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New home needed for disability theatre group

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A performing arts charity that won the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service has been made homeless after crumbly concrete was found in the hall it had called home for the past 17 years.

Freewheelers in **Leatherhead** is on the lookout for a new base – ideally one suitable for its disabled theatre and media company members.

On Tuesday, October 17, the group was forced out of its **Bridge Centre** base after the dangerous Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) which can collapse in an instant and without warning was discovered throughout the building's roof.

For safety reasons, the building cannot be used nor accessed by any groups, according to **Surrey County Council.**

Posting to Facebook, the Freewheelers charity said: "We are homeless and sending out an SOS!
"Freewheelers are looking for a new home in or around Leatherhead. Do you know of an accessible space or spaces, suitable for our disabled theatre and media company members? We need spaces for dance, drama, film making and music on Mondays, Tuesdays and Friday mornings."

"We are a diverse and creative company of people with disabilities based in Leatherhead, Surrey. We work alongside directors, producers, composers, artists and writers, to co-create and produce engaging, thought-provoking, funny, joyous and highly entertaining theatre, dance, film, and music.

For over thirty years we've been a force for change and artistic excellence in the world of Disability Arts."

Freewheelers website.

Survey work is being carried out at the Clare Crescent site and Surrey County Council has confirmed that it is also actively helping the search for a new suitable location for the group while the centre is closed.

A spokesperson for the county council said: "We have been in constructive dialogue with the Freewheelers Theatre and Dance Company this week so that we fully understand their requirements. We are currently working at pace alongside Freewheelers to help find a suitable location for them to use while the Bridge Youth Centre is closed."

They added: "The closure of the youth centre will allow further investigations to take place so that we can be assured the building is safe. We understand that the short notice closure of the Bridge Youth Centre may be challenging for groups that use the building and the residents they support. However, as residents would expect, safety is our top priority."

Other groups who regularly use the Bridge Youth Centre have been offered temporary alternative accommodation, the council said adding that they were working to ensure anyone who may need to access equipment or items stored in the building will be able to do so safely.

They said "At present, as the discovery of RAAC in the building is very recent, we need to carry out further inquiries before we can provide any details on proposals to deal with the RAAC or timelines for re-opening."

Image courtesy: Freewheelers

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