The whole incident was dealt with without fuss and everyone present remained calm. The person returned at a later date and gave the interviewer her perspective of the experience- which was that she feels safe and comfortable at Square 1 Cafe and she was happy to return and say hello again.

When the interviewer enquired

What are the not so great things about Square 1 Cafe?

Feedback was given in ways that were mostly constructive and inclined towards improving the centre, for example one attendee said they would like to know more about the support that is given to the Cafe and if they could help the organisers find funding.

Negative feedback was based more on individual relationships and dynamics. One person said

"There are some people I do not get on with" and another pointed out that

"There is some demarcation; people not mingling, that is a personal choice"

Over the review process the interviewer observed that people tend to sit in their favourite place, with their friends and family and take part in the same familiar activities such as a quiz or scrabble, talking quietly, colouring or listening to music.

On the interviewer's last visit she noticed some discussion about moving the games table to the other end of the room to incorporate the people who tend to sit in the quiet area, they didn't move, but a couple of the people in the quiet area did get a little more involved in answering quiz questions spoken at the games table than they had seemingly done previously.

Lastly the attendees were asked

What improvements would you make to the cafe?

Some people found this difficult to answer and so they turned it into a joke eg, stop a certain person cheating at scrabble, find so and so a decent opponent at chess etc however one attendee put this feeling into words of advice *"keep it light"*, the feeling of joviality and humour was something that attendees felt a need to protect.

Others already felt that making the cafe a better place was already incorporated in their experience of it, they gave the example of how they had bought a tea urn and donated it to the cafe. This was a source of great pride and happiness for them. Another example of this is that one attendee gave a practical suggestion, to buy a netted cake plate cover which was bought and put in situ by the following week.

Lastly the only other improvement offered was by a woman who was homeless and was a regular user of local food banks. She felt that there should be more Square One cafes, and that they should be advertised as a place for people to talk about their problems, she said the cafe had helped her build her confidence and she felt this was an essential need for local people across the borough.

The Volunteers

There appears to be a strong contingent of regular volunteers, some of whom were originally attendees/ service users. Those people described how becoming a volunteer made them feel.

"The Cafe grounds you, prevents you from being in your own head"

"Making an arrangement is good', sometimes it's better for the volunteers than for the clients!"

"It is something to do out of work, I find it really good to have a routine and be social, I like to help people"

"I asked to be a volunteer, I enjoy doing what I do, I see people here and have a good time, it's a place to talk have a chat and I think it's really good for kids too, we don't get many, but it's good for them when they do come"

The experience of volunteering at Square 1 Cafe has, according to a Director of Kingston Environment Centre, directly benefited the community group in terms of an increase in the number of volunteers willing to work on other projects at the centre.

Some of the volunteers are Kingston University Students who have an interest in community development and as a result of their work at Square One cafe they continued in the field and offered their services to other local community groups outside of the Environment Centre setting.

Summary

The Director of Kingston Environment Centre: Pat Dobson attends the cafe regularly, she has noted that as well as the project attracting more volunteers to work in the community garden, the cafe is popular and busy *"you can see friendships have developed"*

The interviewers impression is that the cafe is achieving its desired goals and has become a valued resource by the Square One Cafe community. It is best summed up in the words of a regular user who asked for her words to be written verbatim and shared in the review.

Woman 68 yrs

"This place is right, very right, it promotes friendships for the lonely, unconditional love of making a sandwich for the lonely, it has an effect, it's as it should be everywhere, people are built up people are lonely, I've been observing, and it's right so right, that people are different, it's incredible, it's the highlight of the week, lovingly treated, fantastic, I make a point of coming here, people come week after week, as it stands it is very good, I play Scrabble which I haven't done for years, they've helped me through bereavement, gave genuine care, there should be things like this all over the world"

11/10/22

Danielle O'Shaughnessy

Square 1 Café KT3 Attendance

Date Customers

09/10/2021 10
 16/10/2021 10
 23/10/2021 24
 30/10/2021 19
 06/11/2021 18
 13/11/2021 31
 20/11/2021 19
 27/11/2021 25
 04/12/2021 25
 11/12/2021 26
 18/12/2021 30
 25/12/2021
 01/01/2022
 08/01/2022
 15/01/2022 17
 22/01/2022 24
 29/01/2022 31
 05/02/2022 20
 12/02/2022 22
 19/02/2022 25
 26/02/2022 20
 05/03/2022 24
 12/03/2022 22
 19/03/2022 21
 26/03/2022 17
 02/04/2022 24
 09/04/2022 19
 16/04/2022 22
 23/04/2022 25
 30/04/2022 28
 07/05/2022 26
 14/05/2022 16
 21/05/2022 27
 28/05/2022 35
 04/06/2022 37
 11/06/2022 32
 18/06/2022 28
 25/06/2022 26
 02/07/2022 32
 09/07/2022 21
 16/07/2022 35
 23/07/2022 34
 30/07/2022 27
 06/08/2022 30

13/08/2022 26
 20/08/2022 27
 27/08/2022 32
 03/09/2022 31
 10/09/2022 35
 17/09/2022 25
 24/09/2022 25
 01/10/2022 30

TOTAL 1235

RBK Grant Funds
 £ 3,000.00

Spent per customer visit
 £ 2.43

Attendance over Time

