



THE UNITY CENTRE

YOGA, WELLBEING & THE ARTS

OUR STORY

In 2018 Unity, a yoga organisation based in Brighton, won the tender to establish a community arts and wellbeing centre in the listed Turkish Baths building in Lewes, East Sussex.



The School / Retreats have been established since 2002 and the Studio has been operating in Brighton since 2012 offering yoga, dance, massage and meditation classes to a wide variety of people. Our experience and passion for the arts and community will be shown in this new community development. We are bringing our work to Lewes as a CIC meaning that all our profit will be reinvested into helping a wide range of people access yoga, wellbeing and the arts. We want to create a centre which is inclusive and open to all, serving the whole neighbourhood with these lives enhancing, often lifesaving practices and therapies.

We have recently begun transforming the building into this new community space. The council who own the building have fitted out the shell of the building to bring it up to current health and safety and public standards. We will be adding all electrical work/heating/plumbing and flooring, plus extra walls, plastering etc. We will also be building interior fittings including the kitchen and café area and purchasing all specialist equipment to allow those with disabilities to do yoga; including disabled parking and access, a hoist and adult changing table.

OUR VISION

Our vision is that the Turkish Baths will become a community hub for all allowing the whole community to benefit from yoga and the arts. When work is completed, we will offer two large studios, two treatment rooms, an infra-red sauna, therapeutic float pool, a vegetarian café which will intercept food waste and a shop selling local products.

Our vision ensures that the centre is accessible to those with various disabilities and or vulnerabilities / additional needs and those facing barriers to engagement / life enjoyment.

We will be able to offer affordable and no cost activities to those who may not usually be able to access them.

THE NEED

The tender for the building was won by Unity after a period of wide community consultation in partnership with the council. Tender was granted following a well-supported petition of 2000 signatures requesting that the building be offered as a community space rather than a

commercial space. This shows a clear need in the eyes of Lewes residents for a new community space. We have continued to gain public feedback and support ever since, to fine tune exactly what is needed by the public.

Through our experience of running yoga and wellbeing centres as well as extensive networking we have discovered that it can feel intimidating for some people to enter this world of natural health. Elderly people, those with learning difficulties, people struggling with depression and anxiety as examples, may find it difficult walking into a 'standard' Centre as they may feel that they don't 'fit in' or will be judged. Others may feel alienated from these services because of financial restrictions or physical/learning difference. To counter this there is a need for inclusive centres such as Unity Lewes.

Those with vulnerabilities are often excluded from the world of exercise through a lack of specialist support. For example, in research conducted by Sports England in 2018 only 16.8% of those with a Learning Disability are involved in sport once a week compared to 39.9% of the general population. With specialist staff this does not have to be the case.

Bridging the Gap research reveals pockets of need including significant deprivation, older people's isolation and youth disadvantage in Lewes. The inclusivity of our centre means we will be open to support these groups.

Jo Carter, Former Green councillor for Lewes

'I'm really pleased that the Unity Centre for Yoga, Wellbeing and the Arts has got the lease for the historic Turkish Baths. Hundreds of local people signed a petition I started that persuaded the council that the public building should be occupied by an organisation with 'social and community' value, not just another restaurant. I think that Unity ticks all the boxes: they are really committed to running a program that is open to all from young to old, and they have great plans to offer pain relief, support and therapy especially to those who are disabled or suffering from long-term illness. I'm looking forward to seeing Unity bring the Turkish Baths back to life with yoga, martial arts, dance and something for everyone!'

Heather Renton, Local Resident

'This will be a fantastic project for the people of Lewes. A great location in the centre of town and offering therapies and yoga to all of the community. I'm very happy to support such a vision. I practice yoga myself and work closely as a nurse with many people with mental health problems. If only everyone could understand the power of mindfulness meditation, yoga and art therapy and how it can transform the lives of people with mental illness and other conditions, I can't wait to watch the project evolve.'

HOW WE WILL WORK

To ensure we have maximum community impact we will run a variety of programmes in the centre. This will include:

- A vegetarian café intercepting food waste
- A series of arts events including play / music performances.
- Yoga, Dance, Meditation, Martial Art classes (e.g. Yoga for children in foster care)
- Specialist group classes including Music for Dementia, Yoga Therapy for Cerebral Palsy and Arts and Craft Stroke Clubs
- Massage, bodywork, talking and art/music/movement therapies

- Sauna and Floatation sessions (excellent for pain/stress relief)
- Gallery Space for local artists to showcase their work.

Initially our focus will be on:

- Gatherings for the Elderly, more specifically those recovering from strokes, partnering with the Stroke Association & Lewes Stroke club
- Chair yoga specifically addressing significant mobility issues
- Music for dementia provided with Lewes Based MovingSounds.
- Yoga for Children in foster care/recently adopted
- Yoga Therapy for those with severe physical limitations such as cerebral palsy

For those who are able to afford it classes will be run at a competitive rate. Profits will be used to fund specialist classes at no or low cost to those who would not normally be able to access them.

OUR IMPACT

We want to create an environment that will mean users of the centre will leave with an increased sense of physical, mental and emotional wellbeing and increased mental and physical resilience. In addition to this our classes and events will aim to bring about reduced stress and increased confidence.

Monitoring and evaluation are important to us and we will continually measure our impact through both quantitative and qualitative data. This will include the number of new participants and returning participants, measured change in participants through tools such as wellbeing webs, participant interviews and case studies.

OUR BUDGET

Our renovation costs to completion are £127,000. This includes all plumbing, electrics, internal and external building work, flooring, specialist equipment including our sauna and floatation pool, hoists, adult changing table and all decoration.

We have currently raised £76,287 through a combination of grant and crowdfunding. We have received funding from Awards for All, The Chalk Cliff Foundation, Locase and the South East Business Boost. We are in the process of accepting funding from Sports England. To reach our target we have secured loans and we are approaching further trusts and foundations to ensure we can achieve as much funding as possible.

FIND OUT MORE

Please see our attached plans and visit our website at www.being-in-unity.com

CONTACT US

Kathryn Sutter, Fundraiser – kathrynsutter@gmail.com – 07706 035330

Write to us: Unity Lewes CIC, c/o 5 Wheatsheaf Gardens, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 2UQ

"I really welcome the Unity Centre to Lewes where young & old will be able to meet & come together & experience a calm and peaceful space together" Maria Caulfield, MP for Lewes