



school's out we're in



2 The Story So Far

Chicks. Dudes. Jocks. Plastics. Ant and Dec. In recent times, we've been bombarded with films and telly programmes about what life is like at school: Grease, Grange Hill, various Nightmares on Elm Street, American Pie, Mean Girls, Juno, Saved by the Bell, The Simpsons... the list goes on and on.

And yet, one thing none of them has bothered to reveal is what happens at the school AFTER the bell has gone. There's a perfectly good reason for this – schools are boring once everybody leaves and the gates are locked. But isn't that a waste? Imagine all the fun stuff you could do with an empty school... Imagine, if you will, that the bell doesn't ring at the end of Hit Me Baby One More Time, and Britney and her dance chums are able to stay in the school gym for another five hours.

Wouldn't that be a good thing?

Six years ago, my cousin James was contemplating this important issue as he sat at his boring desk on a boring day at his boring company. He wanted to do something valuable, something he genuinely cared about. He'd been thinking about numerous different ways in which schools might be able to benefit from private enterprise, and had begun to chew them over with his friend Matt, who had recently left a senior boring job at British Airways to become a teacher. James didn't feel he had the requisite guts to become a teacher – too much noise and far too much paperwork – but he and Matt were convinced there was an opportunity for schools to benefit from some business acumen...

One year later, I received a phone call from James asking me to join him in a new venture – Schools Plus. He and Matt had devised a way to keep schools open and turn them into thriving hubs of community activity. The Head Teacher at Matt's school had taken a huge and admirable risk, and agreed to let James have a go at seeing if the model worked. I was James' first recruit, tasked with putting these ideas into action, while he saw out the rest of his boring contract. 5 years and most-of-James'-life-savings later, we're going from strength to strength.

What we do is fairly simple. Some people call it 'lettings'. We try not to call it that, mainly because it's such a horrid word. 'Extended Schools' sounds a bit better, and it's pretty close. Basically, in the evenings, weekends and holidays we open schools up and turn them into all-singing, all-dancing, all-sporting, all-worshipping, all-tutoring, all-partying community centres. We use schools more than schools do. You'd be amazed at the number of people who are looking for space to run their clubs and classes, and who are willing – nay, eager – to pay for it.

So what, you might say, surely someone at the school can take a phone call and pick up the cash? Don't schools do this already? The answer is yes – but most of the time, they do it badly. We like to think of it as a classic case of 'Shows Potential, Could Do Better'. Let's face it, the poor Asst. Head/Bursar/Receptionist who normally gets lumped with the dreaded 'lettings' phone call has got more important things to do with their time than arrange for somebody's Bar Mitzvah at the weekend.

This is where the Schools Plus team comes in (like the A-Team, but without the cigars and the bling). The way we run the business is key to its success: we recruit a Manager, whose sole responsibility is to maximise community use of the school; the Manager, always an entrepreneurial type, is then given the freedom to run the operation like their own little business – they actively market the facilities; they sign contracts with customers, who pay

by direct debit; they recruit their own Staff (often 6th Form students at the school) who look after all the customers' needs on site and lock up at the end of the day; and, crucially, once they have covered all the costs of doing business, the Manager keeps the rest. This financial incentive means that the quality of the service provided to the school and the customers has to be absolutely top notch – if it isn't, the customers will go somewhere else; if the facilities aren't properly looked after, then the school won't renew the annual contract and the Manager's business is finished.

Strong values and excellent working relationships are therefore at the heart of everything we do. When James and I talk about the values of Schools Plus – Integrity, Accountability, Commitment, Relationships – we aren't thinking about nice words. We're thinking about actions which define us: looking after somebody else's classroom like it's your house; taking responsibility for the broken window and making sure it gets fixed quick; talking to the Head of Drama face to face about the use of their studio; getting the marigolds on late at night and cleaning the toilets; always being on time.

The benefits are obvious: the Manager is given a chance to run their own business (with our help when they need it); community groups suddenly have options, and a proper service; Schools get improved Ofsted reports, improved pupil attainment, and instead of consuming valuable time and resources trying to do 'lettings', they receive a hefty cheque from us at the end of each year for doing absolutely nothing. Often, schools are so impressed by our staff that they ask us if they can use them too, and we are only too happy to oblige. Think Groundskeeper Willie with a smile and a CRB check.

There are some 4000 state secondary schools in our country; most of them are being wasted. Just think – would PJ have been blinded in a tragic paintball accident if Byker Grove youth club had been able to use their local school facilities? Would Freddy Krueger have been free to terrorise shadowy school corridors if the lights were on and Britney was dancing around with her mates? Exactly.



3 What Our Clients & Customers Say

“I am very happy with the experience to date, and I wish James and his team well as they offer the service to other schools” Steve Wilks, Headteacher, Oaks Park High School, Ilford, Essex

“Everyone’s a winner” Times Educational Supplement

“He is regularly handing over significant cheques to the school” Paddy Hesketh, Business Manager, Islington Arts & Media School, London

“At the start of our involvement with Schools Plus I was somewhat cautious about how the company/school relationship would develop. I can now recommend James and Schools Plus without reservation” Ian Collins, Headteacher, Trinity School, Belvedere, Kent

“I have been impressed by the professional and well managed service” Paddy Hesketh, Business Manager, Islington Arts & Media School, London

“Key to the success of our relationship has been the excellent interpersonal relations that the Schools Plus staff have ensured by employing Academy staff and sixth form students” Martyn Coles, Principal, The City of London Academy, London

“We have been consistently impressed by the excellent relationships they have built with their clients, their integrity, and their commitment to working through the inevitable issues in order to deliver results” Chris Martin, Senior Operations Manager, Mill Asset Group

“We were delighted” Leslie Morphy, Chief Executive, Crisis

Interested?

Please email enquiries@schools-plus.org
or contact any of our managers for more information.

Their details are on our website at

www.schools-plus.org