



Residential to Haven Chichester May 2013



The conversation and laughter shared during our last meal said it all, the Assert residential was a success!

In May a group of Assert members spent the weekend in Haven Chichester. The accommodation was comfy, spacious caravans. The activities included swimming, coastal walks, go-karts, adventure golf, air hockey, bingo and more; there was something for everyone to enjoy. Members had the freedom to explore the site during the day, take a day trip to Chichester and Bognor Regis or simply relax in their caravan. Each day we met as a group for a tasty evening meal.

All agreed that it was a thoroughly enjoyable weekend, giving Assert members the chance to have a much needed break, try new things and spend time with each other. Many said they would love to go again!



Assert Antics at the Mash & Barrel' by Luc Raesmith



The Mash & Barrel meet-and-greet staff (and ever-chirpy yellow coat quiz/bingo caller) were getting used to our unwieldy crowd of seventeen persons by the second night – and they accommodated our eating needs and quirks pretty well... I was finding ways to not be overwhelmed by menu choice – but then found myself totally thrown by almost-dainty dessert portions arriving accompanied, not by a dessert- or sundae-spoon, but a whacking great serving tablespoon; I hastily 'nick' fork from neighbouring table to enter edible-heaven with white choc cheesecake...



Although I really enjoyed exploring the natural beauty of the Haven site, the lagoon areas and Pagham village and beach – alone or one-to-one – during the day, a highlight of my holiday was the coming together of the whole group at the Mash & Barrel restaurant at the social centre in the evening. Not only the hub for eating & drinking – but also for pre-meal bingo, post-pudding quiz and pre-bedtime-snack shove-twopenny and ice hockey or ten pin bowling in the games 'arcade' space: just the ticket!



What threw the waiters, however, was an Assert holidaymaker's request for their scoop of ice cream to be served, not in a cone, but in a pudding bowl. Waiter retreats, pudding returns as ice cream and cone 'dumped' in bowl, cone-side-up!

This 'serving suggestion' had us all full-belly laughing. Clearly the scenario made the waiters' evening gossip as ice cream was now served thusly to our table the following night... As the pun- and word-play-loving amongst us devised & decided: if the waiting staff were discombobulated by us, we were discombobulated by them! Thanks again to all the funders and organisers: what a delicious treat of a trip!

Assert Residential Weekend by Debbie Caulfield

I went on the Assert residential weekend in Chichester, at Church Farm, where we arrived Friday the 10th and left Monday the 13th, which gave us plenty of time to enjoy a full weekend. There were three of us to a caravan where we each had our own rooms and I enjoyed being with the two people who I shared with. They were both very pleasant to be with. The caravans were definitely five star to my liking, clean, bright, plenty of space and comfortable.



of the other Assert members, before walking out onto the beach area of pebbles that were of multiple shapes, shades and colours. We then went along a countryside dirt road and track where I was being completely swept and filled with the fresh sea air, that felt cleansing and that had a natural smell of its own as always. The surrounding countryside had a lot of yellow with earthy greens, blues and browns, right for Spring.



A swim with three other Assert members in the indoor swimming pool was the second activity I went for in the morning to start the day, after a short stroll around the lagoon. There beside the water, I acquainted

myself with a beautiful swan who was floating peacefully in the tranquil water, that caught the glimmers of the morning sun. It was the only swan amongst a lot of cygnets and then a lovely little black dog came out and barked at me. After I chatted to her friendly owner I then stroked the dog. The swan and the dog added to the beauty. After lunch I had a go on having a ride in a peddling go-cart (tricycle) that was a lovely drive around that exercised my legs.

The latter part of the afternoon after a rest, I went for a lovely long walk around more of the lagoon with one

In the evening we all met up for the evening meal at the 'Mash and Barrel' (Lounge bar restaurant and entertainment location). The food was lovely as well as we all had a good chat and laugh. The evening ended with free choice again as to what to do. I decided to watch a DVD the latter part of the evening with some of the others before chatting around a tea and coffee before bed, where I slept well and had a good night sleep due to the walk, swim, ride, fresh sea air and company. The weather was a mixture of sunshine, rain, cloud, wind and warmth. Whatever, regardless of the weather, there was plenty to do in the way of both indoor and outdoor activities.

I can say that I had enjoyed every bit of this weekend. With all the other Assert members it was like being one of the family, a feeling of belonging and being with other people like myself. A lovely weekend like this certainly adds extra quality to my life and the lives of others who are also on the autistic spectrum.



From Nerves to Nirvana by Phillipa Cook



There I was, a very 'nervous nellie' on the Friday lunchtime as I approached the place where I was joining the coach for the Assert Weekender. I'm quite isolated and because of my condition don't normally mix well so it took a lot of effort to get even this far. But I need to take these opportunities if they exist so I was pleased to be going. Fast forward to Monday afternoon as the Weekender is finishing and I'm actually in tears after getting off the coach I'm so sad it's all over.

So what caused this miraculous transformation? Firstly all the staff were great, I can't praise them highly enough as I felt supported all the time, we had regular group meetings, and even when we were on our own they were only a phone call away. I was also lucky enough to be with a really nice bunch of fellow service users, it's good to be able to mix with fellow aspies in an informal yet supportive environment and I was so pleased that I made some new friends as well.



I also liked the fact that you could pace it how you wanted; you could always do your own thing, or do activities with fellow travellers. I opted for a mixture of both. I did mainly do group stuff but also nipped into nearby Bognor on my own on Saturday afternoon and spent some alone time on the camp. Highlight from my solo stuff would be going for a

walk at 6.30am on the first morning. I was excited and wanted to explore the camp and it was wonderful just walking around in the peace and quiet before it all woke up. My Bognor visit was also good as I have a soft spot for the place having holidayed there as a child. But I much preferred the group activities. Playing Crazy Golf in the driving rain was very entertaining, such a typically British thing to do! Also had a lovely walk on the Sunday morning, such lovely scenery, and such a sense of peace and serenity it was amazing – rounded off with chips with Sarah F from an Elvis-themed chippie!

I really looked forward to the Evening Meals in the on-site bar 'The Mash & Barrel' as we all got together and had a chance to chat about the day. We didn't have a reservation the first night (which caused some panic amongst the serving staff!) but for the other 2 nights they put together a few tables so we could sit together and placed a nice 'Reserved' sign on it! That was quite a sight, 17 people sat round one big long table but I thought it was brilliant! The presentation of the food was very impressive, nicely laid out with nice flourishes like a dinky metal fryer basket for the chips! I thought they were so cool they should sell them in the Gift Shop!



The Saturday Night was the highlight for me. I was lucky enough to be sat next to Sarah F who was brilliant when dealing with the staff regarding an item they had placed on the table, I was very grateful for her intervention. After a lovely meal some of us went to the Amusement Arcade next door and played the 'Twopenny Falls' which I really like and then moved on to the Air Hockey, which I really love playing, although it turns out I'm not as good at it as I used to be! The two Sarah's played each other and I shouted encouragingly from the sidelines 'Come on Sarah!' which was funny and caused a lot of amusement! I was really enjoying myself and felt totally safe. I wish I could bottle how good I felt that night and use it when I get depressed. Really gave my mental health a massive boost!

Sunday afternoon after watching my team Swansea City play Man Utd we went next door to the bingo! Don't normally play bingo but once Miriam explained how the cards were laid out I could follow it better, I was really confused initially! Although I didn't win I was so pleased that one of the group actually won the Big Prize which was great. The bingo caller didn't do all the sayings though such as '5 and 9 the Brighton line' to which I always want to go 'choo choo!' as I love Trains!



Sunday night was a bit more subdued, I think people were enjoying themselves so much they were sad it was nearly over. Still had a great meal though, apart from an upsetting issue with the Apple Crumble having things in it that weren't supposed to be there! I was lucky enough to be sat next to Sarah B who had a word with the staff and got me another dessert. When that's happened to me when dining alone some places are not helpful, so I'm so glad the support was there. Afterwards we went over to the games area, where Sarah F and I managed to win a game of pool! That was nice as I've never been very good at pool good job Sarah F was!!

Overall this was one of the best holidays I've ever had and I'm so grateful to Assert for giving me the opportunity to attend. Thanks especially to Sarah B who worked



to get the funding but the whole team the two Sarah's and Miriam were absolute stars and went about a mile beyond the extra mile to make it special! It's made such a difference to me and I really hope they can do it again.

As I said at the start I'm normally very isolated and find it difficult to mix but this weekender was the ideal supportive



environment for me, I was a lot less stressed and a lot more how I would like to be all the time, I just felt really happy. At the end I wanted to propose that we all move in to the caravans permanently and live like that forever! Obviously that won't happen but I treasure the memories and felt so much better on the Weekender I really want to get that feeling again. I really hope that can happen.

Photographs of the weekend...

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