

## Surrey team addicted to changing futures

17 January 2024



A former aircraft engineer has spoken out about how his alcohol addiction threatened to wreck his life.

Steve Saunders, 66, from Pyrford, Woking says that what started as social drinking turned into an all-consuming addiction, which saw both his marriage and career end.

Now he is using his experience to help others and to send out a clear message, that there is always support in Surrey for those with a drug or alcohol addiction.

Steve works with Surrey County Council's Changing Futures programme on their Bridge the Gap scheme which supports people facing a range of issues including alcohol and drug addiction, domestic abuse and mental health challenges.

*"Like most other people I started drinking in my late teens and 20s socially but it was in my 50s when it started to become a big problem," said Steve, who is a proud father of two grown-up sons.*

*"I now know that I have an addictive personality and that affects how I see alcohol, and one drink is never enough. My behaviour changed and I was awful to those around me – it ended up ruining my second marriage and saw me retire from my job as an aircraft engineer aged just 53-years-old.*

*"At my worst I was drinking a bottle of spirits a day, often in secret. You kid yourself that people don't know what's going on, but it was out of control. I kept losing my driving licence and I was lucky not to be in prison. When I left my job I nearly drank myself to death."*

The turning point for Steve was when he decided to be honest with his doctor about his drinking, and he went into rehabilitation.

*"Going through rehabilitation changed everything," said Steve. "I decided I wanted to help others who are facing similar problems and so I became involved in Bridge the Gap to offer my insights into the systems that support people and also to run SMART recovery meetings which are both face-to-face and online.*

*"A huge range of people access the service – business owners, housewives and professional people such as doctors and teachers. All of them have one thing in common – they are looking for help, and we make sure they receive it."*

Until now Bridge the Gap has been run as a pilot scheme by Surrey County Council, funded by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the National Lottery – but now a fundraising drive is being launched to raise the £1.4 million which will be needed for it to continue supporting vulnerable people in Surrey.

Eleven local charities are backing Bridge the Gap and these are Catalyst, Guildford Action, The Hope Hub, Oakleaf, Richmond Fellowship, Rentstart, Your Sanctuary, North Surrey Domestic Abuse Service, South West Surrey Domestic Abuse Outreach Service, East Surrey Domestic Abuse Services and Surrey Domestic Abuse Partnership.

Steve said: *"As well as helping others I also get something from the SMART meetings because it reminds me to be grateful for where I am. Anyone facing a drug or alcohol problem needs to know that there is help out there, and we will support them in turning their life around."*

Keely Glithero, service manager at Catalyst, said Steve's input into the Bridge the Gap programme is invaluable.

Keely said: *"Steve's rich lived and learned experience in addiction brings a valuable perspective and contribution to how we deliver services. I am truly inspired by his relentless energy for supporting people, and I'm so glad to support and work alongside Steve as a volunteer for Catalyst in the Changing Futures programme."*

**A conference is taking place in Surrey later this month when people, like Steve, will use their lived experience to support others, challenge prejudice and empower themselves. The Power of Lived Experience event takes place on Wednesday, January 31 from 10am to 4pm at Dorking Halls. For more information and to reserve your place contact [colette.lane@sabb.nhs.uk](mailto:colette.lane@sabb.nhs.uk)**

Further information:

Changing Futures Bridge the Gap programme **Changing Futures - Bridge the Gap | Healthy Surrey**

Drug and alcohol support in Surrey – **Drugs and alcohol | Healthy Surrey**

## In the footsteps of the great man?

17 January 2024



The great orator **Sir Winston Churchill** was born in **Blenheim Palace** in 1874. 150 years later **Epsom's** own **Blenheim High School** became a nursery for the next generation of orators. Twenty-one students from four local schools took part in **Youth Speaks: A Debate Competition** on Thursday 11th January 2024 evening at the Longmead Road school. Many adults run shy of public speaking, so to see and hear students speaking with such confidence and assurance was wonderful.

This local heat of the national competition was once again organised jointly by the Rotary Clubs of Banstead, Epsom and Sutton Nonsuch. Teams from The Beacon School, St Philomena's and Wilsons School took part in the Intermediate section (11 – 13 years old) with teams from Blenheim High School and Wilsons in the Senior (14 to 17) section. Each team consists of a Chairperson, a Proposer and an Opposer.

The team from The Beacon School got the Intermediate competition underway debating that 'footballers' income should be taxed at a higher rate'. St Philomena's discussed whether 'social media makes us less social', an important topic that affects many of us today. The team from Wilsons gave us a lively discussion on 'climate change being the most pressing issue facing us'. In her summary, chair of judges Ros Rokison said that the team were outstanding and they were adjudged the winners of the Intermediate competition.

In the senior section both teams provided the large audience, which included Epsom and Ewell Mayor Cllr **Robert Geleit** (Labour Court Ward), with lively debates. The proposal that 'the extra-curriculum is more important than the standard curriculum' was debated by an excellent team from Blenheim High School. The proposer of this motion was particularly persuasive.

Then the proposal ‘this house believes extremism is inevitable’ was debated by a team from Wilsons. Although they exceeded the time limit of fifteen minutes, all three students were outstanding for content and delivery and they won the senior competition.

The three Rotary clubs thanked the excellent judges Ros Rokison and Ken Rokison. Ros gave each of the twenty-one students useful constructive feedback.

Public speaking is a hard skill to master, but such a useful skill to acquire and Rotary is proud to have given these young people this opportunity.

John Chamberlain.

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## Dancing for the Wells

17 January 2024



A sponsored “dancathon” took place on Saturday 6 January to help raise the funds needed to re-open the community centre.

Cllr **Bernie Muir** (Conservative – Horton Ward) danced for 5 hours, and **Neva Novaky** and **James Baird** danced for 10 hours on Saturday 6 January to help raise funds for the centre. It is still possible to make donations online – [CLICK HERE](#)

Speaking at the event, **Chris Grayling** MP said “I would like to congratulate the team who organised this successful event and on the valuable contribution they are making to this community hub. This community centre was rightly saved from being knocked down and it is great to see events like this that raise its profile.”

Cllr Bernie Muir said “Community centres play a crucial role as hubs for opportunities to socialise, learn and access key services. They nurture the community spirit, help tackle loneliness and give the youth a positive outlet. Let’s get The Wells community centre up and running again!”

Initially closed down by the Borough Council, the community centre was saved after local residents and Cllr Bernie Muir fought to save it. The **Epsom Wells Community Association** now have a long-term lease and are trying to raise the funds needed to help re-furnish it and have it fully functioning again.

A day of dance classes followed by a dance party in the evening, Dancing for the Wells saw classes of ballroom Latin, morris dancing, Jive and salsa. James who was previously a competitive ballroom and Latin dancer and danced with celebrities such as Jennifer Lopez, taught ballroom and Latin with Neva.

Morris dancing was taught by Thames Valley Morris, Jive by Surrey Jive and salsa was taught by Somos Caribe Academy.

“When I saw the two-floor community centre building with its own parking, I could understand why the community had fought so hard to save it and wanted to help re-open it. I would like to thank all those who have generously sponsored us and all those who supported the event on the day.” said Neva.

The fundraiser was led by **Neva Novaky** and Cllr Bernie Muir and the team organising it included James Baird, Stuart Carroll, Ben White, Tanya Solomon and Richard Robinson in collaboration with the Epsom Wells Community Association led by Vanessa Merchant. Sponsor’s included Lucy Demery, Tina Mountain, Ask Italia and Pari’s Beauty Salon.

Related reports:

[Epsom’s Wells Plan has a hole in it](#)

[Wells Centre’s Appeal](#)

[All’s well that ends well for the Wells Centre](#)

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## Surrey braces for doctors’ strike

17 January 2024



Hospitals and health services across Surrey are bracing themselves for the longest “and most difficult” strike in NHS history. Junior doctors, who make up about half of the medical workforce, will walk out for six consecutive days starting Wednesday, January 3, after negotiations broke down following the Government’s offer.

Health chiefs are warning people to expect significant disruption as urgent, emergency, trauma, maternity and critical care are prioritised during the work stoppages over routine and scheduled appointments.

It comes as hospital services are already stretched with the NHS experiencing one of its busiest periods.

In December, Royal Surrey County Hospital issued a plea to only attend in cases of life-threatening situations or serious injury after its accident and emergency



department reported its busiest ever day.

Matt Jarratt, chief operating officer at Royal Surrey NHS Foundation Trust said: “Our junior doctors have our full support, whether they choose to participate in industrial action or not. But we know this strike action will put more pressure on frontline services and our staff, who are already working incredibly hard.

“We are again asking members of the public for their support in using services responsibly and appropriately, thereby helping us keep our emergency departments and 999 for those who need them most. We are also asking people to be patient, particularly if services are busier and waits are longer than usual or if outpatient or planned procedures need to be rearranged, as our frontline teams prioritise critical services and work hard to make sure people get the care they need.”

The long-running dispute has meant hospital trusts have developed emergency plans to cover disruption but the timing has made this walkout even more challenging.

Dr Charlotte Canniff, joint chief medical officer for Surrey Heartlands Health and Care Partnership and Surrey GP said: “We have well-rehearsed plans in place to manage these periods of disruption, working together across health and care organisations. However, due to the timing, and with this being the longest period of planned industrial action the NHS has ever seen – taking place over six consecutive days – we expect this to be the most difficult period of action yet.

“During the last period of strike action, just before Christmas, at its peak, on December 21 we saw 497 junior doctors from Surrey Heartlands taking part in planned action. With junior doctors making up around half of all doctors, a reduction of this scale has a significant impact on the services our frontline teams can continue to provide – so we do expect significant disruption to routine appointments and planned procedures as we prioritise urgent, emergency, trauma, maternity and critical care for those who need us most.”

Dr Rob Laurenson and Dr Vivek Trivedi, are the co-chairs of the British Medical Association’s junior doctors committee. In a joint statement, they said: “It’s incredibly disappointing that we’ve had to call this strike – no doctor ever wants to have to take industrial action. Junior doctors face the brunt of the decade of underinvestment that has undermined the NHS frontline.

“The record-high waiting list and chronic lack of resource are pushing many talented doctors to the brink; as a profession we are exhausted, disenchanted, and questioning whether we want to stay in the health service at all. Add to this years of pay erosion, and it’s no wonder that morale on the frontline has never been lower.

“Patient safety is our top priority at all times, including during strike action, which is why we not only give trusts adequate notice to arrange appropriate cover, but also have an established process with NHS England, which we have successfully used over the previous eight rounds of strike action, to constantly review staffing levels and act appropriately, including derogating staff back to work when absolutely necessary.

“Of course, these strikes don’t have to happen. We’ve been clear that it is the government that cancelled talks and we would still at this late hour encourage Government to put forward a credible offer so that we can stop this strike and get back to doing what we really want to do – care for patients.”

Junior doctors in England will be taking strike action from 7am on Wednesday January 3 until 7am on Tuesday January 9.

The NHS will prioritise urgent and emergency care as consultants cover for junior doctors, but has said people should continue using urgent medical services as normal.

For minor problems, general practices, community pharmacies, and dentists are not expected to be affected.

Dr Timothy Ho, chief medical officer, Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust, said: “These strikes come at a time that will cause huge disruption to the NHS, with services already feeling the strain of winter pressure. All health and care partners are working together, and we have drawn up contingency plans but we are concerned as this round of industrial action will see junior doctors on strike for six days.

“We are working closely with partners to ensure we prioritise urgent and emergency care for patients, but we do need the public to continue to support us and use the right health service to meet their needs.

“Routine appointments may be rescheduled. If you have not been contacted by the Trust, we would advise that you attend your appointment as planned, but please continue to check for updates.”

Related reports:

[Local NHS Doctors and Consultants striking](#)

[Plea ahead of doctors’ strikes round 5](#)

[Doctors’ strike: advice](#)

[Junior doctor strikes to be ‘monthly’ in Surrey?](#)

[Surrey doctors to go on strike?](#)

## Epsom and Ewell schools get new CEO

17 January 2024



The new chief executive of one of the country’s biggest multi academy trusts has a busy schedule in place as he prepares to visit all 42 schools under his watch during his first term.

**Julian Drinkall**, the new CEO of GLF Schools, has started 2024 with a pledge to visit all schools within the Trust, located in Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Surrey, West Sussex and the London Boroughs of Wandsworth and Croydon, during the spring term.

GLF’s schools in Surrey are Banstead Infants, **Cuddington Croft Primary** (Cheam), **Danetree Primary** (West Ewell), **Glyn** (Ewell), **Rosebery** (Epsom), The Beacon (Banstead), **The Vale Primary** (Epsom), Warren Mead Infants (Banstead), Warren Mead Juniors (Banstead), Cordwalles Juniors (Camberley), Frogmore Juniors (Camberley), Hammond (Lightwater), Lightwater Village, Pine Ridge & Lorraine Federation (Camberley). Lime Tree (Merstham), Merstham Park, Merstham Primary, Salfords Primary,

Mr Drinkall replaced the outgoing and founding CEO **Jon Chaloner**, who stepped down from his role last month after 11 years of leading the organisation through a period of continued growth. The pair worked together in the weeks leading up to the Christmas break to help the transition before the New Year. [Many will remember Jon Chaloner during his headship of Glyn School in Ewell.]

Mr Drinkall said “GLF Schools is in an enviable position, with many great schools and poised to go from strength-to-strength. I intend to visit all our schools in my first full term. Context is everything in schools and, as with our children, each and every one of them has different needs at different moments in time.

“It is that context and that ambition that I want to learn about, and I am looking forward to getting to know as many of our staff as possible, as well as our students, parents and carers, schools and communities, and hearing about the incredible work that everyone is engaged in and committed to.”

Mr Drinkall has held a variety of education CEO roles and was CEO of the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET), leading its turnaround over a five-year period. He

said he was both ‘delighted and proud’ to be starting work for GLF Schools, which provides education to over 17,000 young people aged from two to 19, in a diverse array of settings and employs around 2,500 members of staff.

He added: “I’m looking forward to establishing new dreams and possibilities for our Trust, and I’m committed to finding innovative and supportive ways to make that happen for all our children and young people.”

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## Conquering disability through art

17 January 2024



**Conquest Art CIO** was founded in Cheam in 1978 by artist **Ursula Hulme** MBE and now has 15 groups throughout England. The members have a wide range of health problems and disabilities and they are encouraged to work using their imaginations creatively at their own pace. This helps build self-confidence and enables people to relax and make friends with similar interests within the group. No previous artistic experience is needed to join.



‘Coronation Celebration’ – a picture made as a joint project by the members of the the Stoneleigh Conquest Art Group

In the past an annual exhibition of members’ work has been held at Bourne Hall in Ewell. This year the exhibition was held online and in 2024 there are plans to hold it at the Horton Chapel in Epsom.

Each year an annual meeting (accompanied by an exhibition) is held at St. Paul’s Church, Northey Avenue, Cheam, and the Charity Coordinator is in the process of setting up a series of meetings on Zoom where the leaders of the various groups can discuss common issues together and share ideas.

Three of the groups are in Epsom and Ewell as follows:-

**Epsom Methodist Church**, Ashley Road, Epsom, Surrey, KT18 5HU ‘phone number 01372 723966.  
The leader is Christine Loizou. Held on Tuesdays from 2pm – 4pm.

**Stoneleigh Methodist Church**, Stoneleigh Crescent, Epsom, Surrey, KT19 ORT. ‘phone number 020 8393 4116. The leader is Lesley Lee. Held on Mondays 2pm – 4pm.

**Christ Church** Ewell, Cheam Road, Ewell, Surrey, KT17 1AD ‘phone number 07500 339 168 The leader is Steve Deal. Held on Mondays from 1pm – 4pm. Currently this group has no vacancies.

Conquest Art is run by volunteers with the exception of the co-ordinator. Anyone who would like to find out about volunteering or who feels inspired to learn more about Conquest is very welcome to come along to one of the groups to see what happens there.

For further information please see the charity website at [www.conquestart.org](http://www.conquestart.org)

Top image: Caterpillar draft excluder made by partially sighted and blind members at Epsom from coloured wool pom-poms.

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## Catalogue of errors - death inquest

17 January 2024





A Woking family has spoken of their “incredibly difficult time” after losing their son saying “there is nothing that can take away the pain”. Their comments came after an inquest concluded a catalogue of failures by Surrey County Council and other bodies contributed to the death of 18-year-old diabetic Jake Baker.

Jake, who also had learning disabilities, died on December 31, 2019, while visiting his family home.

It was the first time he had stayed away from his care facilities for more than two nights in a row, since being placed in the care of the Surrey County Council when eight years old, his family lawyers said.

The teenager arrived home on Christmas Eve, became unwell on December 28 and was found unresponsive on New Year’s Eve by his mother and stepfather, neither of whom had been trained to recognise or seek medical advice for a deterioration in Jake’s diabetes.

According to the family’s lawyers, Coroner Carolyn Topping said Jake’s death was avoidable and, if he had been admitted to hospital any time before 5pm on December 29, he would have been successfully treated.

They added that the coroner said there had been “a systemic failing on the part of Surrey County Council to adequately train and oversee personal advisers about their legal obligations in preparing pathway plans for children leaving care”.

In a statement, the family said: “Losing Jake has been incredibly difficult for our family, especially as he died in our home at what should have been a happy time. We trusted Ruskin Mill Trust with Jake’s care, and we have been let down by them in the worst possible way. Jake was an enthusiastic and determined young man who always put his mind to things. He was happy to help out in the garden or with DIY.

“He had a kind soul and would get very excited when meeting new people. He loved dogs and playing pranks on his brothers and sisters. Jake wanted to be more independent and was keen to learn but to anyone who met him it was clear that he needed help, particularly in handling his diabetes.

“Before Jake turned 18, he had a key worker that we trusted and who he had a great relationship with. We were able to spend time together as a family safely, knowing that Jake was well supported by the staff at Burbank children’s home. This changed when Jake moved from Burbank to Ruskin Mill College. We were told it would be his road to independence and from this point on we didn’t have much contact with the people who were supposed to be supporting Jake. We were never made fully aware of how severely his diabetes could affect him, or how he should be managing it.

“As a family we did all we could to make sure that Jake was looking after himself and was well taken care of, but those that were put in charge of his care didn’t give us the information necessary to ensure Jake’s safety. There is nothing that can take away the pain of losing Jake, but it is our hope that lessons will be learned from his death so that another tragedy is prevented.”

The cause of death was given as diabetic ketoacidosis.

Jake had been living at a residential college run by Ruskin Mill Trust in Stroud, for 15 months.

The trust is a charity that provides specialist education for young people with learning difficulties and special educational needs.

The coroner also said the trust failed to ensure Jake’s safety when he went home for contact with his family. Following his death Transform Residential Limited, the body responsible for providing care services to Ruskin Mill Trust, was ordered to pay a total of £22,721.04 at Staines Magistrates’ Court, after pleading guilty to causing a resident avoidable harm, the Care Quality Commission said.

Jake had been a resident at Glasshouse College since November 18 2019. Previously he lived at Ruskin Mill College, run by the same provider.

According to the family’s lawyers, the coroner said Jake lacked the ability to be wholly independent in managing his diabetes and was not given any information about the dangers for him to have unsupported contact if his blood sugars became imbalanced.

They added that Ms Topping said those involved in making decisions for Jake, from the Surrey Care Leavers team and Children’s Services, failed to ensure Jake’s safety when he went home for overnight contact from March 2019 and that Ruskin Mill Trust failed to ensure Jake’s safety.

Anna Moore, who represented Jake’s family, said: “The coroner’s detailed investigation and critical findings illustrate a catalogue of failings that led to Jake’s death. Jake’s family welcome these conclusions and hope that lessons will be learned from his death. What is particularly important is that those authorities entrusted to look after children and support them through their transition to adulthood are doing so properly.

“The evidence heard at the inquest showed that no one with current responsibility for Jake had a clear picture of needs and what support he required. Very worryingly, those at Surrey County Council who were meant to be supporting Jake into his transition to adulthood were not aware of the scope and extent of this important role. This needs to be urgently addressed so that children and young adults, and particularly people like Jake with additional needs, are given the support they need when they turn 18 and beyond.”

Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning at Surrey County Council, said: “Our deepest sympathies remain with Jake’s family and friends at this difficult time. The services provided to Jake fell short of what he and his family needed to keep him safe, and we are very sorry for our part in that. We have taken a number of actions over the past four years to improve our support for young adults leaving care. While we have already made changes, we know there is still further to go and we will carefully consider the coroner’s findings as we take our next steps.”

Ruskin Mill Trust took over responsibility for residential care from Transform Residential Limited in August 2020. A spokesperson said: “Jake’s death was heart-breaking and our thoughts remain with his family. He was well known to our staff and his loss came as a profound shock to everyone here. We deeply regret that in this instance some key measures that should have been in place for his visit home were overlooked. We aim to provide the highest standards of care.

“Since this tragedy occurred, the overnight risk assessment protocol has been fully reviewed and we have taken steps to strengthen practice, policies and procedures to ensure this kind of incident never happens again.”

## Epsom Pianist scores 50 out of 101

17 January 2024



In 2022 **Epsom Choral Society** celebrated its centenary. For very nearly half that century **Marion Lea** has accompanied the singers on the piano.

**Marion Lea**, an acclaimed freelance pianist and accompanist, has performed in recitals and concerts of the highest calibre, working with the likes of the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the Bolshoi Ballet. As well, Marion has played an integral part in the local music scene. She has accompanied Operatic Societies, Choral Societies and any number of other talented musicians. As she approaches her **50th anniversary with Epsom Choral Society**, they celebrated the immense and invaluable contribution she has made to the choir with a presentation on Saturday at their annual Christmas concert.



In 1973, **Jon Pullinger**, the ECS president, suggested to Marion that she should apply to become the new rehearsal pianist for the Epsom Choral Society. On arrival at the audition, Marion fell into conversation with the then Musical Director, **Richard Fentiman** and Chair, **Dr Barbara Mitchell**, and happened to mention that, as a student, she had been invited to perform at one of Vaughan Williams’ famous parties. They realised it was testament to her exceptional musicianship and waived the audition!

Since then, Marion has been the ECS rehearsal pianist for innumerable Wednesday nights; has accompanied the choir in hundreds of concerts; playing continuo on harpsichord and little organ; and even taken the spotlight on occasion as soloist.

She has supported learning of all styles of music, from the renaissance to the modern. She has played Debussy solos for ECS; played piano duets and, of course, most recently, played the ‘concerto’ piano part in Lambert’s Rio Grande, to great acclaim.

As ECS approach Marion’s Golden Anniversary with them, **Isobel Squire**, Chair, reflected on how lucky they are to have had such an accomplished pianist all that time: “On behalf of all our singers, I want to say how privileged we feel to be able to work with Marion, and how much we value her wonderful support in our rehearsals, and enjoy her sparkling performances in our concerts.”

Related reports:

Epsom Choral works 100 years

Epsom Choral Society opens its centenary celebration 2022

Expect miracles from Epsom Choral Society

Photo credit: Anne Richardson

## Caught the Christmas Epsom Stagecoach to Paris

17 January 2024



**20 DECEMBER 2023:** Gifted students from local **Stagecoach Performing Arts Epsom** were chosen to take part in Disney’s festive show, Let’s Sing, in Disneyland Paris at the weekend.

The troupe of 21 students, aged between nine and 19, performed alongside Mickey and Minnie Mouse, Donald and Daisy Duck, and Goofy, as well as professional Disney singers, in a magical and spectacular choral story that was performed four times over the two days.



Taking to the specially decorated stage with scenes from Disney's Main Street USA and the Disney Christmas tree, the students gave a heart-warming performance of festive songs.

The students also took part in a choral workshop with Disney choirmasters and professional stage rehearsals and sound checks, learning how large-scale productions such as this are put together. Skills they can take forward for future performances and productions, and into their professional lives.

**Stagecoach Epsom Principal Rachel Crouch said:** *"We've taken part in Stagecoach's event, Disney Dance the Dream, before, but this was the first time we had performed at Christmas time. The students thoroughly enjoyed it and learnt a lot from the experience. It was fantastic to watch them on the stage singing alongside such iconic Disney characters, and lovely to be there for the festive season."*

Stagecoach Performing Arts opened its first school 35 years ago and, since then, it has seen more than one million students unlock their creative potential. Provided with the support and dedication of the experienced Principals, the students learn so much more than how to sing, dance and act. Stagecoach helps them blossom into well-rounded individuals, ready to embrace life and all its exciting opportunities.

With a network of over 55,000 students and more than 3,000 extra-curricular performing arts schools worldwide, Stagecoach aims to make a difference in its students' lives by teaching Creative Courage for Life and many children have gone on to study and work in performing arts from blockbuster films to countless roles in local theatre productions. Early stages classes are available for children aged four to six and main stages classes take place for six to 18-year-olds every weekend during term time.

For more information about Stagecoach Performing Arts Epsom, please visit [www.stagecoach.co.uk/epsom](http://www.stagecoach.co.uk/epsom) or phone 01737 669504.

#### About Stagecoach

Stagecoach Performing Arts was founded in 1988 and continues to grow as the UK's largest network of extra-curricular performing arts schools for children, with over 50,000 students enrolled in our weekly classes worldwide.

One of the first extra-curricular children's performing arts schools in the country, we aim to inspire our students, making a difference in their lives by teaching *Creative Courage For Life*®.

With 350 franchisees and 3,000 teachers worldwide, Stagecoach operates over 2,000 schools and classes and has a presence in eight countries including Canada, Germany, Malta, Spain, Gibraltar, Lithuania and Australia.

Notable alumni are Emma Watson, Jamie Bell, Eleanor Tomlinson, Tuppence Middleton, Tom Fletcher, Dani Harmer, Josh Cuthbert, Danny Mac, and Charlotte Jaconelli.

Find Stagecoach on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/stagecoachtheatrearts](http://www.facebook.com/stagecoachtheatrearts) and on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/stagecoach\\_gbr](http://www.twitter.com/stagecoach_gbr).

For more information visit the website [www.stagecoach.co.uk](http://www.stagecoach.co.uk).

## Local hospital plea to use 111 unless urgent

17 January 2024



A spike in very unwell patients has put indescribable pressure on St George's, Epsom, and St Helier's emergency departments - and with Christmas and doctors' strikes on the way, demand could snowball further this winter.

Senior clinicians are warning of severe disruption to NHS services over the coming weeks - and are calling on members of the public to help by going to NHS 111 online when their healthcare need is less urgent.

Some people may think that going to an emergency department - even when it is not an emergency - means they will be seen more quickly. This, however, is not the case.

In reality, because of the high number of severely unwell patients requiring urgent intervention, waiting times to be seen for less severely unwell patients will be significantly longer than usual. Other settings of care will be quicker and easier to access than the hospital ED.'

More than 560 people with winter-related illnesses, many of whom were very unwell, came to the hospital Group's three emergency departments between 4 and 10 December - about 10% of all attendances. Hand-washing is one of the most effective ways to stop the spread of bugs like norovirus, and vaccines are good protection against flu and Covid.

Dr Rebecca Suckling, Site Chief Medical Officer at Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust, said: "Winter has arrived. Our hospitals are under extraordinary pressure, not just because of the numbers coming to our emergency departments, but the sheer volume of very sick people we are seeing.

"We are here for people when they genuinely need us. But on behalf of the nurses, doctors, and everyone else working so hard in our hospitals, I would urge people who are unwell over the Christmas period to consider whether our emergency departments are the best place to come.

Dr Luci Etheridge, Site Chief Medical Officer at St George's Hospital, said: "With further strike action on the way, and Christmas just around the corner, we face a very challenging few weeks. And following a record-breaking summer, it barely feels like we've come up for air.

"The best Christmas present the public could give our hardworking staff this year is using NHS services wisely and going to NHS 111 online when their health need is less urgent - helping us to prioritise the very poorly people who are coming through our doors."

Last month, 219 people going to St George's, Epsom and St Helier emergency departments were redirected to other services more appropriate for their healthcare need, including GP surgeries, pharmacies, and urgent treatment centres.

When someone has an urgent healthcare need that isn't an emergency, NHS 111 online - a 24/7 service - should be the first port of call, as this can direct where to go. Pharmacists are highly skilled and can provide advice on minor health concerns from skin rashes to earaches and flu. Many local pharmacies stay open late, and no appointment is needed. Some will be open over Christmas.

During strikes, people should continue to attend GP appointments, unless contacted and told otherwise. When it's an emergency or life-threatening, people should always ring 999 or go to an emergency department.

People can also take steps to stay safe and well this winter, including getting vaccinated for flu and Covid through their local NHS vaccination service and washing hands regularly with soap and water to stop the spread of illnesses.

With many people more vulnerable to colder weather - including those aged 65 and over, babies and young children, and those with long-term conditions - take the time to look in on vulnerable family, friends, and neighbours.

A lot of older and vulnerable people have been affected by winter illnesses - and as they often need to spend longer in hospital, additional demand has been placed on NHS services.

People who use medication should ensure they collect prescriptions well in advance of the bank holidays.

Junior doctors strikes take place from 7am on Wednesday 20 December to 7am on Friday 23 December, and from 7am on Wednesday 3 January to 7am on Tuesday 9 January.

St George’s University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust