

IN THE LOOP

We're back with what's happening at Assert

Welcome to the Assert newsletter! We are pleased to publish our April 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!

LET'S BE REALISTIC

by Mary Murphy

Let's be realistic

The thing is I'm autistic

The me you see from the outside is very different to my insides

In these few minutes you see my poet's soul standing here delivering

Looking like it's simple while my inner being is quivering

From being in a room full of strangers

That alone sets off a trigger saying danger danger danger

That is one of so many challenges that I encompass daily

And appear to do it seamlessly because you see my mother she did train me

To not be the me in me, instead to be what's normal and acceptable in society

I learned from very early on to mimic siblings and the kids at school, I rigidly adhered to all the rules

I mean this was the 1960s and little to nothing was known

I grew up so well masked from me that even I didn't see the me in me fully
Till my autistic son and some random helpful stranger from Assert a Brighton charity

Both reflected back to me that my autism doesn't only dwell hidden within

It is in fact written plain upon my face
I was blown away by this
I hadn't got a single clue how much I showed of all the many signs
All the ways that would just 2 years ago lead a diagnostician to say
Yes, this is the case, that I have this collection of symptomologies these
differences in me neurologically
Which meant she could say officially to me, you are autistic

But still I'm well aware that like a museum exhibition you could stand and
stare and still not know it
Because I'm somewhat atypical and I do at times find the whole being seen
quite difficult
So let me break it down for you, show you in more detail what lies beneath
my skin, what goes on within the me in me, let me help you see
Social interactions, sensitivity to noise, certain smells, light, textures and
tastes of foods, ritual behaviours and still mostly sticking rigidly to the rules,
mimicking and masking, problems with asking, depression and anxiety,
thoughts of lack of every kind, a million pathways springing constantly in my
mind, sarcasm and hidden meanings going way over my head, multiple
other problems with my health both physical and mental
Yet still I have belief in me that's truly fundamental to how I get up every
day and navigate my path through the second by second moment by
moment travails and when all else fails I don't
Instead I've learned to stop, to rest, to know that for those moments, hours
and days that resting is the only way

So to return to the beginning of this inner snapshot of myself, my
momentary story of the stuff about my mental health
It's the very reason I stand here before you, opening the exhibition of me for
you to see
It's possible to know that with all that and so much more there are still ways
like this, performance of my written and then spoken words
These moments where I can allow myself to be seen and heard and know
that you, the people in this room can through hearing me, take away some
inner sight, find your way to better knowing

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

by Mark Bromfield

Time has flown by since I started at Assert in February. I am seeing more and more how much assert supports people. I have met with one of the funders of Assert, the Three Guineas Trust. We are fortunate to have funders that understand what is needed to support our community of interest. Other meetings with the Lottery, Southdown Housing and Community Roots will be taking place very soon.

I would urge the readers of this newsletter to see this as your newsletter, which it is. Having input and articles, images, artwork, and so on would be wonderful. Thank You.

ASSERT OPERATIONS

By Debbie Taylor

Hi everyone,

Welcome to April's Newsletter.

I hope you are all well and healthy and keeping safe.

Assert are continuing to take precautions to decrease the risk of spreading Covid within our face-to-face groups and to ensure that we are promoting safe spaces for our activities. Please read these very carefully:

- **Importantly please do not attend any Assert face to face appointments or activities, if you have any covid or cold like symptoms. This is regardless of testing negative, following having had the virus.**
- **Assert ask that you do not attend any activities for one week after you have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive.**
- **Please do a Lateral Flow Test before you attend in-person appointments or activities, if you still have access to tests.**
- **Wear a mask when indoors and when in close proximity to each other, if you can.**

I know it can feel frustrating to remain mindful of Covid's safety, but we currently have two Assert staff members who are pregnant. Although not contracted at work, we have had staff and Assert users having had Covid. One member of staff is having prolonged symptoms, which is causing a delay in new registration appointments.

Thank you for your continued understanding.

We welcome back Maria from her maternity leave, following a year away from Assert.

New Mosaic and Mindfulness Project

As promised some more photos from the final day held at the 'Hearts and Flowers' site at Stanmer Organics. A very big thank you to the lovely people from 'Hearts and Flowers' Rona and Helen and the very talented Caroline Budden from Luna Moon Mosaics, based at Stanmer, do check out her [Facebook page](#) (pamphlet at the end of this section).

This was a partnership project of 6 sessions, held during January, February and March. 5 sessions being held at the Phoenix Art Centre and the final one at the 'Hearts and Flowers' site located at Stanmer Organics and the beautiful Earthship Sessions included learning mosaic skills on individual pieces to take home each week and the bigger pieces of planters, which culminated in them being placed in situ and planted up on the final day at Stanmer. There were also sessions of Mindfulness and visits to the exhibitions at the Phoenix Centre, explaining and demonstrating the 'Starling Murmurations'.





Comments from the project participants

I really liked the Phoenix art centre. Since being introduced to it by Assert and getting to know the venue I actually booked and did a course there by myself! I wouldn't have even considered going without this initial support.

I thought the Hearts and Flowers plot at Stanmer was so calming and beautiful. It was nice to be somewhere in nature where I felt private and safe. Going into the woods or parks alone rather than the Hearts and Flowers plot is scary because of other people and because I don't know what is going to happen.

I absolutely loved the Earthship at Stanmer! I had no idea it was there. I want to live in one of my own! Seeing how indoors urban life can actually meet outdoors nature has given me my first genuinely useful pathway out of the mental health system.

I wish the sessions could have been even longer because the breaks were planned so well and the space was so well adapted for me I could have gone on all day!

I enjoyed all of the activities because it was explained to me why we were doing each one and what the group leaders hoped we would get out of it, the day was timetabled so no surprises and I was given the option of dropping in and out or just not doing them entirely. I felt no anxiety or pressure to join in which meant that I was actually able to. Knowing why I'm doing something is very important to me - if I don't know why I quite often come away confused instead of achieving it because I think differently from the person who planned it.

Comments from the project participants

I love art galleries! Being introduced to the Phoenix art gallery is especially important to me because the topics are local so I felt a part of wider Brighton and also because the artists are from the Phoenix centre so I now have a sense that I could try and do some too.

Talking about mindfulness with the ladies at Hearts and Flowers and seeing how it is possible to live a mindful life rather than just submit to it when I'm scared and mentally ill in a medical setting 'or else' has given me a freedom I have never had before. They have a humanity and an authenticity I want for myself. They really took the time and had the time to get to know me - and I had the time and space to think and let it all make sense which I need because I process a bit slower. I now have a personalised neuroaccepting mindful practice that might not look like mindfulness to anyone else or be in a book, but it works for me.

The mosaic making was so much fun and good for me. I need everything to be in order or I get very upset and I have an OCD diagnosis so getting a little bit messy and actually breaking tiles and that being ok has completely changed my life. I have been trying for years to challenge my need for order because it has been really limiting my life and takes up most of my time, I have been under psychiatric care a few times because of it. This was the best therapy I could ever have had, I wish it was available for more people and on the NHS and for more things!

I loved the Assert and Hearts and Flowers staff. They are all such kind welcoming people who made me feel like a person doing an activity rather than a client or a patient or someone 'who struggles' or 'who suffers with'. They all have a genuine kindness and the more I got to know them the more I realised that they are living a life I want for myself. Mindfulness and art therapy and getting messy isn't just something you do quickly with the NHS when you've gone mad, I realise now that it is a sustainable life and by sharing their lives with me I can see how I can do it too. I had no idea before that I could have a stable future - something that was probably a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Comments from the project participants

I have realised from doing these short meditations at the start of activities that they work very well for me with all activities. I am often wound up and stressed and because I have Autism I can only focus completely on one thing at a time, unfortunately a lot of the time I now realise I'm still focused on the stresses of how to get to the place I am, instead of the reason for being there! I'm not very good at swapping from one thing to another - the psychiatrist told me that when I was diagnosed 13 years ago, but now I actually know what that means! During those weeks between sessions I started to practice a short meditation before I start anything and my house is a less dangerous place and my head is less scary.

Do you feel the sessions you attended have boosted your mental well-being? If so please say how.

These sessions definitely boosted my well-being. I have been in and out of the mental health system since I was a child and have only received diagnosis, medication and crisis support. This is the first time I have experienced being shown over a meaningful period of time that it is possible to live constantly stable, show how to put life skills into practice rather than just being told about them, and how going out into nature can be useful rather than it just being a suggestion on a photocopied handout.

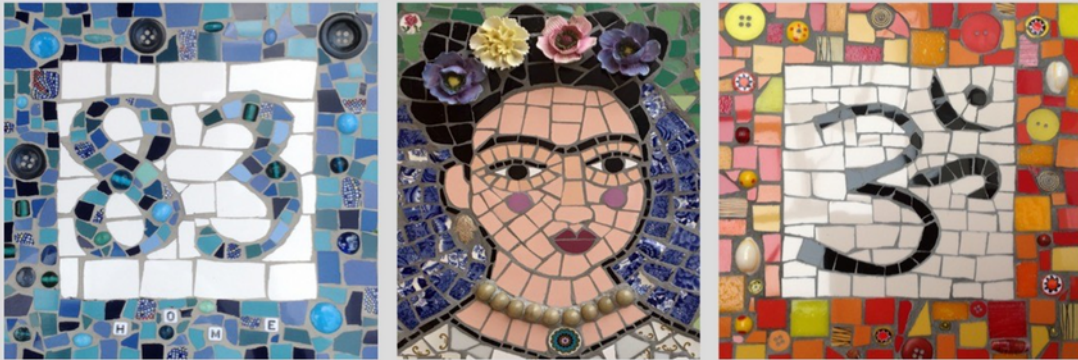
The activities at Assert I enjoy because I can 'socialise by osmosis'. I am able to do the activity with no pressure to socialise which means that I actually can socialise rather than panic! I have been so isolated over the pandemic years, it really affected my mental health (I even got sectioned for the first time) so the pressure around socialising has been even greater and so made it more difficult. Because I attended most of the sessions other members were asking me for help which meant I made friends and connections that I otherwise would have wanted but wouldn't have been able to do. Me and one other attenders have already decided to meet up to do 'socialising by osmosis crafts' because it was so good for us!

The sessions have made me feel less isolated and more connected with the community. The Assert and Hearts and Flowers people are so kind and understanding. They are the types of people I actually want to be around and am not afraid of and they are the types of people I want to be. I am so grateful to them for sharing their lives and perspectives with me and showing me how to connect with community and what kind of community I want to connect with. Being isolated is hard and not knowing what to do about it is harder, but not having the social skills to know when you are in a community that is taking advantage of you while at the same time feeling trapped there out of loneliness is even worse. Over the course of these sessions and other sessions like these at Assert I have seen (and even joined!) satellite communities that Assert members have created once we have discovered what we need, been introduced to other people by Assert who want similar lives, and are also being supported practically and emotionally by Assert to continue to be stable individually. With Assert support uplifting us and platforming us like this individually over these periods of time we are able to create communities that are stable whereas previously they collapsed without the personal support and introductions. Assert and Hearts and Flowers is opening up world by showing me what to do, where to go and giving me the confidence and they are also directly creating communities and indirectly supporting them to continue.

Because I have Autism I don't have a very good social imagination which means I follow instructions very well, but I can't adapt them or come up with my own ideas. These groups have made me realise I love walking in nature (something I have never done) and I love doing art - something I never got to do at school because I was different. Since the course ended I have with outside support been to Kew gardens, Hampton Court Palace gardens, and done an art course at the Phoenix centre (the venue I was introduced to on this course). My whole life I feel like I've been waiting for life to start for me because I didn't enjoy cars, motorcycles and guns and didn't know that anything else was out there because that's what my family like and I went to military school. I'm so excited, I feel like I've finally started life and I've found what I need to leave the mental health system behind me - I was only going back there time and time again because there was nowhere else to turn and I wasn't getting what I needed. All of Assert's activities, courses, support and staff have given me what I needed to attend these groups, learn these interests and skills, and turn them into an independent life so that I can be a happy person in the future and not a patient.

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Best wishes

Debbie

Debbiet@assertbh.org.uk

BENEFITS SERVICE

By Alex Little

Hi Everyone!

The increases in benefits are in place from this month. If you are worried or confused about what you should be getting, you can check all of the new rates here: <https://www.rightsnet.org.uk/resources/benefit-tax-credit-rates>.

PIP waiting times for both new claims and reviews remain higher than usual. If you are waiting for a decision, Benefits and Work have created a calculator where you can check what you may be entitled to when your decision does come in: [Link](#)

The Benefits Service is currently booking appointments 2-3 weeks in advance. This means there will be a wait of this length for appointments. If you need support with any aspect of your benefits, including with assessments or appeals, please get in touch as soon as you know you need support to make sure your request can be accommodated. If you have an upcoming deadline, you may be able to get an extension by calling the relevant benefit helpline.

As always, full services are still being offered remotely, via phone and zoom. This continues to include 121 budgeting sessions. If you have any questions at all, or need support about a new or existing benefits claim or upcoming assessment, please email me about them - benefits@assertbh.org.uk

WELLBEING CLUB

By Jenna Dadak

Hello all,

I am very happy that Spring is on its way and the evenings are a little lighter and there is less need to wear so many layers. I find everything starts to feel a little 'lighter' at this time of year.

If Spring spurs you on to think about a Spring clean or looking at how you have been organising yourself over winter, then accessing the Support Sessions may be a good fit for you. The sessions are personally designed to help you move towards your goal or through an issue. If you would like to speak more about the sessions, then please email me on jenna@assertbh.org.uk

For March's Active Club we had a private coaching session at the Brighton Table Tennis Club. It was a lot of fun, even more than I think most of us were expecting. We did a series of competitions. After which I certainly left feeling my technique had improved which was so rewarding. **Jared was the winner of the afternoon's competitions!**





For the next Active Club on May 6th, we shall we cycling along the promenade. People can either bring their own bikes and it will be £3 to rent a bike for the activity. More information for this has been sent out via email on Friday 22nd. There are just 8 spaces that will be on a first-come-first-serve basis. There will not be an Active Club in June as it falls on the Queens Jubilee Bank Holiday. The activity for July be bowls, using the outdoor facilities this time.

From April, both Coffee Clubs per month will now be held in-person at an out-door café. This decision was made as the online groups had started to become more quiet than in the face-to-face groups for which there was a higher demand. This means that we will be meeting in-person on the following Wednesdays; 11th May, 25th May, 8th June, 21st June. Pease look out for the email detailing more information, and the online register, which is sent the Wednesday before the event.

ASSERT PEER DISCUSSION GROUP (PDG)

By Jenna Dadak

The Peer Discussion Group (PDG) will continue to be delivered both online and in-person, with the 1st Tuesday being only and the 3rd Tuesday being in-person. We recently discussed 'Building new relationships', 'Activities that bring us joy' and 'Organisation preferences'. The topic is voted for in the group previous and information for the groups are sent out the week before.

ASSERT PARENT, PARTNERS AND CARERS GROUP (PPC)

By Jenna Dadak

The Parent, Partner & Carers group (PPC) meet every 4th Tuesday of the month at the Earth & Stars pub. The group provides an opportunity for people to share their experiences of loving and caring for someone on the spectrum. Discussions can be both practical and emotional, but the consistent aim of the groups is always to support one-another.

LIFESKILLS PROJECT

By Julia Martinez

The Food Partnership

'Cooking for fun!'

Recently I took part in Asserts cooking sessions at The Community Kitchen on a Monday from 12.00noon until 3.00 pm for 4 weeks. I have previously done some cooking through Assert at this venue so knew it would be a safe and welcoming space, and I was not disappointed. As an Autistic male, I struggle to cook at home, and the opportunity to do so with volunteers that knew and understood Autism and its various constraints was a fabulous chance to enjoy myself in a kitchen. Each week there was a different theme including, making our own healthy and tasty Take-Away and Baking our own Focaccia (a tasty Italian bread), Banana Tart, and Lime and Almond cookies. Each week after we had cooked the food, in whichever way we made them (Frying, Baking, boiling, etc), we all sat down together and shared a calm and delicious communal lunch. This also offered a moment to chat and catch up with each other if we so desired. The course was very informative and provided lots of new ideas and recipes to try out at home as well as being an enjoyable way to spend time on a Monday.

The chef running the session was motivational and highly skilled and was willing to pass on tips and advice throughout the course. Julia (and one week Jenna) who facilitated the sessions provided help and support as and where necessary along with some able volunteers to assist them. I must take this opportunity to thank them all for the part they played in making this such a gratifying activity to participate in.

Thankfully there will be another course later in the year and I cannot wait. I will definitely be taking part and would recommend the course to everyone else too. Believe me, you don't need to be a budding Gordon Ramsey or Mary Berry to take part which is just as well because I am more of a Jamie Cullam than a Jamie Oliver! If I can cook, then so can you trust me! So look out for the email about it taking place later in the year and then sign up for it'.



The Real Junk Food Project

A group of clients and I dropped by St Luke's Prestonville for a 'pay as you feel' meal with the Real Junk Food Project. When we arrived to St Luke's we were welcomed with a big smile by a volunteer, and we were invited to sit down. We were offered a hot drink and given a choice of different food options; chicken katsu, parsnip soup, dhal. We decided to try a bit of everything. The food looked delicious! Pam and Connie, the lovely volunteers, brought us some amazing curry and apple crumble for dessert.



'Feed Bellies Not Bins'



The Real Junk Food Project Brighton is part of the Real Junk Food Project network, created by Adam Smith. It is a national and international movement of cafes, projects and pop-ups with one core objective: To intercept food waste destined for land fill and use it to feed people who need it, on a 'pay as you feel' basis.

They are a community interest company, which means that the money the project makes from serving food goes back into running the project.

They have pop-up cafes on Tuesdays and Wednesdays at St Luke's Church Prestonville, Old Shoreham Road, and Thursdays at Hollingdean Community Centre. The city-centre cafe, The Gardener, in the North Laine is open daily (Tuesdays excepted).

For more info, visit their website

<https://www.realjunkfoodbrighton.co.uk/locations/>

There are volunteering opportunities! If you're interested in helping, please email: volunteer@realjunkfoodbrighton.co.uk.





SHARE YOUR VOICE AND FEEDBACK IN THE ASSERT NEWSLETTER

Assert would love to hear more from you!

Your voice and feedback are important to us and this newsletter is a space to amplify your voices, experiences, opinions and contributions. We would love to receive your write ups, drawings, puzzles, poems, photographs, articles etc. on topics that interest you and which can benefit other clients too. We will be publishing these in our monthly newsletter. If you would like to be anonymous, we will respect your decision.

Please email your submissions at supporters@assertbh.org.uk.

SHARE
YOUR
STORY

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 the 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:



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HELLO
APRIL



UPCOMING ACTIVITIES CALENDAR

PEER DISCUSSION GROUP

EVERY 4TH TUESDAY OF THE MONTH

COFFEE CLUB

11TH MAY, 25TH MAY, 8TH JUNE, 21ST
JUNE

PARENT, PARTNERS AND CARERS GROUP

1ST TUESDAY (ONLINE) AND THE 3RD
TUESDAY (IN-PERSON)

ACTIVE CLUB

6TH MAY

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CONTACT US VIA

Phone: 01273 234 850
01273 234 853

Email: assert.bh@assertbh.org.uk

Web: www.assertbh.org.uk

Office Address:

Assert (B&H)
Community Base
113 Queens Road
Brighton BN1 3XG

