

WSP and National Highways join forces to renovate mental health charity Oakleaf's Safe Haven space in Guildford

An exciting endeavour is underway to breathe new life into the Safe Haven in Guildford, located within the premises of Oakleaf Enterprise. The much-needed refurbishment, set to take place in June 2023, has received the green light with the generous support of WSP and National Highways, who are providing volunteers and funding to transform the space into a sanctuary for mental health support.

The Guildford Safe Haven serves as a vital evening drop-in service – a collaborative effort between Oakleaf, Catalyst (another local charity) and the NHS. This free service operates every evening, 365 days a year, from 6pm – 11pm, providing a lifeline for individuals experiencing mental health crises or emotional distress. During the day, the space also plays host to wellbeing activities, non-confidential one-to-one conversations, social meals, and meetings for both clients and staff at Oakleaf.

“Oakleaf has saved my life. Attending has helped me feel positive about actually having a future and pulled me back from the edge many times.” Oakleaf client

Over the years, the space has become tired and lacks the inviting atmosphere it deserves. With its outdated paint colours, dreary furniture and dark room dividers, the environment falls short of matching the warmth and compassion of the staff who work there. Additionally, the space outdoors

is not being utilised.

“The Safe Haven is about having an open, warm, and welcoming environment that people feel safe to come into. We are very proud to have a re-visit rate of 70% that shows the impact this service has, and it gives instant access to mental health professionals, in a time of crisis.” Tommy Coppinger, Out of Hours Service Manager at Oakleaf.

Recognising the profound impact of purpose-built environments on mental health and wellbeing, we firmly believe that this revitalised space will represent a much more comfortable and welcoming refuge for hundreds of individuals who are struggling with their mental health in the Surrey community.

“Delivering on Social Value is an important part of what we do at National Highways. As part of our Social Value initiative, individuals in the organisation can commit up to 3 days a year for volunteering. Loneliness can impact anyone at any time in any community, and the work of voluntary organisations to reduce isolation and loneliness has been in higher demand since the pandemic. That’s why we are excited to be joining forces with WSP to help refurbish Guildford’s Oakleaf charity ‘Safe Haven’. A local facility that provides an all year-round location close to both the town centre and the university for those with mental health issues.” Martyn, Gannicott, National Highways.

Work is scheduled to take place from 12th – 14th June 2023. Volunteers will embark on a mission to declutter, clean, redecorate and reorganise the space over several days. This will include tasks such as deep cleaning, installing furniture, painting and implementing other valuable design changes determined by the project team. Our aim is to ensure that the Safe Haven is fully operational by 5pm each day for those in need of its services in the evening.

With an annual attendance of over 1,800 individuals, the

Guildford Safe Haven service plays a pivotal role within the local community. Therefore, we want to extend to our heartfelt gratitude for the support that has been offered to this project. Together, we look forward to creating a Safe Haven that truly lives up to its name, providing solace, empowerment and a renewed sense of hope to all who seek it.

To mark the completion of this transformative journey, a small celebratory event will be held on June 16th from 4pm – 5pm.