

# Assert Newsletter

Welcome to the Christmas edition of the Assert newsletter.

## Assert Update

I'd like to thank everyone that has signed up to become an Assert Champion; your support really does make a difference.

We are beginning to think ahead to 2019 and to how our work may develop. We are looking to develop our Life Skills courses next year and hope to be able to secure funding to enable an extension of what is currently offered. Our current funding for Life Skills finishes in September 2019 and we are looking into current tenders for services in the city to support this work.

We are thinking of other ways that we can fundraise at Assert and generate some essential core funding. If you have any ideas, do let us know. We are hoping to get some enthusiastic coffee morning volunteers for World Autism Awareness Week.

## Sarah Bourne

### Friends, Coffee and Cake... Sound Good?

Organise a coffee morning or afternoon to raise vital funds for Assert.

We are hoping to get some enthusiastic coffee morning volunteers to plan and run their own fundraising coffee mornings in 2019. We would love this to happen in World Autism Awareness Week. This is from the 1–7 April 2019 so this gives lots of time for planning your fundraising event.

You just need a few ingredients to make your coffee morning a success:

- **A venue**—choose a venue for your coffee morning such as home, in the local community or at work.
- **Date and time**—decide on a date and promote your coffee morning by sending email invites to friends, family or colleagues.
- **Bakers and makers**—ask friends, family and colleagues if they can volunteer by baking cakes or making tea and coffee.
- **Ways of collecting donations**—some Assert collection pots for donations, Assert bank details or PayPal or Everyclick details for online donations.

If you would be interested in running your own coffee morning fundraising event, please let Sarah know and we will be in touch in the New Year with more details.

## Activities

October's activity was a walk exploring the notorious **Historic Women of Hove**. After a few last minute cancellations, we were a small but enthusiastic group. The day was cold but bright as we met our guide Louise at St. Ann's Well Gardens to start our tour.

We learnt about the history of the gardens, the spring's name coming not from St Ann but according to legend from the tears of a Saxon lady, Anafrieda, after her lover was murdered. The modern day coverage of the park owes much to Flora Sassoon who donated an acre of land, now the bowling green area, as well as a clock tower and various pieces of statuary.



We learnt about Helen Boyle, a distinguished Irish GP who became the first female GP in Brighton and Hove; Margaret Powell, a serving maid whose memoirs became the basis for the TV series *Upstairs, Downstairs* and later *Downton Abbey*; Grace Eyre Woodhead, whose work to improve support for disabled children continues today in the foundation that still carries her name; Mary Hare, the first female police officer in Brighton and Hove; and Baroness Muriel Dowding, who was the founder of the cosmetics company *Beauty without Cruelty*. It was a fascinating tour and Louise gave each character life as she told us their stories.



To start bringing festive cheer in early, November's activity was **painting mugs or tea light holders**. Our group of crafters of various stages of experience met in the extremely brightly lit room to transform plain vessels into works of art—well, that was our plan at least! Using glass paints and porcelain pens and a mixture of free hand drawing, tracing and stencilling, we transferred designs ranging from a map of Mordor (not to scale) to some very colourful dog faces onto the mugs and tea light holders. Here are some of the finished pieces...



If you have any ideas for activities that you would like to do, please let me know either by email, phone or text, or come and talk to me at a drop-in.

**Cat Hogan-Jones**

[activities@assertbh.org.uk](mailto:activities@assertbh.org.uk) 01273 234853 / 07950 277420

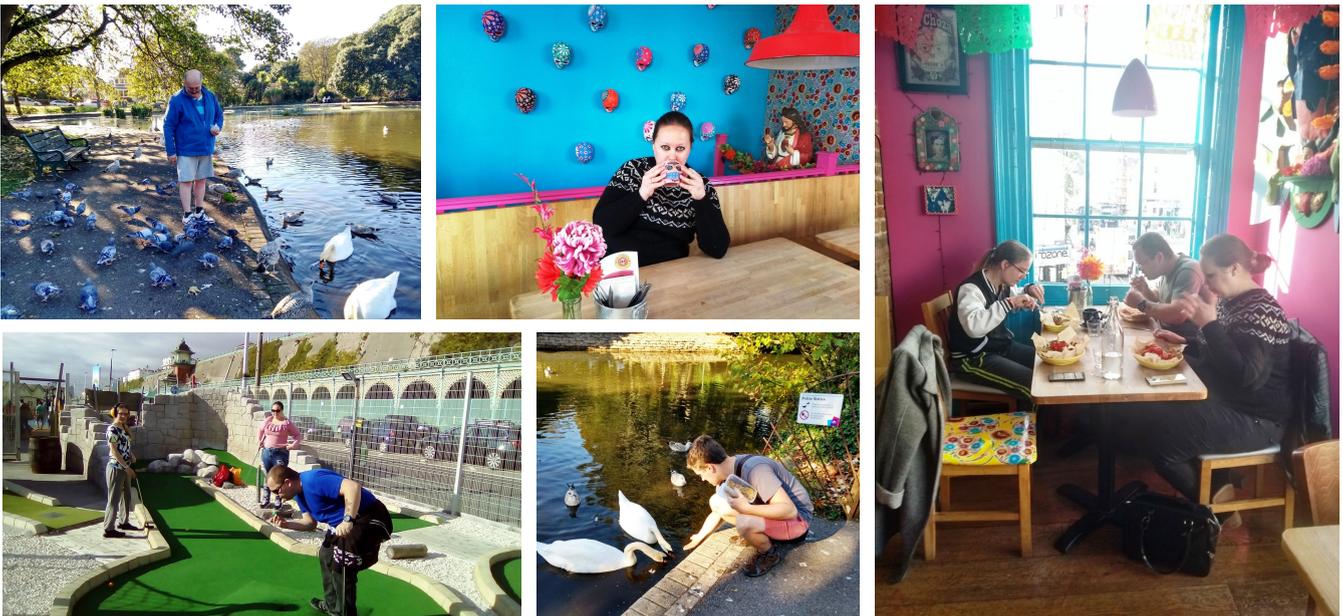
## Life Skills

Another Life Skills cycle has come to an end and as usual I'm left with mixed feelings. It's amazing to observe how we start the course as individuals but as the sessions go by, we learn about each other, about our life challenges and we slowly start bonding and building a sense of belonging and group identity.

I will miss spending time together with this lovely group of students from whom I've learned so much. I feel fortunate to have the opportunity to learn from people on the autistic spectrum how they experience and navigate the world. It has been particularly amazing to see how confidence and wellbeing has grown in individuals as a result of work we've done together.

As part of the Life Skills course, clients choose activities which allow them to put into practice some of the skills and strategies learnt. As a result, we spent a lovely sunny afternoon in Queens Park feeding a diversity of birds. We also went to a Mexican restaurant coinciding with the celebration of "Dia de los Muertos" and practiced our golfing (and resilience) skills at the mini golf park on the seafront. If you're wondering who won... it clearly wasn't me!

### Julia Martinez



### Assert's Life Skills Courses—thoughts from course clients:

*“Assert’s Life Skills courses are directly credited for showing me, and other clients, how to achieve a much more balanced lifestyle, with less stress, less worry and even lowered ‘Aspie Anxiety’, while replacing these with positive outlooks, examples of sorting minor problems, ability to face and deal with bigger issues, and to do so in a friendly, supportive and adaptable form. I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to benefit from Assert’s two courses and have no hesitation recommending both Life Skills courses to other clients. Try them, you will feel transformed sharing your path in life with Assert’s facilitators, and I know these courses are highly beneficial to all involved. Thank you Assert, and please continue to provide your excellent courses and support. Makes a huge difference!”*

*“My experience of Life Skills has been positive. The group has been one of the highlights of my week, a place where I feel at home and can talk openly about the things I struggle with.”*

*“I’ve found the course beneficial, although perhaps not primarily for the intended reason. I’m new to the autistic community and in retrospect I didn’t need help in some of the areas covered, but it’s been a great benefit to my mood and mental health in general to share common experiences with the other attendees and I feel less alone as a result.”*

*“My favourite element of the course has been the welcoming and friendly nature of the group. I feel at ease here, which has been wonderful because whilst I crave human contact I often find it very stressful.”*

## **Mentoring Update**

Since I started in April I have run one mentor training course for six volunteers. This is as well as three initial volunteer training sessions for sixteen volunteers. The training covers a little bit about autism as well as the role of the mentor/befriender, focussing on boundaries and protecting the health and wellbeing of both the mentor and mentee.

Three of these volunteers are now matched with members and have started their mentoring relationship, with another one hopefully starting in the next month or so.

I still have several members on my list but if you think you could benefit from having a mentor please let me know. As the match is the most important part of the initial relationship, I will endeavour to match members with volunteers that I think they will get on with and respond well to. This may mean that someone is on the list for a very short time before a suitable match comes up—however, it may also mean that it takes longer to find a suitable match.

Here is a bit about what an Assert mentor/befriender can offer.

The relationship between a mentor and a mentee is based around personal development. The aim of mentoring is for the mentor to provide support (emotional and practical) as well as guidance and encouragement, with the ideal outcome being that the Assert member comes away feeling more confident and independent. There are many different activities that can take place whilst spending time with a mentor. These can include:

- A volunteer regularly accompanying a member to an agreed activity.
- A volunteer helping a member find ways to structure their week and develop their time management skills.
- A volunteer helping a member research volunteer/employment opportunities and helping them practice coping strategies.
- A volunteer accompanying a member to the supermarket for their weekly shop.
- A volunteer meeting a member every couple of weeks for a cup of tea and a chat.

The next mentor training session will hopefully be in February. If any members feel they would like to become a peer mentor please let me know.

**Cat Hogan-Jones**

## Assert Christmas Meal

This year's Christmas meal was at the Mercure Hotel on Brighton seafront once again. We had a great turn out with a few Christmas jumpers, one elf costume and at least one sparkly dress worn to add to the festive feel of the evening. The football crowds for the Albion vs Crystal Palace match delayed some people in arriving but by 6:30pm everyone was seated and starting to eat. The ballroom looked beautifully elegant and once the disco lighting at the bar had been turned off the subdued overall lighting added to the ambience.



Overall the night was enjoyable, with most tables wearing their cracker crowns and telling very bad jokes, but the lack of sprouts for the veggie option caused a bit of an uproar—only made worse when the chef refused to provide them! The staff were very helpful and friendly, those of us who chose the goat's cheese to start were treated to a game of 'where is the goat's cheese in my beetroot salad?' and the balloons in the crackers exploding unexpectedly gave interesting background noise to the first course. Still, as the pictures show there were many smiling faces, funny hats and on the whole a good time was had by all.





## Advice for the Holiday Season

The holidays can be a disruptive time for some autistic people. The changes in routine, dealing with more people, social expectations, loneliness and sensory overload can all be factors that may make things difficult. I wanted to take this opportunity to highlight a few of these and hopefully give some advice and tips on how to deal with them. I have asked a number of autistic people for their input on this, so this advice is from people going through similar experiences themselves.

The first thing that most people mentioned is to ensure that you practise self-care even more than usual at this time of year. This can be a very difficult thing to do but before the holiday season gets into full swing, try giving yourself some time to think about what works for you. Being aware and clear of your own needs could help you express to people what you do and don't feel capable of doing during this time. This can also help manage others' expectations of you.

Don't feel you need to conform to others' social expectations. One person wrote "anything which is of detriment to your well-being should not be expected of you!"—a great piece of advice. There can be a lot of social 'norms' and pressures at this time of the year that can be difficult to manage, so give yourself some space with things like mindfulness, meditation or quiet walks to ease these pressures. With the social expectation of giving gifts to people, one person has a wonderful bit of advice: "to take away the stress of having to buy Christmas presents for others, you could enter into an agreement with people you're seeing not to bother with Christmas presents and just enjoy each other's company instead."

Still on the social element, you could tell the people that you are with that you prefer to see people in small groups and you'd rather there weren't too many people that make you feel overwhelmed or that you are unsure of how to interact with. Maybe having a close relative or friend that understands your needs and can help you out in any tricky social interactions with people might be helpful. It has also been suggested that you give yourself days off in between big social occasions to be alone and quiet to "recharge your social batteries".

Some people spend a lot of time on their own over the holidays so in a similar way, making plans to see people and do activities in advance can be helpful. Having clear plans can take away the uncertainty and relieve some of the anxiety of managing social elements. A few people suggested writing a detailed list of things that you enjoy, so if you are alone or feeling uninspired and struggle to come up with things to do, you can refer to the list written earlier.

### Stephen's Stinkers

How did Darth Vader know what the Star Wars cast were to get for Christmas?

*He felt their presents.*

What did the fireman give his daughter at Christmas?

*He put a ladder in her stocking.*

What do you call a snowman in a mild Christmas?

*A puddle, a carrot and two buttons.*

Changes and disruption to routine can be difficult for some autistic people, and this time of the year can lead to a lot of these. One person suggests that you “set yourself small goals of the tasks you need to do that are different from normal”. This will give you a chance to take small steps at your own pace to do the things that are out of your normal routine, giving you the control to do things in a way that will work for you, but still managing change. Gradual changes can be helpful as well. “I don’t put many decorations up, and when I do I introduce them slowly. But mainly I try to keep things much the same”, suggests one person. Another person states that “I remind myself that it is a brief period time wise and will pass”.

With a lot going on over the holidays, sensory overload is something to be aware of. Many of the suggestions for this involve sunglasses to soften light, earplugs or headphones to dampen noise, and a handkerchief with a soothing essential oil on, such as lavender, to inhale deeply if stressed. “It’s a good excuse to wear my reindeer ear protectors”, someone said. Taking time out when there is a lot of sensory input happening can be really useful, and remembering that if you are feeling overwhelmed, you have the right to leave the situation.

If you chose to celebrate, however you do, I hope this article provides you with some tips that may be helpful to you over this time. I really appreciate the input people have had to help put this together, so thanks to you.

**Liam Ragless**

## **Free Events in Brighton & Hove this December**

### **Burning the Clocks, Friday 21 December**

Burning the Clocks is a free spectator event to mark the shortest day of the year. Local people make their own paper and willow lanterns and after parading through the city, they pass them into a blazing bonfire on Brighton beach, as a token of the year’s end.

The parade leaves from New Road at 6.30pm and arrives at Madeira Drive at approximately 7.15pm for the finale, when lanterns are passed onto the bonfire and the fireshow begins. The event finishes at around 8pm. The fireshow will take place on the beach with viewing from Madeira Drive and the Upper Terrace on Marine Parade. The finale will contain loud music and pyrotechnics.

For more information and parade route, go to [samesky.co.uk/events/burning-the-clocks](https://samesky.co.uk/events/burning-the-clocks)

### **Artists Open Houses**

The 2018 Christmas AOH Festival runs for three weekends: 24–25 Nov, 1–2 Dec, 8–9 Dec. During this time, hundreds of artists and makers throughout Brighton & Hove and beyond will be opening their houses and studio spaces to the public, offering the opportunity to view a diverse selection of artworks ranging from ceramics, jewellery, print-making, photography and home-wares, to handcrafted Christmas cards, wreaths, decorations and homemade foodie gifts. Much of the artwork on display is for sale.

For more information and locations, go to [aoh.org.uk](https://aoh.org.uk)

## Beach Hut Advent Calendar, Hove Seafront, 1–24 December

The world's first Beach Hut Advent Calendar began on Hove seafront in 2008 and has become an annual tradition for beach hut owners, artists, performers and the general public. Every night from 1–24 December a single beach hut will open with an art installation on the theme “Follow the Star”. Come and experience the wonderful community art installations, mince pies, mulled wine, choirs and good company.

For more information and locations, go to [www.beyondchurch.co.uk](http://www.beyondchurch.co.uk)

Have you moved house, or changed your phone number or email address? If so, please get in touch and let us know your new contact details so we can update our records.

## Julia’s Easy Ten-Minute TIRAMISU

Want to try making a different pudding for Christmas? Whether you’re cooking for yourself, family or friends, Tiramisu is an easy and mouth-watering Italian dessert no one will resist!

Prep time: 10 minutes

### INGREDIENTS

225ml heavy whipping cream

70g sugar

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

225g mascarpone cheese, room temperature

1 tablespoon Amaretto or Brandy liquor (optional but yummy)

450ml strong coffee, room temperature

1 pack of Ladyfingers (also called Boudoir/Savoirdi or sponge fingers)

Cocoa powder, to dust on top



Please send us pictures of your Italian Tiramisus and we can post them in the next newsletter!

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a bowl: beat whipping cream, sugar and vanilla extract together until soft peaks form
2. Add to the bowl: mascarpone cheese (and Amaretto or Brandy, if using) and continue to whip until cream and mascarpone are completely combined and stiff peaks form
3. One at a time, dip half the Ladyfingers in coffee (5 seconds on each side or they will fall apart!) and place them in a layer covering the bottom of a shallow serving dish
4. Spread half of the whipped cream mixture on top of first layer of Ladyfingers
5. Repeat steps 3. and 4. with the remaining Ladyfingers, coffee and whipped cream mixture (placing them on top of the first layers)
6. Using a sieve, dust the top of the dessert with cocoa powder
7. Refrigerate for two hours, then enjoy!

**\*Please note the ingredients used in this recipe contain wheat, eggs and dairy products.**

If you have any allergies we highly recommend you check the packaging of each ingredient individually.

**Julia Martinez**

## Benefits Update

### 2018 Budget

In the 2018 Budget, the Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond revealed a number of planned changes that will affect many of our members, which have been detailed below:

- From April 2019 the personal allowance for income tax will rise from £11,850 to £12,500.
- The work allowance for Universal Credit claimants (who have limited capability for work or work related activity, as well as for claimants with one or more dependent children) will increase by £1,000 per year from April 2019 (which is an increase of around £83.33 pcm).
- As part of the Budget, an additional £1 billion was pledged over the next five years to support the transition of existing benefit claimants to Universal Credit, which means around 1.1 million people will get an extra one-off non-recoverable payment from their existing Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, or income-related Employment and Support Allowance worth an average of £200 to cover them for an initial two-week period at the start of their claim.
- The roll out of 'managed migration' has been pushed back and is now scheduled to take place between July 2019 and March 2023.

### Severe Disability Premium and Universal Credit

There is currently no transitional protection or provisions in place for claimants who qualify for the Severe Disability Premium to protect their current benefit rates if they must make a claim for Universal Credit (UC), which can happen due to a change in circumstances like moving to a full service UC area. Some groups of claimants may be better off on UC but others will receive substantially lower amounts after naturally migrating—such as people on Employment and Support Allowance who also qualify for the Severe Disability Premium, or some families receiving additional amounts for a disabled child. However, the government has proposed (in draft managed migration regulations) that from 16 January 2019:

- people who receive the Severe Disability Premium (or those who meet the conditions for getting it and have received it in the last month) who would have naturally migrated to Universal Credit will stay on their legacy benefits until they are migrated to Universal Credit through the managed migration process; and
- people who were previously entitled to the Severe Disability Premium and have claimed Universal Credit before the coming into force of the restriction on claims described above will be entitled to a flat rate 'transitional Severe Disability Premium amount' ranging between £80 and £360 for each assessment period since the move to Universal Credit, which will be converted into a transitional element after a date determined by the Secretary of State.

**Tip:** If you have lost out after naturally migrating to Universal Credit you can currently only challenge the decision by taking individual legal action, for example as has happened with the successful challenge in the case of R (TP and AR) v SSWP and the pending case of R (TD, AD and IM) v SSWP.

## Assert News

Assert were honoured to be invited to MindOut’s annual celebration event on 13 November, where we were given an award for supporting MindOut and for our contributions to LGBTQ Mental Health.

Emma, benefits caseworker, and Liam, autism support advisor, attended the event to receive this award in person and were inspired to hear stories from some of MindOut’s clients and partners about the incredible work that they do.



### Raise money for Assert when you shop online

**Give as you Live** is a free and easy way to raise funds for Assert, simply by shopping online. Log in or sign up for free, then search for the store you want to shop with using the search facility on the Give as you Live website or iOS app. Once you've found the store you want to shop with, click on the 'Shop & raise' button. You'll be redirected to the store's website where you can shop as normal.

[www.giveasyoulive.com/charity/assertbh](http://www.giveasyoulive.com/charity/assertbh)

Assert are registered for **Amazon Smile**. Choose Assert as your charity, then shop at Amazon Smile to raise funds for Assert. There is no additional cost to you, the customer. Once you are registered, shop at [smile.amazon.co.uk](http://smile.amazon.co.uk) and Amazon donates a percentage of the net purchase price of millions of eligible products to Assert.

If you are shopping through the Amazon app, it is not possible to access Smile. If you are using the app, you can add to the basket in the app, then log into the Amazon Smile website, and check out there to donate to Assert.

## Assert Walks



October’s walk over the Downs from Ditchling Beacon to Patcham (left) and November’s walk along the Seven Sisters cliffs from Cuckmere Haven to Birling Gap (right).

## Assert Champions

Assert are excited to have launched our Assert Champions Scheme. We hope to encourage service users, members and supporters of Assert to help us maintain our services in the future and sign up to become an Assert Champion (AC).

To become an AC we ask that people sign up to monthly giving from as little as £3 a month, or make an annual donation of at least £30. You can give more if you wish. It's simple to donate by setting up a standing order or regular payment through PayPal. One-off donations can also be made via the 'Donate to Assert' tab on our website or by PayPal, BACS or cheque.

### As an AC you receive:

- Membership of Assert and a vote at our AGM.
- Assert Champion welcome letter and thank you card.
- Assert Champion pen.
- Assert Champion keyring loop.
- Optional 'thank you' listing on our website.

There will be a dedicated page for Assert Champions and a list of names of our supporters.

- Invitation to the Assert Champion coffee morning. The Breakfast of Assert Champions!

If you are interested in becoming an Assert Champion and supporting our work and services in future, please get in touch. We would hugely appreciate your support in helping Assert to maintain its services. For a registration pack please contact [sarahb@assertbh.org.uk](mailto:sarahb@assertbh.org.uk) or call 01273 234853.

### Newsletter Contributions

Contact Assert if you have suggestions for the newsletter, or would like us to include something from you such as a poem or article you have written, artwork or photos.  
[assert.bh@assertbh.org.uk](mailto:assert.bh@assertbh.org.uk)



Assert (B&H), Community Base  
113 Queens Road, Brighton BN1 3XG  
01273 234850 • 01273 234853  
[assert.bh@assertbh.org.uk](mailto:assert.bh@assertbh.org.uk)  
[www.assertbh.org.uk](http://www.assertbh.org.uk)




The Queen's Award  
for Voluntary Service  
*The MBE for volunteer groups*



## CHRISTMAS TREATS

P	D	T	M	F	M	S	S	A	H	P	H	L	K	N
Q	A	A	U	F	I	U	M	Z	H	Q	F	Y	M	Q
G	E	E	E	A	N	O	U	C	O	O	K	I	E	S
S	R	S	K	O	C	I	L	C	L	O	V	E	S	L
E	B	O	A	M	E	T	P	E	G	D	U	F	E	E
G	R	O	C	S	M	P	R	E	H	E	P	L	I	O
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X	X	S	E	O	T	A	T	O	P	T	E	E	W	S

BUCHE DE NOËL  
CANDY CANE  
CHOCOLATE  
CLOVES  
COOKIES  
CRANBERRIES  
EGGNOG  
FLAT BREAD

FRUITCAKE  
FUDGE  
GINGERBREAD  
GOOSE  
GRAVY  
HAM  
MINCEMEAT  
NUTS

ORANGES  
PUMPKIN PIE  
SCRUMPTIOUS  
STUFFING  
SUGARPLUMS  
SWEET POTATOES  
TURKEY

