

# IN THE LOOP

**We're back with what's happening at Assert**

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Welcome to the Assert newsletter! We are pleased to publish our February edition of the newsletter. This newsletter contains information about how our staff are providing support through different services, our upcoming activities and events and member stories. We hope you enjoy reading it, as much as we did writing it!

## **A Manifesto for 'A New Normal'**

By Lydia Wilkins

Hope is the thing I have found hardest to hold on to during this pandemic; when the basic things of every day life feel like a right, and everything changes, it's hard to sometimes recognise those things as a one time privilege. Platitudes have dominated our lives since last March; you know those annoying phrases I mean. 'Turn the tide'. 'Self isolating'. 'Quarantine'. 'Lockdown'. 'A new normal'.

That last one is the one I struggled to swallow or get on board with most. A flippant, glip remark of a politician, it seemed to have no route in reality – especially when it came to lacking to support. (Hello, furloughed workers! Hello, the arts! Hello, nurseries!) Besides, it just covered up a lacking response to a deadly virus – and accountability seemed to have no meaning, reason, logic any more.

After Covid-19, I worry that there will be no place for someone like me. The constant observance of the rules is exhausting, only to become infuriating when you see your next door neighbour violating the rules. The so-called 'debate' around masks is downright disgusting. Some aids I have relied on have come to mean nothing, having been co-opted by people who want 'out' of restrictions that could save their lives and others.

Let me present; **the manifesto for 'A new normal' – the Autistic version**

Firstly, if you have something to say – please just say it. It is hard enough trying to guess intentions, but there has been so much disinformation, false promises, even lies when it comes to dealing with Covid-19. We would save so much time by just 'speaking straight' – not to be rude, but to cut to the chase, the point of what you want to say. No "I'm fine" when you clearly are not, complete with passive aggressive sighing. No 'manning up'. Have a good cry if upset. Go on. It cleanses the soul. Just say what you actually mean, dammit, and stop using fancy language to dress your intentions up.

Accountability will be restored, alongside the agility to have a conversation of nuance. We are all allowed to ask questions. It is not "disrespectful", or something to be punished; people of all ages are allowed to be curious. We learn that way; our culture of correction of Autistic people has got to stop. Everyone will be held to the same threshold, regardless. I spoke to another client recently, and we seemed to agree that Autistic people are held up to a far higher standard. Nobody is a saint, bar the actual saints as deemed by the Pope – so can we stop treating people like they should be? Thanks.

Care means to care – and not that people who have a disability will be subject to potentially unlawful DNRs. To even happen, even be contemplated, was a disgrace. To have a 'disability first' approach is seen as revolutionary – but makes more sense to business. It does not need justification or 'inspirational' stories. People matter. Life matters. Economy over people is not working – and has actually hurt the economy even more, according to the I.

Adaptations, accessibility will be engrained in every design, every building. This has no bearing on the space of people who have no impairment. It should not be an issue any longer. I am tired of having to justify my space and why I 'own' it. Self advocacy is a privilege that not everyone has.

And if that makes me a justice seeker, a warrior? I believe in a better world. My platform is not just for me, and is a form of empathy to make space for others. We have come so far, and we have all questioned our existence after a year in lockdown. To me, to live is to live alive – to stand up, to speak up, and to stand tall while doing it. And to make every day count.

# ORGANISATIONAL UPDATE

By Sarah Bourne

Welcome to February.

Its so amazing the see the first signs of spring showing. I've spotted snow drops and the first daffodils now out. With the knowledge or spring on the horizon and the vaccine roll out, I am optimistic that we will be able to reinstate some limited outdoor sessions in the summer again. We will of course do this, as soon as it is safe to do so.

Its been very sad to see Prachi return to Delhi and her family for us- but wonderful for them! We are lucky that she will be continuing to support us and we hope to access a little more funding to help maintain this relationship a little longer. This is a photo of her returning to her parents after 16 months away! Prachi endured an arduous journey with quarantine and numerous tests to get home, but it resulted in an amazing home coming.



We are continuing to offer support as creatively and flexibly as possible while are still remote working. Julia is launching both online cookery sessions and a walking log project this month- both very exciting. Coffee Club, Active Club and PDG are continuing to run on a regular basis. Nicola is in the process of organising a social games session for us. If you have not attended any of our online sessions, but would like to give it a go, please get in touch. We can help you with using any new processes that are unfamiliar to you.

## Assert voucher Scheme

We have received funding from BHCC that will enable us to purchase 94 £50 vouchers that we can distribute to people in financial hardship and who can't afford to buy some pre-defined essential items. We obviously can't help everyone, but we know that this will hugely help those people who are really struggling. If you are on a low income and are in need of the items that fall within the following categories:

- Food
- Winter Clothes
- Household items (such as bedding, essential cooking items, essential toiletries such as soap and sanitary products)
- Gas/ water/ electric or other essential services

This funding is very limited and we want to make sure we are supporting those people in greatest need. Please only apply for support if you are genuinely struggling to support yourself/ and your family.

The deadline to receive applications is **Monday 22nd February**. If there are still some vouchers available after the first round of applications, we will reopen the application process for people to request additional support. We may be able to provide more than one voucher per household, but this will completely depend on the demand for support.

Please check our website for the application form:

<https://assertbh.org.uk/2021/02/vouchers-to-help-if-you-are-in-financial-hardship/>

Please email your response to **sarah@assertbh.org.uk**.

My funding priorities for this year include securing funding for our Volunteer and Activities Coordinator post, identifying and securing funding to re-establish our partnership working with ADHD Aware and towards the end of this year, to secure funding for our Benefits Service. All three areas have already been lost or at risk in 2021 and I will be starting to focus on fundraising for these key areas. If you have any fundraising ideas or would like to donate funds to Assert, please see the Donating tab on the website.

World Autism Week is from March 29- April 4. As part of this we will be looking to launch a new fundraising pack. This will contain a wide range of resources to help supporters and users of Assert to help raise funds for our services. Other news to come on activities for the week!

If you have any suggestions of ideas for additional remote support and activities, get in touch!

## AUTISM SUPPORT

By Maria Riaza

Hi everyone, I hope you are all well and keeping warm in this snowy times.

We continue to welcome new clients to Assert every week. The registrations are being made via Zoom meetings due to Covid restrictions. I am also offering remote 1-1 support. This could be getting advice, guidance and signposting around Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC), help with any specific needs/issues or ASC related support.

This is task-focused and can be one or two sessions per case. Emotional and practical support is also provided. There might be a waiting list to access this support. Please contact me via email if you are interested in casework, general enquiries, or registering with Assert: **[assert.bh@assertbh.org.uk](mailto:assert.bh@assertbh.org.uk)**

# WELLBEING CLUB

By Jenna Dadak

Hello everyone,

I have had a busy month so far! I feel that I have developed a positive routine with work.

The Coffee Club is still on Zoom which is going really well. Some clients gave some very positive feedback yesterday. If you would like to join us on the 24th please email me.

The not-so-active Active Club - Wellbeing Discussion group has also developed into a really nice activity. Everyone who attends is invited to speak about how they are doing, and what they have been doing to stay feeling well. We also discuss tips and techniques to try. Last week we introduce a 'silent disco' activity for the first 5 minutes what was really fun! Everyone played their own favourite song with the microphones off and then all danced/bopped our heads while on Zoom. It was great to be doing something together, while apart so we will keep including this in future clubs. The next one is on the 19th and again please email if you would like to take part.

Additionally, if you are looking to achieve a goal or overcome an issue the waitlist for the Support Sessions is quite low for the time being. If you would like to access 7 hours of 1:1 support with me, please email and we should be able to start in about a month.

# BENEFITS SERVICE

By Alex Little

Hello!

As always, the Benefits Service is running remotely, offering full services via phone, email and zoom. I am still also able to offer out 121 Budgeting Sessions, so if you would like to take a look at your finances, cut down your spending, or start making some savings please get in touch to book a session where we can tailor make your own budgeting plan.

The Government is due to release its new financial budget early March, so any new developments for the DWP, Welfare and Benefits will be sent out to you all as soon as they are available. The DWP has continued to increase their capacity for telephone assessments for all relevant benefits and have released a statement saying that this is now reducing their wait times for assessment.

As always, if you are thinking about making a new claim, or would like to know what is available please check out the resources on the Benefits page of the Assert website, and get in touch if you need any support or have any questions: **benefits@assertbh.org.uk**

## NEURODIVERSITY PROJECT

By Nicola Jones

Hello Everyone!

To celebrate that February is the last winter month and to welcome spring in March, we will be hosting a **new monthly zoom group!**

We were inspired by how much we enjoyed the Christmas party and how much we missed the old monthly drop ins so decided to blend the two. On the second Thursday of every month we will be hosting a zoom group with two rooms; one will be an activity or topic-structured social room and the other will be an unstructured, anything you like social room (much like Jenna's wonderfully successful coffee club). More rooms will be added as hopefully the group grows!

Keep an eye on your email inboxes for more information and how to sign up. I'm so excited to be doing activities again and really looking forward to seeing you at the group.



# LIFESKILLS-COURSES

By Julia Martinez

## Life Skills Project- Cookery Sessions Update

As some of you might know, we launched the new Life Skills Project in April 2020.

When we designed this project we wanted it to have a particular emphasis on the practical & social elements and we included an extra walk, cookery classes and mindfulness sessions.

Sadly, during the first year of the project we haven't been able to carry out the above activities as we would've liked- as a group, connecting with each other sharing a space.

We haven't ceased exploring alternative ways of adapting activities to deliver these remotely. Initially the cookery sessions were going to be delivered by the 'Food Partnership' on a face to face basis but this format has had to be postponed.

The good news is the 'Community Chef' will be holding 2 online cookery sessions for Assert clients! On the 23rd of February and the 2nd of March. When we first announced the cookery sessions, these proved to be very popular and a few spaces have already been booked. There are still spaces available!\*

If you want to find out more about the online cookery sessions and to book a space email Julia: **[lifeskills@assertbh.org.uk](mailto:lifeskills@assertbh.org.uk)**

*\*Available spaces will be filled on a 'first come first served' basis*

**Have you ever found cooking to be a challenge, something best avoided?**

**Me too...**

I recently signed on to a publisher to write The Autism Friendly Cookbook - in order to address inaccessibility of everything food related. There will be information about adaptations, places to contact for help, recipes, and more.

**I am looking for voluntary interviewees to feature in the book, in order to contribute recipes. You will be credited throughout**

If you are interested, you will need to:

- Have a recipe in mind. It needs to be your own and cannot be from a cookbook or from anyone else
- Be willing to chat to me about it
- And sign the relevant documentation to do so

**If you'd like to take part contact Lydia Wilkins on [lydiasmiles5@gmail.com](mailto:lydiasmiles5@gmail.com)**

**Please note this is not an Assert event.**

# ASSERT OPERATIONS

By Debbie Taylor

Hi everyone,

I hope you are managing at this time of further lockdown due to the pandemic. I know for many of us, this time around is proving even more challenging to cope with. It can seem to take more effort and motivation to go out of doors, even though we know it can help our mental health and well-being. Hopefully some of you have chosen to take up Julia's 'Walking Challenge' in the coming weeks and I look forward to seeing photos of your walks, whether in urban or more rural environments. Take care everyone and hope to see some of you soon, although sadly likely to be remotely for some time yet.

Debbie Taylor – [debbiet@assertbh.org.uk](mailto:debbiet@assertbh.org.uk)

## ASSERT PEER DISCUSSION GROUP (PDG)

Hi everyone,

Maria and I want to let you know that the Assert Peer Discussion Group continues to operate weekly on a Friday, through Zoom. Look out for the weekly topic flyer, usually sent out on Tuesdays.

Sadly the further current lockdown clearly prevents us giving consideration to returning to an in-person PDG at this time. Keeping safe and healthy has to take precedence above everything else currently. The group has become increasingly popular, as people enjoy the opportunity of discussing topics important to them. This has meant that we have trialed the use of zoom breakout rooms, to allow for greater participation for attendees. We will shortly be sending out a feedback survey for those who attend regularly or have attended the PDG in the past. It will be so helpful to us if as many people as possible do respond to this. This is the way we can try and deliver a service that reflects your needs, within the resources we have. All feedback is helpful and constructive. Thank you in advance.

Debbie and Maria: [debbiet@assertbh.org.uk](mailto:debbiet@assertbh.org.uk)

# ASSERT PARENT, PARTNERS AND CARERS GROUP

Hi everyone,

I hope you are keeping safe during this challenging times. We have started our monthly Zoom meetings, the next meeting will be on the 23rd of February, from 18.00 to 19.30h.

We are aware that it is not the same than meeting in the pub, but considering the current situation and the unlikelihood of being able to consider meeting in person throughout the next few months, we wanted to be able to offer the opportunity to connect to those parents, partners and carers that would like to do so.

The group is being facilitated over Zoom by Debbie and myself (Maria) and we will be happy to welcome those of you who want to join us. Please get in contact on: **assert.bh@assertbh.org.uk** (Maria)



## JENNA'S WELLBEING COLUMN: SMALL PROMISES

I have been thinking so much more about how I look after my body and how it affects how I feel in the last year. I think that initially this was due to lockdown taking away any structured routine away from me; all I really needed to do was ensure I was awake, semi-dressed and sat at my desk (nee. dining table). I therefore I have made a few small promises to myself to keep my mind and body feeling well.

### **Wake up – eat breakfast**

I began to notice that this shift of routine left me starting to feel anxious and panicky by 11am. Of course there was the plausible reason of the global pandemic, but I began to notice that whether or not I ate breakfast was a huge contributing factor to how I felt by mid-morning. I always knew I had a tendency to become “sangry” – sad & hungry – but it was becoming more evident with the decrease of other distractions. If I let my blood sugar levels deplete too much, it turns out I become a mopey, worrying, catastrophizing woman. Noticing this was the beginning of implementing a new routine in my day; eating breakfast every morning.

### **Eat every 4-5 hours**

I also noticed that this can reoccur at regular intervals through the day. I may not feel hungry in my stomach, but I would start to feel sad and tired. And when your sad and tired it only makes it harder to work out what it going on inside your body – especially when everything else going on in the world is a perfectly valid reason to feel sad and drained. Therefore, I have decided that if I can't decide if I am depressed about the world or just hungry, the one thing I can control is to eat at regular times throughout the day. These small promises can sometimes feel like a great, caring act of looking after myself. If you are likely to get distracted or hyper-focus, miss meal times and then find yourself ravenous, it could be beneficial to have set meal times and use an alarm on your phone to remind you.

### **Drink a pint of water before anything else**

It is a strange thing to be known for, but in a previous job in hospitality I was humorously famous for making everyone I was working with stop mid-hectic shift and force everyone to drink the glasses of water I had prepared for them. According to research you should drink between 3 and 3.5 pints of water a day. However, I think it is common for us to get caught up in what we are doing and forget to drink, or to confuse the sensation of needing to drink water with feeling hungry. To give my body an easy boost, and so I don't discover that it is midday and I have drunk 2 coffees and not a drop of water, I have a pint of water as soon as I wake up.

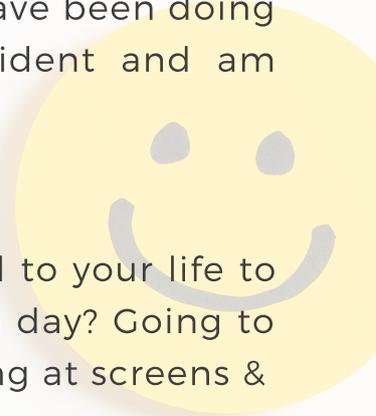
### **Learning & practicing a new skill every week**

I do try to eat enough fruit and vegetables every day, and not to eat too many unhealthy meals – but let's face it, life is hard and cooking is complicated. I have mentioned before how much I dislike cooking but I am trying to unlearn this response. I have made a commitment to myself to cook one proper meal a week. By this I mean something that requires me to follow a recipe. I am trying to consciously plan what I will cook, do a food shop and block out an entire evening to cooking. I have been doing this since January and I am already feeling more confident and am enjoying the methodical process more.

### **Activity**

I would like you to think about what 4 ideas you could add to your life to help you feel more well? Waking up at the same time each day? Going to bed 1 hour earlier? Leave the house each day? To stop looking at screens & read a book before bed? Eat a piece of fruit after dinner?

I would love to hear what you do to stay feeling well – please email me at **[jenna@assertbh.org.uk](mailto:jenna@assertbh.org.uk)**



## TOGETHER, WE CAN

Assert are still here for you. We want to hear from you about how we can help you and what you would find beneficial. Please get in touch if you have any ideas for new ways to connect with and support you. If you cannot access remote support, we may be able to offer you in person support. You would need to be able to give a reasonable explanation regarding why remote support is inaccessible to you. Assert have spent time ensuring that we can do limited in person support safely. This offer is subject to change due to requirements from the Government changing or staff availability altering.



## DONATE TO ASSERT: YOUR SUPPORT IS VITAL TO US

The pandemic has had a huge impact on the wellbeing of everyone. It's been a really difficult time and has required continued adaptation, changes to routines and different ways of working. It has also impacted on funding opportunities for Assert and the services we provide. We have lost funding for our Activities Coordinator position and it is impossible to fundraise for this in current circumstances. Supporting our clients is now more important than ever and we need your support to help us to continue to offer our services and support.

Donations to Assert are vital in keeping the charity operational and free at point of service. We are incredibly grateful for any donations received. You can donate to us through PayPal or the 'donate' button on our Facebook page. You could also make donations in cash, via cheque or bank transfer, host your own fundraiser or use the link below:

<https://www.paypal.com/uk/fundraiser/charity/2333838>

**FOR MORE INFORMATION AND REGULAR UPDATES, FOLLOW US ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS:**



**/ASSERTBANDH**

**@ASSERT\_BH**



HELLO  
FEBRUARY

## UPCOMING ACTIVITIES CALENDAR- FEBRUARY

**PEER DISCUSSION GROUP**  
EVERY FRIDAY, 5:30-7:00 PM  
VIA ZOOM

**COFFEE CLUB**  
24TH FEB  
FROM 11AM-1 PM, VIA ZOOM

**DISCUSSION GROUP- IN PLACE OF  
ACTIVE CLUB**  
19TH FEB

**PARENT, PARTNERS AND CARERS  
GROUP**  
23RD FEB, 6:00 PM - 7:30 PM  
VIA ZOOM

**ONLINE COOKERY SESSIONS**  
23RD FEB AND 2ND MARCH

## PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CONTACT US VIA

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