

FOUNDER'S
STORY



Sandwich Teen Action Group



Brand Adjectives

SAFE
RESPECTFUL
CLEAN
STYLISH

Elevator Pitch

20-30 SECONDS

Did you know since Sandwich Teen Action Group opened youth crime statistics have decreased?

STAG was designed to save the lives of the youth in Windsor. We've worked extremely hard over the years to decrease the poverty rates amongst the youth, build self-esteem, and promote the importance of staying in school. The result is having the privilege to see our alumni grow up, become successful in their fields, and give back to their communities.

If you'd like to be part of this success, we're always looking for volunteers. And if time isn't an option, we also have a donation page on our website, sandwichteenactiongroup.org.

Can be used on LinkedIn, Networking Events, Business Cards.



Founder's Story

Over thirty years ago, two partners and members of the Windsor Police Service; Constables Mike Mackenzie and David Doidge realized the need for connection and community is as fundamental as the need for air, water, and food.

Every day while on patrol, they bore witness to a terrifying trend. Hundreds of kids loitering endlessly on the streets after school.

The scenes were shocking, yet familiar to both Mike and David. Growing up in West End, they faced the same challenges.

Mike grew up in a low-income community, spending most of his teenage years searching for a safe space away from his home. He found support in his high school, Forster Secondary School, where he spent most of his time. It was the best thing that ever happened to him, and Forster is the place he credits for giving him a chance to discover the best of himself.

Dave, originally from England, migrated to Canada with his family. He was the academic type. Laser-focused on his studies and determined to make it out of West End.

To the people of West End, their community had been forgotten by the city of Windsor, and their way of life was proof.

Windsor-Essex had been the automotive capital of Canada since 1904, with three of the biggest automaker companies calling it home. Most of the jobs in the city at the time were in the automotive industry, but employment opportunities for the working-class poor in West End were scarce.

With parents struggling to make ends meet, parental supervision was low, and children instead sought love and attention elsewhere.

What shocked Mike and Dave the most were the number of girls pregnant and raising kids on their own when they were themselves still a kid.

Their vision for Sandwich Teen Action Group (STAG) was simple. They imagined a safe place for girls to go after school to keep them off the streets.

But they quickly realized that the boys also needed a safe place. The decision was made. STAG would instead be a place that kept all children off the streets after school.



Founder's Story



After two years of extensive planning, the officers were on to the next step, fundraising to officially open the doors to STAG.

It was then their paths crossed with David 'Red' Wilson, the well-known labor leader. Similar to Mike, Red grew up underprivileged. Unlike Mike, however, Red never found solace in an institution instead he dropped out of school and battled with alcoholism for years.

His battle with poverty and alcoholism would eventually be the motivation behind him becoming a fighter for the poor and disadvantaged.

In 1991, after three months of fundraising, the three were able to successfully refurbish St. Edward Catholic School and officially open the doors to STAG.

STAG quickly became a favorite for the young people of West End. For the first two years of STAG, there were at least 700 youths registered every month.

Instead of running to hang out on the streets, the youths were rushing to hang out with their friends at STAG.

STAG experienced rapid growth but while STAG began as something to entertain the kids, the vision was bigger than that. The founders decided programs would be integral to keeping the kids off the streets and ensuring the kids' success outside of STAG.

Thus began their search for a Program Director, someone to develop programs for the kids that would provide them with structure and exposure.

They sorted through hundreds of applications until they arrived at John Elliot. After an interview with John, the now executive director of STAG, they knew they had found their person.

Years before STAG opened its doors, John made a critical decision that would forever impact his life.

Founder's Story



He decided that money wasn't as valuable as being fulfilled. He wanted to do something that would help people and leave a mark on their lives.

Similar to the three founders, John was also a product of Windsor, and he too remembered vividly how rough the West End was growing up. He credits his stable support system for the reason for his success. Because many of his friends did not have the support he had and are still in West End, doing some of the same things they were doing 50 years ago.

When John was 19 years old, there was a building under construction about ten minutes away from his house. He passed this building every day until he did some research to discover what they were building. When he found out that it was going to be a community center, he made his way there to ask for a job application because he knew he wanted to work there. Every day, he would make his way to the center to see if the door was open. Every day he would be met with a closed door. Still, he refused to give up. One day he stopped, and the building was open, much to his surprise. He opened the door, not sure what to expect. There was nothing there, just an empty office with a guy behind a desk. Determined to get a job, he introduced himself, informing the guy he was there for his job. He explained he applied for a job, and he was there to accept it.

Taken aback, the guy told him he would have to get in line, as he had thousands of applicants to get through. As he was explaining this to John, he opened a thick file, and on the top was John's application. Repeating himself, John asked when his start date was.

While working there, John discovered his passion for the youth. He related to them in ways no one else did. It was as if he was one of them. After his time at the community center ended, he moved on to security and law enforcement, constantly yearning to work with kids. He battled with the idea until he realized that at the end of thirty years, he wanted to be proud of the life he led, knowing he changed lives and he has not looked back since.

Walking into STAG for the first time, John met a fast-growing grassroots organization that required organization urgently.

His commitment was sturdy, and his ideas were endless. He got to work cleaning up the records and creating programs for the kids.

STAG's first program was an All-Girls Summer Program which ensured that every week the girls of STAG left the neighborhood. They traveled all across the country, experiencing everything from skiing to camping. The goal was to teach them there was a world outside of West End and it was available to them.



Founder's Story

Unbeknownst to him, the Girls Summer Program would be the blueprint for STAG's programs thereafter.

Twenty-eight years later, STAG has changed the lives of all that has walked through its doors, even its founders who grew together while growing STAG.

While STAG is constantly growing and their reputation is second to none, John, who has now taken over from David and Mike, never settles on the success of the previous day. He is driven to always improve the programs and activities because there is always a child that needs the support of STAG.

When children leave STAG, their lives are completely altered. To say its alumni are thankful is an understatement, many credit STAG for their successes and ultimately saving their lives. Today, they can be found within the walls of STAG giving back to an organization that completely changed their lives.



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