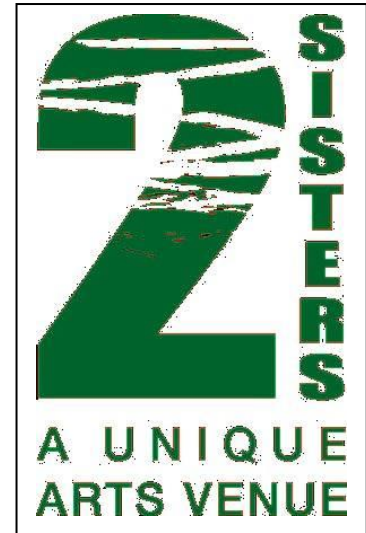




12/6/20

**Two Sisters Arts Centre
St Mary's Church
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Dear Members of Felixstowe Town Council

Re Grant Report

This is a difficult time for the arts industry, with the impact of coronavirus being particularly heavy on our sector, and for Two Sisters Arts Centre it could not have come at a worse time. Having been running for just under a year we were beginning to build audiences. We always knew we would need support initially but our Business Plan saw us break even in Year 5 – now this has been thrown into disarray.

However – I don't want to be pessimistic.

Firstly – the grant you awarded us in June last year was extremely welcome – and was put towards purchasing some tech equipment and producing new Publicity Brochures for the Autumn.

Our Autumn/Winter season was very successful. We hosted 20 events including local jazz talent, touring drama, music groups, an Arts & Crafts Fair and a Xmas Celebration with local choir Stella Accapella, seasonal readings, mince pies and punch.

The building was also used regularly for rehearsals by a children's dance group, a number of music groups and drama groups.

Audience numbers varied but were building. Feedback was very encouraging from both audience and performers alike.

During our first year we made a number of improvements including installing a stage area, a bar area, a lighting rig and sound desk. We also negotiated with Bidwells to rent a piece of land opposite the building (Great Street Farm) as a car park to relieve pressure on the neighbourhood.

We successfully applied for an alcohol and performance license so we did not have to rely on temporary event notices.

We have been running completely on volunteer help. We have a committee of five plus a caretaker and a Bar Supervisor. We have a pool of about 20 other volunteers.

We had had a few issues initially with a certain neighbour of the building – and I personally went to a lot of trouble to speak to him and all his concerns. I was very pleased when at the end of the year he stated himself happy with all we had put in place to address his issues.

We decided not to open in Jan/ Feb 2020 as we didn't think we would get audiences turning out if the weather was inclement. However, we had a full programme planned from March with over 20 different

events including touring company The Panterloons' Bleak House, local musical production Tunswick, regular Friday night jazz sessions, Charlie Haylock with a talk for Suffolk Day, A weekend Maritime Festival and the premier of Black & White Productions celebration of the Battle of Britain 'The Few'. And two productions about diversity – From Zimbabwe with Love and Windrush Stories. This of course has all had to be cancelled.

But even in lockdown i have not been idle. Looking forward – I wanted to keep the name and spirit of Two Sisters alive so every week have been recording and posting online 'In Conversation' pieces with local people of interest. These have included Liz Rastrick the village recorder, local authors Ruth Dugdall and Iain Maitland, and Felixstowe Book Festival Director Meg Reid.

I have also been working with local 'techie' Stuart Brindle, who has worked in theatres all over the country but has given his time for free during the pandemic, to set up facilities to live stream events. We aim to live stream our first 'lock down' jazz concert on Fri 3rd July with local young band The Alfie Buckley Quartet.

We hope if successful this will mean we can live stream other events in the future and therefore reach a wider, more diverse audience.

We aim to open in September if the government allows – and i have events booked through the Autumn. If we still need audiences to still be socially distanced we have the advantage of not having fixed seating so we can spread people about. We aim to ensure there is plenty of sanitiser available, to have remote temperature checks and to deep clean after each performance.

The Diocese has been generous in allowing us a rent holiday until Sept. I have also managed to get us an Arts Council Grant – in partly due to the fact the Felixstowe Town Council supported us last year. So I am hopeful this will be enough to get us up and running again – and support us in building up audiences once more.

Suzanne Hawkes (Artistic Director)