

# Assert

# NEWSLETTER

## Life Skills courses a great success

By Catherine Neville, Life Skills Coordinator

We have finished our first set of Life skills Courses and the experience and feedback has been so positive that I wanted to share it with you all. The courses have been relaxed and informal, with students growing in confidence and gaining life skills helping them to become more independent and lead more fulfilling lives.

*"I feel that I have gained a greater understanding of the issues I face and how to handle them. Also the fact that it's not just me who has these issues and it's really nice to be able to share experiences with other people on the spectrum"*

*"I think the course has helped me become more accepting of myself as an autistic person. I have learnt more about myself and Autism in general throughout the program and outside activities organised by Assert".*

I do not stand at the front of the class and just talk at students; that would be boring. We take part in activities and have lots of discussions. At the end of the course students could choose activities. Both groups chose to take part in a yoga/relaxation session which most people really enjoyed reporting at the end that they were so relaxed that they just wanted to fall asleep. We also went on a bus to the marina, played in the arcade, had an ice-cream and went on a short walk. This was great fun and a lovely way to end the course.

As part of the course, students can have one to one sessions with me. This time is focused on the needs of the student and we can cover topics related to the course and how to relate them specifically to their lives.

*"We covered issues that were at the back of my mind and would have prevented me from a functional and positive day."*

I have helped a student work out whether to joining the gym or not, supported another with accessing a social group and supported another with joining recruitment agencies to help find a job, so it can be really practical and tailored specifically to what you need.

*"I enjoyed the course and the one2one sessions. It was constructive and encouraging, increasing my confidence and enabling me to find solutions to a number of long-standing practical and organisational problems and to make new friends."*

If you would like to sign up for a course or find out more, please email me, Catherine, at [lifeskills@assertbh.org.uk](mailto:lifeskills@assertbh.org.uk)

## Punk's Not Dead



In October of this year I went to London and saw a punk band from Finland called 'Pertti Kurikan Nimipäivät' or 'PKN', in short. The band is made up of people who have learning disabilities, Down syndrome and Autism. In their songs they channel their frustrations about things like living in sheltered accommodation and not being served the type of drinks that they want. The band formed in 2009 and since then they have released 4 EPs and one LP which have sold out. Over the years the band have developed a 'cult' following. PKN are the subject of the multi award-winning documentary called 'The Punk Syndrome' which is a very honest, funny and emotional account of the band member's lives. I thoroughly enjoyed seeing this band play live. If you get an opportunity to see them, I would urge you to go along but be warned...it will be LOUD and you may well hear a few swear words!

By Sarah Faulkner

## Future activities

**Assert Christmas Drop-in**  
Tuesday 10th December  
Community Base 5th Floor  
conference room

**Day trip to Brighton Museum**  
25th January 2014

**Yoga classes**  
Starting February 2014. Please email Kat for more details

**Assert AGM**  
20th February 2014—times TBC. Invitations being sent out in the New Year.

If you are interested in taking part in any of these activities please contact Kat on [activities@assertbh.org.uk](mailto:activities@assertbh.org.uk)

# Qantas Australian Woman of the Year in the UK Award

By Deborah Caulfield



Back in March this year, I had been nominated for the Qantas Australian Woman of the Year in the UK Award, that was held at the, ME London Hotel, in The Strand. I didn't win, but the fact that I had been nominated, invited to go along and to be one of 24 competitors for the title, was rewarding and it made me feel good about myself. I was nominated because of personal achievements, where as an adult on the autistic spectrum, I had achieved a lot against difficulty. When I was very young I was not expected to hold down a job. Through personal determination, and a desire to overcome obstacles and to achieve things, I became a Team Leader with my present employer (<http://ableandwilling.org.uk>) as well as holding two voluntary jobs. I had studied part-time and gained a certificate in Art from the University of Brighton that was then Brighton Polytechnic, gained good computer skills and now I have my own website (<http://planetdeb.wordpress.com>). I have also bought my own flat and have gradually required good social skills and good friends.

My lifetime achievement, is to have developed from a frightened autistic child into a much more confident woman, where I continue to progress even though autism will be with me for the rest of my life, because it is part of what makes me what I am as an individual person.

On the evening of the awards, I spent sometime talking to a Head Teacher from a school in Fulham that has just opened an Autism unit and I have been invited to give a talk there to the teachers about my experiences living with autism.

## BRAIN TEASERS!

Answers on back page...

1) Donald and Regan are married with four children, named Michael, Farley, Solomon and Larry. They just had a baby girl and are picking the name. It's down to Olivia, Tiffany and Jasmine. Donald's brother, a piano teacher, tells them only one of the names would be correct. Which name is it?

2) Four words can be made from the letters below. What are the words?

S E N T C A

3) What keys don't unlock any doors?

4) What do these words have in common?

1. Banana
2. Dresser
3. Grammar
4. Potato
5. Revive
6. Uneven
7. Assess

5) What is the only word in the English dictionary that has a silent z?

## Walking Groups with Assert

By Catherine Neville, Life Skills Coordinator

I am pleased to report that the walking groups have been a great success so far, apart from the one that was cancelled due to a severe weather warning in August of all months! The purpose for the walks is to help increase well-being and physical health. I am so pleased to have many of you reporting back an improvement in these areas.

We have walked a range of locations in and around Brighton rewarding ourselves with tea and cake at the end. It has been a great way to get to know so many of you and lovely to see friendships and confidence developing. Each month we have new individuals as well as the regulars. If you would like to come on the walks but feel a bit nervous, please get in touch with me, Catherine, to see if there is any way I can help. You can email me at [lifeskills@assertbh.org.uk](mailto:lifeskills@assertbh.org.uk) or text me on 07879567881.



**New Yoga course starting in February 2014!** From February, Assert will be running some free yoga courses specifically for members on the spectrum, these will be fortnightly, on Thursdays. There will be limited places available, with a 'first come first served' policy. Please can you express your interest in the classes by emailing Kat, on [activities@assertbh.org.uk](mailto:activities@assertbh.org.uk)

## New Activities Coordinator for Assert



My name is Kathryn Chuck (but you can call me Kat) and I am the newest member of staff to join Assert. I have already met some of you at November's drop in and at our last activity. Here is a little info about me and how I came to be here. I moved to Sussex nearly 12 years ago to study at Art College and went on to do a printed textiles degree at Brighton University. Although I love the arts and all things creative I soon realised that my main interest is in people. I have worked as a holistic therapist for many years and have treated a wide range of clients in a variety of settings. Most recently I have been studying towards a Psychology degree and spent time working in a special educational needs school working with boys with a range of conditions, many of the children I worked with were diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome and HFA. My focus is to facilitate independence, confidence and fun by helping people to access the community around them through a range of activities, social events and voluntary roles.

Recently we went bowling at Brighton Marina, and although it was the first time for some of the members, there were some pretty high scores all round! In January I am planning a trip to Brighton Museum to visit their 'Sussex Ice Age' exhibition and am planning pottery painting, pizza making, theatre trips and more for 2014! I am very excited to be in this role and my aim is to provide a wide variety of activities so hopefully there will be something for everyone! If you have any suggestions or would like to contact me about any upcoming activities or if you are interested in any voluntary work then you can reach me at [activities@assertbh.org.uk](mailto:activities@assertbh.org.uk) I am looking forward to meeting more of you soon!

## Laura gets dirty and hurty for Assert



By Laura Priestnall, Benefit Liaison Worker



In October I competed in a race called The Major Series to fundraise for Assert. I am proud to say that I managed to raise £220, so thank you to everyone that contributed! As you

can see from the photos, I got very very muddy, and needed 2 showers and a bath to get clean afterwards! The route was about 12km (about 7.5 miles) and was set in Eridge Park, in Tunbridge Wells. Although this was the 4<sup>th</sup> time I completed the event, I was really hopeful I'd do well as I was fundraising for Assert. I was very proud to be wearing the Assert colours, yellow and black. Many thanks to Catherine who made my personalised vest with the logo on the front, and my name on the back.



The route takes place in a country estate, so it is full of hills, dips, streams, bogs and woodland. You are very quickly wading through muddy streams and negotiating obstacles, which included hanging tyres, large trees, people flinging mud at you, electric wires, ice and hay bales! All while constantly being on the move, but if course helping other runners out too, mainly when they are quite literally, stuck in the mud. Many people lost their trainers in one particular bog, the smell of which still remains with me! There was one tricky time, where I turned over on my already weak ankle. I managed to carry on though despite being in pain, I was determined to finish the race. I was glad to see the water slide at the finish line, definitely the best bit of the race! I am proud to say I did the race in 2 hours. Forty minutes quicker than when I did it last in March! Despite being sore, tired, bruised and battered I have already signed up to do the race in March 2014 again, and I'll use it as another opportunity



## HAPPY 10TH BIRTHDAY ASSERT!

We are Ten! A personal memoir of the Assert Tenth Anniversary Event By Phillipa Cook

This was the Assert 10th Anniversary event. Well over 50 people attended – I've never seen that room so full! A great turnout to celebrate and reflect on how far Assert has come in only ten years. With so many people in that room I found it quite overwhelming at times and I know I was not the only one! Unlike a normal 'drop-in' extra treats were available such as Sandwiches. However as a big meat-eater I was quite miffed to find out that ALL the sandwiches were vegetarian! As a lifelong salad-dodger this was bad news. In my mind I was protesting with placards such as 'Meat 4 Ever' and 'Pigs Taste Nice'. SB pointed out that at least there were Sausage Rolls! Sorry SB had to mention this can we please have some Meat sandwiches next time! I know we're in Brighton but we're not all veggies! It was really nice to meet some of the original founding members (who had been invited to attend) and to be able to thank them in person for what they started way back in 2003. From a group of Mums around a kitchen table it has grown to a team of dedicated staff based alongside other 3rd sector workers at Community Base in the heart of Brighton and has expanded it's services to include Life Skills classes as well as walks and other outside activities. Along the way it has and is making a positive difference to the lives of people on the spectrum.

To paraphrase that old commercial 'Here comes the scary bit!' I was talking to SF and she mentioned the fact that someone should stand up and say a few words – I don't know what made me do it (afterwards I realised it must have been the Bucks Fizz talking – Thanks Catherine!) but I found myself saying 'I'll do it!' Me and my big mouth! A matter of minutes later SF has shoved a piece of paper in my hand with some points to make and SB is introducing me! I started well enough, but as often happens with me a few seconds in my brain released what my mouth was doing and thought an expletive! Immediately my nervous stammer kicked in, and I was in panic mode trying to steady the ship. Thankfully I successfully managed to channel some 'Promo Girl' and was able to continue! I even managed to chuck in a few light-hearted references to my 'Scriptwriter' (SF) as at one point I needed to ask her what something she had written meant! There was a sad moment as we said goodbye to Miriam. She has been a valuable member of the team and has organised events such as the Art Exhibition as well as providing support at the Caravan holiday and other outings. She's moving onto pastures new and we all wished her the best in the future. Thanks Miriam! I can't remember a lot of what I said, but after I'd finished I had some really nice positive feedback about my speech and people seemed to think it was good which I was pleased about – I kind of went into a kind of shock and couldn't really believe I'd just done that! In fact I still can't! Thankfully then we moved onto a subject close to my heart – CAKE Laura had baked an amazing 'Rainbow Cake' of over half a dozen layers all in different colours. A real achievement and very yummy, so many thanks Laura for all the work that went into creating such a masterpiece. A very special cake for a very special event. After thanks had been given and all the cake had been eaten it was time to leave – the party was over. I always find this part the most difficult because it's nice to do these things, but then I'm back on my own catching the Bus back home to my not so splendid isolation. That's why I'm usually one of the last to leave!! Was nice to have the specially made '10' badge as a souvenir though. Thanks to all the staff and indeed everyone who organised the event and all those who attended. You make Assert what it is and speaking personally I'm very proud to be part of it. Assert – here's to the next 10 years!



# Benefits Update

By Laura Priestnall, Benefit Liaison Worker

Every newsletter edition, I'll try to add a benefits update for the Assert members so you are kept informed about anything I think might be important. I know the whole benefits system can be quite scary and worrying, but I'm here to help you all so if you have any worries or questions, or you want help with filling a form in, please make an appointment to see me at the office. You can always email me questions too! Here's a few things regarding benefits I think might be useful for you to know:

## Employment and Support Allowance

Recently I have been attending quite a few ATOS appointments with people who have been called in after applying for ESA. If you get a letter asking you to attend an appointment, please let us know and someone will always try to go with you. It can be helpful to have someone with you to help you understand the questions being asked of you, or to just offer a bit of support. I know it will be a stressful and worrying experience, but we will help where we can. We advocate for our members to go into the 'Support Group' as this means you don't have to attend mandatory appointments. If for any reason you are not placed in this group following an assessment, we will help support you to appeal this decision.

## DLA and P.I.P

A couple of people have had their DLA renewal packs through so I've been helping members with these too. If you get yours, let me know and I'll do my best to help you fill it out and provide you with a supporting letter too. If you want to start a new claim for PIP, I can help you with this. You will need to make a phone call to start the process off, if you want help with this make an appointment to see me, or Sarah F. Once you get your PIP back through, you get 4 weeks to fill it out and return it, and I'll try to help you with this over a couple of appointments. Again, I can provide you with a supporting letter to go with it and can attend any medical appointments you need to go to.

## Council Tax Benefit/Council Tax Reduction Scheme

In April 2013 the Council Tax Benefit Scheme was abolished, and replaced by the Council Tax Reduction scheme. In simple terms, this means that most people will now have to pay something towards their council tax bill, even if they had previously never had to pay anything at all. You should have been sent a bill when the scheme changed telling you how much you had to pay. If you find your self struggling to understand if there is any money you owe, please let someone at Assert know and we can support you to make a phone call to the council. It may also be possible to obtain complete exemption from paying your Council Tax, please contact me if you want to find out more about this. It will involve obtaining a letter from your GP.



Member submissions for the newsletter needed! If you have an article, story, poem, or just a general musing on life that you would like to be considered for submission to the newsletter, please send it in! It can be on any topic, how about your special interest? Please email these to Laura at [laura@assertbh.org.uk](mailto:laura@assertbh.org.uk)

## Assert AGM

On 20th February 2014, Assert will be holding its Annual General Meeting here in Community Base. The starting time will be confirmed nearer the time, but it will be early evening. This is your chance to vote on the board, hear how we have done over the last year, and hear a guest speaker. Invitations will be coming out in the New Year.

### BRAIN TEASER ANSWERS

- 1) Tiffany. The rest of the family's names start with softage syllables: Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La. The last syllable is Ti, for Tiffany.
- 2) 1. ENACTS 2. ASCENT 3. STANCE 4. SECANT
- 3) Monkey, donkey, turkey, jockey, hockey, doohickey, malarkey and passkey. There may be others, but you get the drift.
- 4) If you move the first letter to the end of the word, it forms the same word backwards.  
Banana = ananab, dresser = ressedr, and so on
- 5) The word rendezvous. Even though it's a French word, it's in the English dictionary and is pronounced [rah-n-duh-vooh].

## CAKE SALE!

On 2nd December, the team at Assert held their first bake sale to in order to raise funds for member activities. Laura and Catherine did some baking the night before. It was a stressful time in the kitchen! The menu included rocky road, lemon loaf, mince pies, oreo 'surprise' cupcakes, and after eight brownies. As you can see, staff entered into the festive spirit and Community Base had its first walking Christmas tree, and Elf companion. We visited all the offices in Community Base with our cake laden trolley and we were mostly welcome! Everything was well received and we are pleased to say we raised £53. as it was a success we will do it again some time in 2014.



### Assert Contact Details

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**Have your contact details changed recently, such as your telephone number, email or postal address? Please let us know here in the office, as we want to make sure we are reaching you with mailouts etc.**  
**Email [assert.bh@assertbh.org.uk](mailto:assert.bh@assertbh.org.uk)**