



Celebrating four years of connecting our community



HUMBLE BEGINNINGS... An empty 108 Brentford High Street begins to morph into Docking Station (January 2011)

Contents

Foreword.....	4
Beginnings.....	6
Delivering on our mission.....	8
The team.....	9
Operations and social impact.....	12
Ground floor.....	12
The Bees Café.....	13
Live music.....	15
First floor – ‘108 High St’.....	16
Testimonials.....	18
Finances.....	19
Lessons learned.....	20
What worked well.....	20
Where we could have done better.....	21
Resources to reuse elsewhere.....	22
Acknowledgements.....	23



Foreword

As I write this, I do so with a sense of achievement, but also loss. Docking Station has always been described as a “meanwhile use” project, in as much as it was a temporary use of 108 High Street and one day it would come to an end. Yet having been a part of the organisation for nearly 4 years, I can genuinely state that the ethos of co-working and community is something I will carry with me for many years to come.

When I joined Docking Station in 2011, I had no idea of just how profound the purpose of the organisation was. It was an organisation that had genuine significance; a mission to bring together the very best that Brentford had to offer the general public. Whether that was entertainment, co-working space or something as simple as affordable toys for young families through Brentford Toy Library pop-up shops - Docking Station really did offer everything to everyone.

Whether you are reading this as someone who has contributed to the project, looking to enhance your own project by examining what we did right or wrong or even as someone who is simply curious as to what a social enterprise can actually achieve – I encourage you to take away the very spirit of what we did on Brentford High Street for 4 years. The very simple message that when people come together, barriers mean nothing and anything is possible.

Docking Station achieved a huge amount of objectives on, at times, extremely limited resources. We were fortunate to receive a lot of support and encouragement from local businesses and other charities. We hope the multi-purpose, secular and flexible community space we proved can work will inspire others to replicate what Docking Station delivered during its time on Brentford High Street.

I hope you enjoy the story of Docking Station.



Elliott Parker

PROJECT MANAGER, DECEMBER 2014



Beginnings

In 2010, Spark's (formerly Hounslow Education Business Partnership) Social Enterprise High Street Challenge invited young people in Hounslow secondary schools to develop a business plan for an empty shop in Brentford High Street in just eight weeks. The winning business plan 'Docking Station' - selected in a Dragons Den-like final in autumn 2010 - came from a team at Hounslow Manor School.

For two months in autumn 2010, students worked on detailed plans for a real business challenge - a start-up retail outlet in empty premises in Brentford High Street. Year 12 and 13 Business Studies students not only had to come up with a workable business proposition, their ideas also had to provide new job opportunities for local young people currently Not in Education Employment or Training (NEETs).

The London Borough of Hounslow, through a partnership between Spark! and Community Partnerships Unit, secured funding from LGiD's Local Innovation Transition Fund. The Social Enterprise High Street Challenge was established as a national pilot to provide young people with opportunities to cultivate entrepreneurship, learn about social enterprise and develop retail business skills. The project was supported by Ballymore, owners of the retail site, and the Heathrow Community Fund (part of BAA Communities Trust) in addition to a wide range of other local and national businesses. Ballymore's support was a critical enabler, providing the unit for five years on a peppercorn rent.

The Social Enterprise High Street Challenge had three key aspects:

- A training programme: 'Making money in retail business'
- The business planning competition
- Launching a new business

'Making money in retail business' - This was a programme organised for NEETs and young people seeking employment by Spark! and run in partnership with Integrated Youth Support Service to provide:

- CV and covering letter writing & interview skills
- Workplace essentials e.g. health & safety, timekeeping
- Financial skills & money management
- Providing excellent customer service
- Helping run a catering-related retail business



In December 2010, the trainees completed health & safety training, with the support of Hounslow Connexions and Prospects, as well as first aid and food hygiene training with West Thames College. In January 2011, the trainees started a basic catering course. All were accepted in early February 2011 as Docking Station's first cohort of Hospitality Services (Level 2) Apprentices.

In parallel with the training programme, Spark! ran a competition with teams of local Year 12 and 13 students who created business plans for the empty retail unit. At the end of November 2010, thirty-one students in seven teams from three schools presented their ideas in a Dragons' Den-style final held at The Musical Museum in Brentford.

The finalists' enterprise ideas included a women only gym, a DVD and video games shop, a low-price clothes store, a 'clothes-swap' sell-and-buy store, a multi-cultural tea room, a nursery and a high-quality café and cake shop.

As well as an exhibition of their ideas, there were presentations from each of the teams who had to answer tough questions from the Dragons testing their ideas including financial plans and social and environmental sustainability. The Dragons represented a range of skills and experience: Brentford Ward Councillor Ruth Cadbury; Sara Novakovic, founder of Oliver's Wholefoods (Kew); John Simnett, founder of Wizzbike.com on Brentford High Street; Philip Miller, former Chair of Spark!; Brad Candy, Operations Director of Octink; and Punam Kharbanda, Trustee of BAA Communities Trust/Business in the Community.

Hounslow Manor School's (now Kingsley Academy's) Docking Station idea was developed at lightning speed into a fully-fledged business plan in December 2010. Fit out of the empty unit commenced in mid-January 2011 and the store officially launched on 11 March 2011.

At the time, this was understood to be a first; no other project in the UK had ever seen a social enterprise retail business concept developed by school students put into action.

Relive the Docking Station launch story and watch the video at: <http://tinyurl.com/DSBrentfordlaunch>



Delivering on our mission

The charity's – Docking Station's – objects were to advance the education of the public, in particular but not exclusively young people, pupils and students in the London Borough of Hounslow, by the provision of training, personal development and employment opportunities with the object of improving their employability and to enable them to reach their full potential so they will be better prepared for adult and working life.

Initially, Docking Station provided these training and development opportunities by giving our volunteers the capabilities to offer our:

- members tasty food and drink to enjoy in a comfortable and vibrant lounge and entertainment space.
- members the opportunity to play the latest video games, go online, and drop in to listen to new music talent from our local area.
- members serviced office space in which to non-profits and micro-enterprises can connect, work and innovate.
- customers a space to celebrate events from kids parties to corporate launches.
- other non-profit partners a platform for innovation: from running chess clubs, to pop-up shops, to a stage for new music talent.

Following a slower than expected start to the concept of a lounge and gaming space – and significant challenges supporting and managing a team entirely made of young recruits – the trustee board came to the conclusion that in order for Docking Station to thrive, the focus of the organisation would need to change. We had to say a sad goodbye to all but two of our trainees and with a clear gap in the market for a 'community hub' in Brentford – where the town centre possesses no town hall – the project swiftly switched in mid-2011, just five weeks after first opening its doors, to become a multi-purpose community space.

Docking Station's new focus became to:

- Build the strength of the voluntary & community sector (VCS);
- Reduce isolation by providing a supported community resource;
- Enable people to participate better or more easily in their local society by increasing access to information and opportunities;
- Work with local volunteers and residents to build skills and knowledge and therefore their individual employability; and
- Work with local organisations to provide support structures such as job clubs and other training opportunities.

Docking Station was initially set-up as a subsidiary charity of Spark! After about two years this formal governance link was ended as it was felt that the organisation had matured to a point where this oversight was no longer needed – and the Spark! board's priorities and focus needed to move elsewhere.



The team

The team behind Docking Station has been many and varied since launch. However, there have been some key figures responsible for taking the project from strength-to-strength and overseeing its evolution from gaming café, to community hub.

Trustee Directors:

Tim Luckett has a Brentford-based accountancy services business and was actively involved as a trustee in helping initiate Docking Station. Tim is a past President of Brentford Chamber of Commerce and serves as a volunteer trustee / director for a number of local charities, including Cultivate London, Pathways and Brentford High Street Steering Group.

Kate Tomkinson joined the Docking Station board at launch. Like all trustees she served in a personal capacity but, as Principle Area Initiatives Officer at London Borough of Hounslow, was able to bring extensive knowledge of local, regional and national grant funding. Kate's third sector experience spans over 10 years from involvement in many community projects across London and the south east.

Will Tyler is Chief Executive of Octink, a display graphics & signage company based in Brentford. In the critical start-up phase, Will mobilised Octink to provide extensive pro-bono support in the fit-out of the exterior and interior of 108 High Street. Additional remodelling support was provided for the launch of The Bees Café. Will is an active member of the London Chamber of Commerce and on the judging panel for the Queen's Awards for Enterprise, Sustainable Development category in addition to serving as trustee and chairman of Spark!

Staff:

Elliott Parker joined Docking Station in July 2011 having completed his BA in Football & Society and Journalism. With initial ambitions of being a writer, Elliott joined Docking Station as a Marketing & Communications Manager on a voluntary basis, 5 days a week, at a time when (in the depths of recession) such professional opportunities weren't forthcoming. Elliott's vast contributions during his time as a volunteer ultimately led to him being encouraged to apply for the role of Project Manager in November 2012, which he successfully secured. Elliott has juggled these duties for two years, whilst also overseeing "The Bees café" project, working with our partner organisation The Bridge.

Kaz Bali has been with Docking Station since it opened in March 2011. After many years out of work, Kaz joined the team while the original 7-day café operation was still in full flow. After the transition to the weekly events programme, Kaz stayed on as venue host – co-ordinating



customer bookings and building maintenance; before progressing onto more administration and credit control duties, working under Elliott. Kaz hopes to make use of her experiences at Docking Station across the last 4 years and gain full-time work within the retail sector.

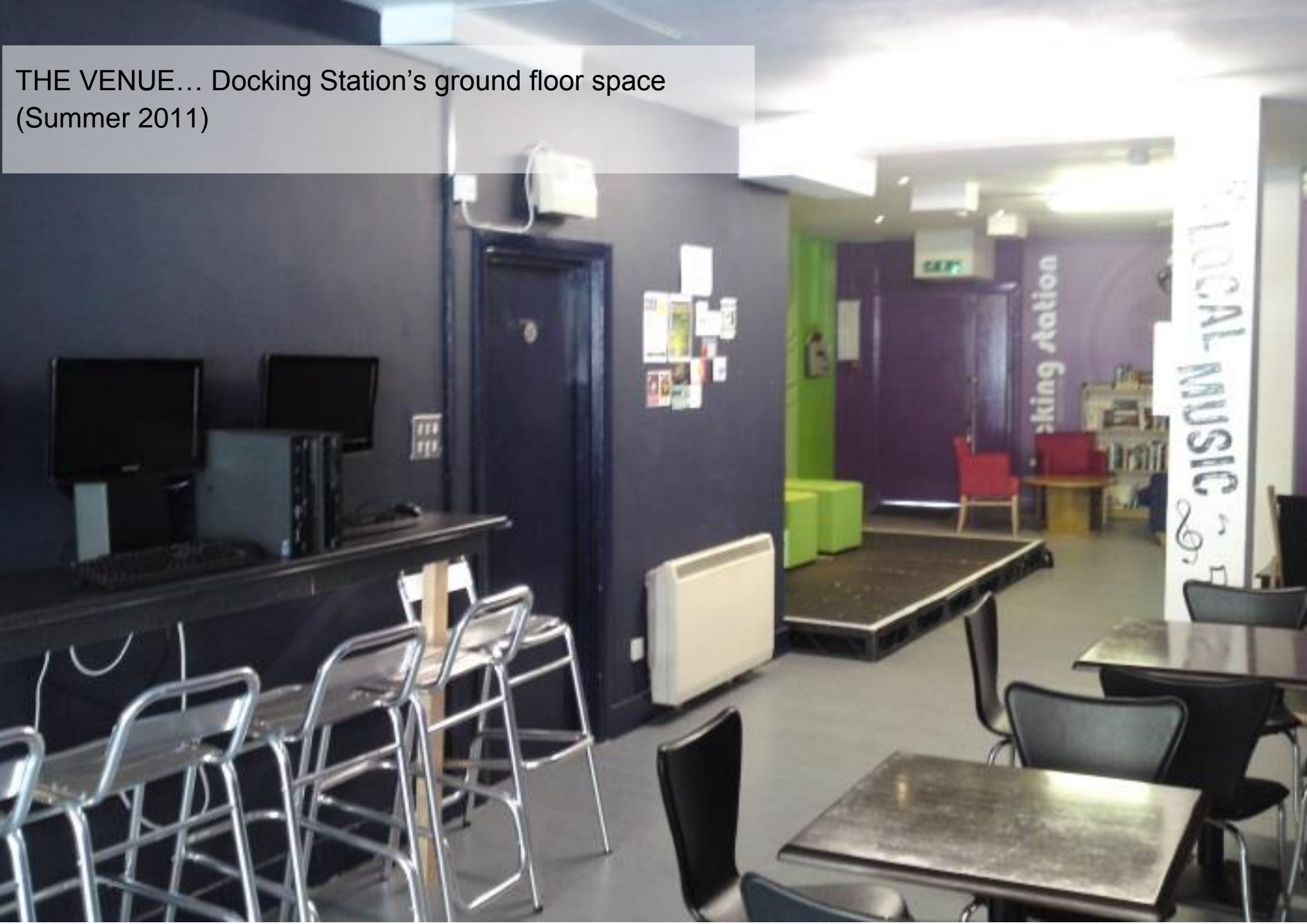
Andrew Dakers managed the launch of Docking Station after originally project managing the Social Enterprise High Street Challenge which sourced the initial concepts for the organisation from the young people of London Borough of Hounslow. Andrew oversaw Docking Station as p/t Project Manager, one day a week, until November 2012. From December 2012 onwards Andrew continued to volunteer with the charity as Company Secretary and Advisor.

Lorraine Davies served Docking Station from May 2011–June 2012 as volunteer Venue Manager – organising the initial Docking Station events programme and promoting the newly-launched office space under the ‘108 HIGH ST’ brand. After leaving Docking Station, Lorraine’s career has focussed on pet grooming and she now freelances for a range of clients.

Georgina Morris was part of the Docking Station volunteer team from January – May 2012. Georgina was integral to the launch of the ‘Jellyweek’ co-working initiative in January 2012 in addition to the range of initial marketing for ‘The Bees Café’ youth employment project in March 2012. Georgina moved on having secured a position at South West Trains, where she now co-ordinates the HLOS (High Level Output Specification) project; expanding the existing capacity of the South Western Railway.



THE VENUE... Docking Station's ground floor space
(Summer 2011)



Operations and social impact

Ground floor

The ground floor space at 108 High Street has easily proven to be the most popular, given its easy access on Brentford High Street.

This area has much in the way of multi-functional capabilities as the space could be adapted for almost any purpose. Some examples being:

- A local gospel choir group that required a space for rehearsals; large enough that could accommodate their growing number of members.
- The Museum of London being able to use the ground space to lay on a well-attended public exhibition of archaeological findings discovered throughout Hounslow.
- Hounslow Council delivered their Community Access Service, a social drop-in project for disabled adults, 2 days per week.
- Families and community groups booking the space for a variety of parties and celebrations.
- Hounslow Chamber of Commerce ran a logistics workshop.
- Consultancy group Soundings using the space to gather thoughts of local residents on the ongoing development proposals of Brentford High Street with property developer Ballymore. This took many formats such as group discussions, Q&As with the development team and seminars where the proposals were presented.
- Docking Station also acted as a central point of information for those wishing to advertise upcoming initiatives and projects through our community notice board.
- Narcotics Anonymous held weekly meetings at Docking Station.
- The use of the ground floor space for Brentford Toy Library, Live music events and The Bees Café is detailed further over the next two pages...

Brentford Toy Library made use of the space from October 2011 until early 2013 in perhaps the most 'organic' use of the space – delivering a pop-up shop every Friday to sell low price toys. This incarnation of the space was consistently popular with the Toy Library's service users who often commented that the pop-up concept was a useful extension of the toy library's other weekly activities; which involved a community play scheme.



The Bees Café

Undoubtedly the highest impact Docking Station hosted on the ground floor was The Bees Café which launched in March 2012. The project began as a partnership between Docking Station, Brentford FC and Chiswick-based training provider The Bridge. This saw Docking Station fulfil its original vision of bringing work-based learning, in a hospitality environment, to Brentford High Street.

The Bees Café is a not-for-profit initiative that allowed young unemployed people, who staff the café, to gain crucial skills and experience to better prepare them for work in hospitality and retail.

In addition to running all aspects of the café operations, the trainees work towards BTEC qualifications, with the possibility of pursuing NVQ Apprenticeship opportunities – using the practical knowledge gained from a professional catering environment. Originally launched as a one day a week pilot, the success of the project allowed expansion to 2 days a week. The project has seen over 150 young people placed into sustainable employment with employers such as Premier Inn & Hilton Doubletree.

Through the partnership with The Bridge, who managed the café's operations, the trainees had access to part time support from several catering professionals. This was a crucial change in approach to when Docking Station first opened.

The Bees Café also won a local award in May 2013 for “outstanding contribution to the local community” in recognition of the work the project achieved in placing young people into work (see press cutting opposite).





Cafe scoops top award for efforts

BRENTFORD: Shop allows workers to gain skills

by **Alix Culbertson**
alix.culbertson@trinitymirror.com

A CAFE which helps young people gain crucial skills to get into work has been rewarded for its efforts.

The Bees Cafe, at the Docking Station, Brentford High Street is the winner of this month's Thorgill's Pride of West London award, which was presented last week by Daniel Madden, the letting agent's Chiswick branch manager.

Elliott Parker, project manager at the Docking Station, was presented with a certificate and £100 to go to the charity of his choice.

Not surprisingly, the money has gone to the Docking Station to help with the impressive work they do.

Mr Parker said: "I was really surprised we were chosen, it's fantastic news."

The not-for-profit initiative, which sees young people working in the cafe to gain experience and skills in preparation for hospitality and retail work, celebrated its first anniversary in March.

It has helped a number of



WELL DONE: Thorgill's Daniel Madden (centre right) hands the certificate to Elliott Parker, along with the Bees Cafe staff

Photo by Matt Grayson WL20135763_1

experience needed to flourish in the working environment."

Mark Devlin, chief executive at Brentford FC, added: "We are very pleased that The Bees Cafe has won

this award. Not only does it energise Brentford High Street, it also draws customers to the heart of its community and we are delighted to be in partnership with them."

live music

Starting in summer 2011, Docking Station hosted a number of live music events. In association with local music promoter, Helen Martin Productions, the venue hosted a range of musical talents, old and new, and gave Brentford High Street a new place for local talent to be showcased.

Performers included:

- The Pieces (pictured right)
- Brentford-based threesomes 'Krosfire' & 'The Three 9's'
- West London rapper Podgy Figures
- JC Carroll Acoustic Trio
- Roosevelt Bandwagon
- John Otway
- Phil Martin - launching his solo album: "Before We Go To Paradise"



Helen's personal license and Temporary Events Notices (TENs) allowed Docking Station to host these events.



First floor – ‘108 High St’



Docking Station’s first floor office space (branded ‘108 HIGH ST’) served non-profits, start-ups and sole traders seeking co-working space in the town centre.



Cultivate London, a local social enterprise, have been anchor tenants of the first floor since October 2012. The organisation focuses on training and apprenticeships in their urban farms.

Docking Station’s presence in this market allowed start-up organisations, community groups and CVS organisations access to facilities that not existed locally following the wind-up of Brentford Community Resource Centre. A clear advantage for these organisations is that they are able to reduce their own running costs by having Docking Station available.

Subsidised office space offered by Docking Station allowed community organisations and start-ups (often run by one or two people) to make use of a space they would not have access to previously. Given the high-cost of office space offered by other local providers EasyOffice and Workspace Group – out of reach of most charities – Docking Station’s first floor space provided an affordable alternative.

The first floor conference facilities at Docking Station attracted a wide range of clients. Brentford’s central location in London Borough of Hounslow, in addition to Docking Station’s easily accessible location by public transport made for a desirable meeting point for a range of organisations. Booked on an hourly rate, Docking Station’s pricing policy allowed for a low-cost solution even for those that needed a meeting space away from home. Some uses of the meeting room included:

- 1-2-1 counselling sessions delivered by TASHA Foundation



- Business support sessions delivered by Hounslow For Business, covering various areas of entrepreneurial interest for those starting up their own company
- Hosting Thamesbank Credit Union's AGM

Docking Station participated in 'Jellyweek 2012' – an initiative to promote co-working originating from Germany that encourages organisations to share ideas in various wacky ways. Under the '108 HIGH ST' brand, Docking Station hosted a number of sessions including 'Seeds of Growth' – where participants discussed various ways of growing their business while also making a commitment to grow a potted seedling to illustrate the growth of their ideas.

We're sure there are some thriving plants out there somewhere following our participation in Jellyweek!



Testimonials

Docking Station has received a range of generally very positive feedback from its beneficiaries over the years. Here is a selection of what our partners and clients have had to say:

“The office space that Docking Station has provided has been invaluable in allowing our organisation to function. Without it, we would likely be in an expensive office that would be a significant drain on our finances.”

Adrienne Attorp, General Manager, Cultivate London

“The Bees Café puts Brentford FC at the heart of the local community and this project contributes to energising Brentford High Street.”

Mark Devlin, Chief Executive, Brentford FC

“Our memories of working with Docking Station are happy ones. We had great fun delivering our pop-up charity shop for 18 months which was a steady source of revenue for our organisation, a great location for our users and a prime example of how co-working between charities works to mutual benefit.”

Sally Malit, Trustee & Treasurer, Brentford Toy Library

“Docking Station has worked with us closely in delivering ‘The Bees Café’. Our trainees have picked up practical skills in a professional environment that has allowed them to transition easily into their desired career in hospitality. Without this link, our trainees would not have been in a position to secure these jobs – It’s been a valuable tool for us.”

Marcia Wootton, Managing Director, The Bridge (Developing People) Ltd



finances

	2010/11 *	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15 **
Income	£36,248	£72,963	£38,176	£31,563	£16,435
Expenditure	£35,898	£53,889	£34,097	£31,992	£21,476
Surplus/ (Loss)	£350	£19,074	£4,079	(£429)	(£7,367)
Liabilities (Yearend)	(£49,726)	(£14,785)	(£6,078)	(£4,560)	£0

Notes

* This included most start-up / fit-out costs, although some project management costs were included in Spark/HEBP's accounts this financial year.

** This is a forecast. Final accounts will be submitted to Companies House and the Charity Commission in March 2015. Any remaining cash assets (likely to be £2-4k) after any remaining liabilities have been cleared will be transferred to another local charity with similar objects.



Lessons learned

What worked well

- **Peppercorn rent and 80% charity business rates relief** – It is inconceivable that that this project would have been viable without this support from Ballymore and the legislative framework around business rates. Together these benefits saved the charity about £28k per annum.
- **Substantial up front funding** – Around £90k of start-up funding, as well as substantial in-kind support, enabled the initial fit out of Docking Station and provided essential working capital.
- **Flexibility of space design** – Our multi-functional approach to venue hire allowed us to attract clients from a wide spectrum. There wasn't any business we would decline (within reason) as we were in a position to be able to alter the layout of Docking Station to cater for any purpose.
- **Active marketing and 'pay as you go' pricing** – From day one a comprehensive marketing strategy was developed whereby our offer – low-cost co-working pricing plans offered to charities, micro-enterprises and start-up organisations – was easy to understand and 'pay as you go'. In this we were influenced by research Andrew Dakers undertook in 2005/6 looking at how The Hub Angel's operating model might transfer to Brentford.
- **Active events programme** – As Docking Station's network of contacts grew, we made full use of these in establishing a weekly events programme that appealed to all parts of the community.
- **Local suppliers and corporate responsibility partnerships** – Our back office support came from local suppliers such as Brentford Bookkeepers/ TeamB, Lanix and KnoxCropper. Partnerships with local businesses, large and small, that believed in community investment such as Octink, Vokins, Chiswick Park Enjoy Work and Anthony Holden Crofts and Co, and offered specialist support in key areas, was also vital to our success and viability.
- **Client base churn and shrinkage** – We were operating Docking Station through the recession and increasingly severe government funding cuts. This meant we both helped extend the operational life of partners such as Brentford Toy Library by reducing their operating costs, but eventually even our support was not enough to keep some under-funded charities going. The closure of charities around us meant that there were less organisations out there to draw on our assistance.
- **Lean staffing** – The project was managed one day a week and had the venue host worked 16hrs a week, time which was used fairly flexibly. This fairly lean staffing kept operating costs to a sustainable level.



- **Progressively lower dependence on grant subsidy** – In its final year Docking Station was generating about 80% of the income required to cover its operating cost, with a 20% subsidy from grants.
- **Exit strategy** – Whilst we explored options for relocation, the reality was that by 2014 with a more buoyant economy and the imminent granting of planning permission for the South side of Brentford High Street, low cost premises were no longer to be found in the area. A managed wind-up before our working capital ran out seemed the best way forward. Only had we been gifted a building might there have been a future for the project. We hope that the benefits it has delivered will inspire London Borough of Hounslow & Ballymore to include a similar space in the re-developed South side of Brentford High Street.

Where we could have done better

- **De-risking the initial start-up with additional funding and support** – After the initial launch of Docking Station, sales proved to be well below expectation. This came down to multiple factors:
 - The operational management of the café and pastoral care of young trainees should have been split into two specialist roles. It was too much for one person.
 - We should have had fewer trainees with an equal balance of trainees to experienced front of house and kitchen staff.
 - This in turn impacted on the quality of the customer experience and reduced the amount of return business that was generated.
 - Interior fit out was initially too dark and did not bounce light about, so shop would look empty from the high street. The initial fit out also lacked intimacy.
 - Controls – video cameras should have been installed from day one to discourage petty theft from tills which was all too tempting for some of our vulnerable client group.
 - The impact of this was that we let down our initial trainees in not providing them with the sustainable employment we intended. However we had a Plan B and learnt the lessons when we established The Bees Café project with Brentford FC and The Bridge.
- **More marketing** – During the course of the project, we determined that the office space and venue hire market, as a whole, is extremely competitive. More established organisations such as Workspace Group, Great West House and EasyOffice, who specialise in reasonably affordable and flexible office space, meant that our first floor space had to remain at c.£50 per week (further discounted for charity users) to offer a meaningful choice in a crowded market. Given our limited resources, marketing the office space in the face of more established competition proved to be a challenge, resulting in take-up of our offer, whilst in line with our initial projections, being a bit lower than was originally anticipated.



Resources to reuse elsewhere

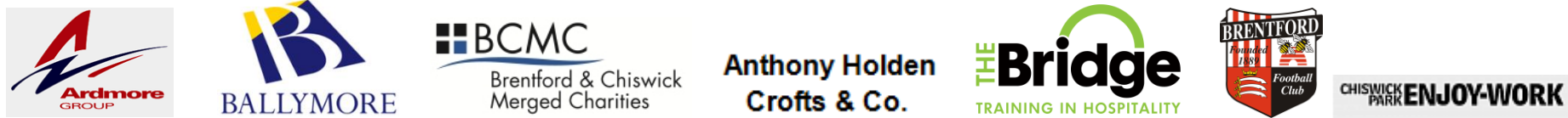
If you are looking to start your own not-for-profit community hub and/or cafe, the following resources can be requested from the Docking Station archive, held by Spark (www.sparklondon.org):

- Supplier contacts
- Articles and memorandum of association
- Lease agreement
- Sub-license agreement
- Volunteer agreement
- User agreement
- Kitchen policies



Acknowledgements

Finally, a big thank you to all of our key supporters:



And our other partners...

ABA – Design	Hounslow For Business	Job Centre Plus	Starbucks	Coffee Hit Hounslow
Connexions	Open House Community Café	St. George	Western International Market	
EA Games	Goddards	Picnic Films	Jewson	VA Services
	Prospects	Helen Martin Productions	Video Shoot Productions	



www.docking-station.org.uk

