

## **The Risks Verses Rewards of Hiring Your School Facilities**

It seems the obvious solution to making the school budget go a little further but is hiring out your school facilities just that simple?

Many schools open their doors to local clubs who regularly hire out sports facilities and such like, in order to provide additional income to the schools budget. But what is stopping these schools from doubling, or even trebling this extra revenue, that fully embracing a community lettings service can bring? Julie Moorhouse, Community Development Manager at Kajima Community outlines the real benefits and risks involved as well as providing a few hints and tips for schools looking to develop a community lettings service.

### **Community Cohesion**

Ofsted's community cohesion requirement tested, amongst other elements, the schools' ability to promote meaningful interactions between people from different backgrounds. Although this clause has been rescinded, community engagement is surely best practice in terms of building positive relationships for the school and the surrounding community. Not all schools are driven by the need to raise additional funds; the purpose of letting the school premises is to establish the school as the 'hub' of the local community. This in turn will encourage greater community cohesion and facilitate more vibrant, safer and stronger communities.

### **Marketing**

Schools should ensure they have a good strategy to target reputable groups and organisations, when promoting the school facilities. Activities that would benefit the school the most in terms of linking to curriculum or benefiting the community is a good place to start. Provide activities that will attract users from a certain part of the community, for example, if you are looking to promote the school for a year 7 intake, then providing activities for under 10's will bring prospective parents through the door putting your school firmly on their radar. A thriving programme of after school clubs can be linked with your lettings service to provide activities for current school pupils through to prospects and local residents. Children's parties, dance classes, sports coaching, adult learning, brownies and cubs scouts are just a few of the types of sessions that your school could offer to target various demographics.

### **Liability and risk**

It is fair to say that the more bookings you have, the more revenue you will receive. On the other hand, more people could mean more risk. Whatever model is used for delivering the lettings service - i.e. by the governing body or a third party, it will be necessary for schools to check that the appropriate insurance and risk management arrangements are in place. Everyone involved needs to be clear about accountability. The key is to consider what might go wrong; who might be responsible in law, and what arrangements can be put in place to minimise these risks. Once the risk management strategy is in place, it should be plain sailing, however, it is the management and upkeep of that strategy which is draining on resources.

### **Administration and staffing**

Effectively administering the bookings process will ensure that you have the correct paperwork in place; booking forms, insurance certificates, DBS documentation, instructor qualifications and risk assessments. This can take time and energy, and all this before anyone even comes through the doors. It is crucial that the facilities are manned throughout community lettings to ensure the site is secure, to respond in an emergency and importantly to ensure the school is ready for lessons the next day.

Hiring out school facilities is not a schools core business and naturally this resource and effort is tagged onto another administrative role. To maximise revenue but minimise the risks involved, somebody has to coordinate all facets of a community lettings service, of which there are many. This coordinator role has to be the sole focus of the lettings service, that way they can build up the business by focusing on promotion and marketing, ensuring the bookings process is undertaken efficiently and coordinating the evening activities with the site team. This will help to minimise the risks and ensure the rewards of a healthy income is not tainted with issues and problems from external users on your site.

Kajima Community have worked with a variety of schools over the past ten years to help them reach their full lettings potential. Experience tells us that the winning formula to exploit the wonderful facilities schools have to offer is to have the resources to manage the whole service and the staff on site to coordinate the activities. This will not only ensure excellent customer service but will help to minimise the risks that go with allowing the public in to your building, out of hours.

### **Top 10 Tips for Improving your Community Lettings Service**

1. Increase your web presence. Link to free reputable websites such as:  
hallshire.com,  
netmums.com,  
Local Authority website,  
google.co.uk/business/add (Google Places)  
lta.org.uk/allplaytennis (Lawn Tennis Association)  
activeplacespower.com (Sport England)  
spogo.co.uk (UK Active)
2. Create a clear “Community Lettings” section on your school website which is visible from the homepage.
3. Promote your hirers activities through your website, newsletter, display leaflets or posters. Display leaflets and posters in school reception.
4. Include a dedicated page in your school newsletter for your community activities timetable, hirer Q&As and general promotions.
5. Allow direct phone calls “For Community Lettings” from your switchboard or main school number.
6. Develop partnerships with local authority organisations such as sports development (NSport) to deliver sessions, promote facilities, explore funding opportunities.
7. Keep a log of all enquiries, in one place and respond to them all promptly – review these regularly and use contacts for ongoing marketing.
8. Introduce advance payments for as many bookings as possible.
9. Introduce staff check sheets for setting up areas for hirers and importantly, to ensure the rooms are set back ready for school the next day.
10. Use Go Cardless, the next generation direct debit system ([www.gocardless.com](http://www.gocardless.com)) – fees are much cheaper than those for credit card payments.