

# 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 March 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!

## HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND- FEEDBACK

by Assert Service User

I was so moved to receive funding for my household recently. I moved to my current accommodation – senior’s council housing – six years ago and I was only offered this flat on condition that I would decorate it myself. It was in such a mess, but I was becoming homeless and with only a month to go this was a great opportunity. I had to accept. (All the flats are being redecorated before new tenants move in now.)

I was fortunate to have trauma therapy for three years from 2018 and a diagnosis of autism and ADHD through the therapy in 2019. My flat still isn’t decorated and I have felt overwhelmed with the process of ‘clearing’ that needed to take place as I couldn’t order all my things properly when I moved as I had to move house so quickly.

What happened with your funding is that this gave me an immense feeling of encouragement to sort my living space out – and since the funding came through I have bought a beautiful fridge. I have never owned my own fridge before. It’s a delight (and rather frightening) to feel my home taking shape. This encouragement has given me enough energy to start clearing everything else – I had to clear the kitchen to make space for the new fridge, as I only had a council given bar fridge before –and so much is going to recycling, to reuse elsewhere, to the tip with a friend.

It's as if I feel more value in my living space and in my life and this is expressed in the clearing up! I even had a moth invasion and have found the source at last.

I have a long way to go but it all feels doable now, step by step! And it's a delight to walk into my home as it feels like it is my own home that is taking shape at last. Just seeing my beautiful fridge keeps me going. I shall order ice cream online for the first time soon! I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to make such helpful changes in my life. I can't thank you enough. It's very, very good to be decluttering and seeing the actual reality of living spaciouly appearing before me.

With deep appreciation.

## **STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT MANAGER**

by Mark Bromfield

Hello everyone, with the clocks going forward we can enjoy the evenings with daylight lasting longer. I have been in post now for almost two months. The time has flown by ( a good sign ). The support that Assert staff provide and the commitment to Asserts members is first class. Time and time again I see people going above and beyond what might be expected. I am looking forward to the coming summer months, and be able to do my small bit in ensuring that Assert can continue to do all the wonderful things that it does.

# ASSERT OPERATIONS

By Debbie Taylor

Hi everyone,

Welcome to March's Newsletter.

I hope you are enjoying the glorious sunshine we are currently having and keeping safe and well.

I do need to remind you that although the government has completely relaxed their prior Covid rulings now, we continue to be mindful and our safety requirements remain in place for attending all in-person activities.

These are:

- To wear masks while moving around inside buildings to attend an Assert activity or meeting.
- To provide evidence of a negative Lateral Flow Test before attending any Assert activity or meeting.
- To not attend any Assert activity if you have been in contact with any one suffering from Covid.
- To not attend any Assert activity or meeting, if you are feeling at all unwell, have cold-like symptoms, even if you test negative. You may need to be asked to return home if this is the case.

We need to remain very mindful of Covid safety, not least because we have two Assert staff members who are pregnant. Although not contracted at work, we also currently have another two members of staff unwell with Covid, we wish them a speedy recovery.

We very much appreciate everyone's understanding of the need to keep everyone safe and thank you for your willingness to comply with our continued request for additional Covid safety measures.



### **New Mosaic and Mindfulness Project**

This lovely project is completing and I will include more photos in April's newsletter. But for now here's a few snapshots:





Best wishes  
Debbie

[Debbiet@assertbh.org.uk](mailto:Debbiet@assertbh.org.uk)

# BENEFITS SERVICE

By Alex Little

Hi Everyone!

With the rise in energy prices among other things recently, here are some helpful links and schemes that might help if you find you need some extra support to meet the cost of your outgoings.

If you need help with your energy bills, you can find information here: <https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/utilities/how-to-get-help-if-you-re-struggling-with-your-energy-bills/>

You can also contact LEAP – the Local Energy Advice Partnership. LEAP provide free advice on how to reduce your energy bills and be more energy efficient. You can find more information on their website here: <https://applyforleap.org.uk/>

If you are with Southern Water, they have a range of schemes that you can access here: <https://www.southernwater.co.uk/account/what-if-i-can-t-pay-my-bill>

For a low-cost internet plan for those of you on benefits, check out BT's Home Essentials package here: <https://www.bt.com/broadband/home-essentials>

Brighton and Hove council are also still running their Local Discretionary Fund and you can apply for help with essential items or emergency funding here: <https://brighton-gwa.egovhub.net/Gwa/launch>

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\*\*](mailto:benefits@assertbh.org.uk)

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.

# WELLBEING CLUB

By Jenna Dadak

Hey all,

Everything is currently going smoothly with my service. Those who responded to the recent Support Session mail out will all start their sessions by the beginning of April. If you would like talk about starting these sessions, you can email me on [jenna@assertbh.org.uk](mailto:jenna@assertbh.org.uk) with any questions.

The yoga sessions finished in March and were a great success. I think that those who attended really appreciated being about to come to an activity more frequently. A huge thank you to Caroline, our teacher.

In March, Coffee Club is still running both online & in-person, however from April this may change to being both in-person – depending on the result of the survey I sent out at the end of March. The upcoming dates for the Coffee Club are;

- **Wednesday 13th April:** online
- **Wednesday 27th April:** in-person
- **Wednesday 11th May:** online
- **Wednesday 25th May:** in-person

Active Club is due to resume as a different activity per month. On Friday 1st April we went to play table tennis with the Brighton Table Tennis Club. On Friday 6th May the activity will be cycling. You can either attend with your own bike or with a Brighton Bike you can rent. All the promotional information for this activity will be sent out on Friday 22nd April. Dates for upcoming Active Clubs are;

- **Friday 6th May:** Cycling
- **Friday 3rd June:** Queens Jubilee Bank Holiday so no Active Club
- **Friday 1st July:** Crown Green Bowls (outside court)

# ASSERT PEER DISCUSSION GROUP (PDG)

By Jenna Dadak

Hey,

If you are interested in attending a social group with more structure and a specific topic, then the Peer Discussion Group could be suited to you. There are two groups per month, one on Zoom on the 1st Tuesday of the month, and another in-person on the 3rd Tuesday of the month. Both groups start at 6-7:30pm and have a capacity of 10 people. The upcoming dates for PDG are;

- **Tuesday 19th April:** in-person – I am on Annual Leave so there will be no PDG
- **Tuesday 3rd May:** online – Topic TBC
- **Tuesday 17th May:** in-person – Topic TBC

# ASSERT PARENT, PARTNERS AND CARERS GROUP

By Jenna Dadak

Hello,

Similarly, to the Peer Discussion Group, we have introduced a different topic each month, voted on by the attendees of the previous meeting. Upcoming dates for PPC are;

- **Tuesday 29th April:** I am on Annual Leave, you are still welcome to meet-up
- **Tuesday 24th May**



# LIFESKILLS PROJECT- RESEARCH COLLABORATION

By Julia Martinez

## ARTICLE BY DR. GEMMA NORTH

### Improving employment opportunities for autistic women

In 2018 I worked in partnership with the wonderful staff at Assert to carry out a research project about the work and education experiences of autistic women.

### Goals of the project

One of the reasons for carrying out this work was to find out more about autistic women's experiences in the workplace. Many more women than men are not diagnosed in childhood so they will not necessarily know they are autistic or be aware of employers' responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 to provide 'reasonable adjustments' so they have as fair chance as a non-autistic person to access and sustain employment.

It is particularly important that educators and employers develop awareness of the challenges autistic people experience; **77% autistic people want to work but cannot find employment** (The National Autistic Society, 2016). Women already experience inequalities in career development opportunities and pay, so autistic women may experience additional barriers at work. Recruitment processes often disadvantage them, and underemployment is common with fewer opportunities for career progress.

### The research project

There was a positive response to a request for people to get in touch and take part in interviews and focus groups. Thanks to the contributions of participants and support from staff at Assert I was able to identify some of the overlapping or 'intersectional' dimensions of being both autistic and a woman. It is also important to note that other intersecting aspects of a person's identity such as ethnicity and class also play a role in the opportunities they can access. This research focused on what gendered expectations of them can mean for them in the workplace.

## Social rules

There is often an unexpressed expectation on women to do unpaid 'emotional labour'; to smile, be friendly, and generally provide care for other people that is not necessarily in their job descriptions. One participant said that gendered expectations of children are often replicated at work by adults. People think that boys who play on their own are independent whereas girls who do that are being antisocial. Autistic women may experience a 'double glazed' barrier to work, as they may not conform to the expectations of employers and colleagues in the workplace. This can impact upon opportunities to progress in their desired careers. Another participant noted that she was thought to be untrustworthy by her manager for not looking them in the eye.

Behaviours such as minimal eye contact and performance of social pleasantries by female employees were often identified as deficits or deviances by employers. Women in the project discussed their positions in the workplace and were often in agreement that they found themselves to be 'underemployed' and in possession of 'much better qualifications' than the jobs they were employed in, potentially as a consequence of not conforming to non-autistic social expectations on them.

These insights offer a starting point to think about how autistic women's experiences might be drawn upon to improve their access to work and successfully sustain them in employment. Employers must do more than provide 'reasonable adjustments' at work. They must improve the workplace environment; making it more accommodating for all employees.

Suggestions made by participants who had good experiences at work included designated quiet spaces and quiet times so that there are opportunities at work to reduce expectations of people to do emotional labour. This can support autistic women in feeling less overwhelmed, stigmatised, and isolated if they need to reduce eye contact or take time out. Managers who took a strengths-based approach to allocation of work to individuals rather than following gendered and ableist norms supported their employment more effectively.

One participant said that their manager had not pigeonholed her but accepted that ***people's stuff is not my stuff***, so instead, she was given work to do that she was good at and did it faster and more thoroughly than anyone else could.

## Findings

One of the goals of the project was to find out more about the employment experiences of autistic women, and the challenges they face when they want to be successful at job interviews, stay employed, progress in their careers, and earn money. Although awareness about autistic women and employment is growing, there is still little understanding in society of the additional pressures on autistic women to conform, and what this can mean for them in their everyday working lives.

A positive attitude to inclusivity and equity in the workplace is a must. Many employers proudly claim to be 'disability confident' and adhere to 'gender equality' agendas but this can be tokenistic and tick boxy in a way that is not helpful.

However, we still have a long way to go in understanding how autistic women can be supported in 'dropping the mask' and reducing energy spent on meeting neurotypical social conventions.

## Want to get involved?

I am hoping to develop this research and share possibilities for progressing opportunities to overcome the barriers autistic women experience in accessing work, sustaining employment and progressing their careers.

I am doing more research in the form of a short survey. Many of the research participants in the first study talked about intersecting aspects of their neurodiversity so this project focuses on gender and neurodiversity in the workplace and also asks about the impact of the pandemic. If you have 5 minutes to spare, completing this survey will help in gathering more important data about patterns of employment and workplace practices.

Here's the link:

[https://qfreeaccountssjc1.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_73TJ8EsPqfYINwi](https://qfreeaccountssjc1.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_73TJ8EsPqfYINwi)

Thanks to the women who took part and staff at Assert for all your help. An article from the research has been published in the journal of [Disability and Society \(Reconceptualising 'reasonable adjustments' for the successful employment of autistic women: Disability & Society: Vol 0, No 0 \(tandfonline.com\)\)](#).

If you are unable to access full the article and would a copy, I have a limited number of copies to share so please [get in touch](#) with me if you would like one.

- **Dr. Gemma North**



## 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.

## LET US KNOW ONE TIP TO BEAT THE HEAT THIS SUMMER!

Please email your responses at [supporters@assertbh.org.uk](mailto:supporters@assertbh.org.uk). We will publish all the tips received in April.



## 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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# MARCH

## UPCOMING ACTIVITIES CALENDAR

### PEER DISCUSSION GROUP

19TH APRIL, 3RD MAY, 17TH MAY

### COFFEE CLUB

13TH APRIL, 27TH APRIL, 11TH MAY,  
25TH MAY

### PARENT, PARTNERS AND CARERS GROUP

29TH APRIL, 24TH MAY

### ACTIVE CLUB

6TH MAY, 3RD JUNE, 1ST JULY

## PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CONTACT US VIA

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