

# 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 May 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!

## THE SPECTRA EXHIBITION

By Assert Service Users

The Spectra exhibition brought so much connection, joy, and pride to us, autistic artists. We collaborated around the organisation which made this project something we had together, something to look forward to and work towards as a team of seven. Having Brighton Dome as venue meant a lot as it's such a renowned place. Being able to exhibit our art there and having the trust of the Dome's producers and managers meant symbolically that our art was as good as anyone else's and deserved recognition. This is a huge step toward more accessibility and inclusion in public cultural spaces since neurodiverse artists often find it difficult to promote themselves and access good opportunities to show their work.

Exhibiting at the Open Access Day 2022 gave us confidence to promote our art in other spaces in Brighton and Hove as a group as well as individual artists. Since one artist among us could not present their art then because of Covid, we will be looking to show Spectra again. We want to sincerely thank Assert and Scope for this wonderful experience and all the support we received.





# STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

by Mark Bromfield

As the weather allows us to spend more time outside, my thoughts also focus on how Assert continued to provide support during the worse of the Covid 19 pandemic, an amazing effort by all at Assert. We can now look to face to face support where ever possible, in line with the processes that we have around that in person support and meetings. More staff are returning to the office, which in turn allows for the support we provide to be as it needs to be. Enjoy the good weather.

## ASSERT OPERATIONS

By Debbie Taylor

Hi everyone,

Welcome to May's Newsletter.

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

I would like to take this opportunity to tell you about a group of artists who have formed a collective and brought their creativity together to exhibit in a public domain.

I had the pleasure of attending this first collective public exhibition at the Open Access Day at the Brighton Dome, held recently. Their own description of the exhibition is as follows:

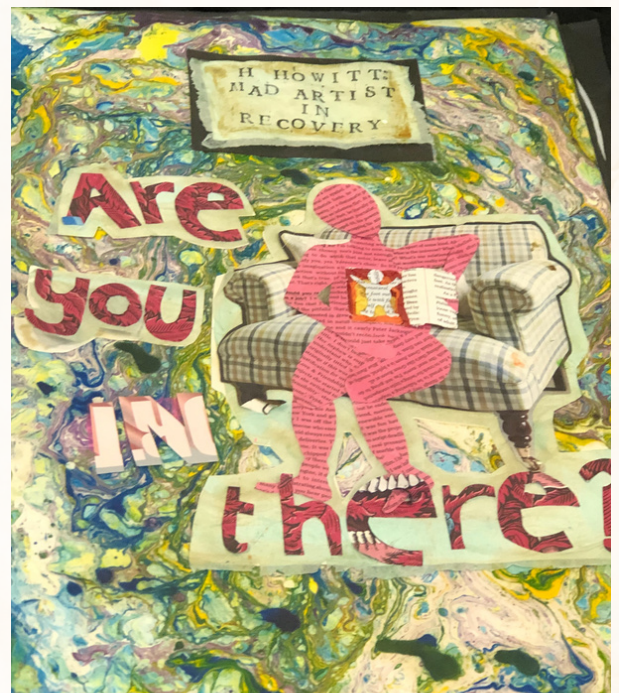
***"The exhibition, called SPECTRA, has been put together by just seven of us, all Assert members and who got to know one another through Assert peer discussion groups. So without Assert, this initiative would not have come to life. The exhibition of various kinds of art pieces, including a performance, is about showing the public the diversity that exists in autistic people, autistic artists and autistic artists' art (hence 'Spectra') and demystifying the image of autistic art. We are very proud and excited!"***



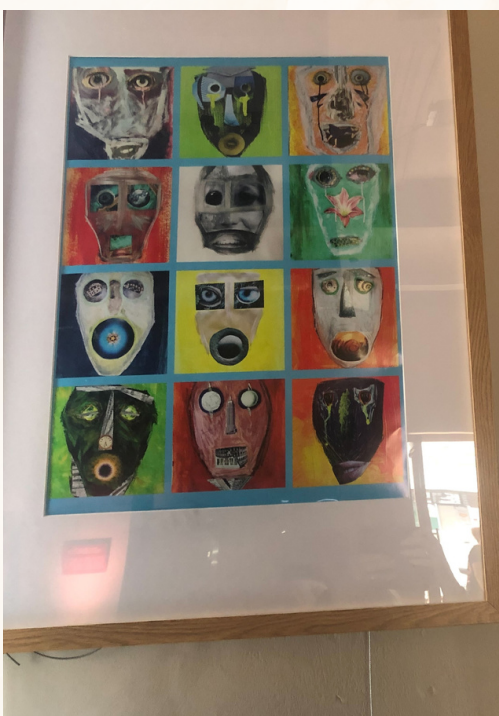
The exhibition was outstanding with each artist demonstrating such talent, that words wouldn't do the exhibition justice. The group are rightly proud of their work as individuals, but also how they independently brought it together.

One of the Group gave a public talk, acknowledging Assert and giving some explanation of its history and what we do, I can't imagine anyone have done a better job, many thanks Josh.

I hope there will be more exhibitions in the future and we will ensure you all get to hear about it. These are some images from the exhibition.









Assert are continuing to take precautions to decrease the risk of spreading Covid within our face-to-face appointments and groups and to ensure that we are promoting safe spaces for our activities. We are still observing the following measures:

- **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 negative lateral flow testing, following having had the virus.**
- **Assert asks that you do not attend any activities for one week after you have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive**
- **If possible and you still have access, please do a Lateral Flow Test before you attend in-person appointments or activities.**
- **If you can, please 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 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 having prolonged symptoms, which has caused a delay in new registration appointments. If staff become sick, it impacts the services and activities we can provide, in a relatively small team.

Thank you for your continued understanding, it is appreciated.

Best wishes

Debbie

**Debbiet@assertbh.org.uk**



# BENEFITS SERVICE

By Alex Little

Hi Everyone!

The increase in living costs continues to impact a lot of people, especially now the energy prices have risen. Here is a reminder of some helpful services that may be able to provide financial support if you are struggling. 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 provides 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>

If you are struggling and would like to see where you might be able to make some savings in your budget, please get in touch to book a 121-budgeting session.

As always, full services are still being offered remotely, via phone and zoom. This includes the 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 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 everyone,

The two Coffee Clubs that I facilitate are now going to be held in-person, at the Pavilion Gardens Café. These are on the 2nd & 4th Wednesdays at 11am – 1pm every month. The group is a relaxed, social group where you can get a drink or snack from the café.

For the May's Active Club, we went cycling from the Palace Pier to Ovingdean Café. It was a lovely sunny day and we cruised along the undercliff pass on a rented California style bikes from Brighton Beach Bikes – thanks Mark for sorting this out! We stopped at the café for an ice cream and to look at the beautiful view.

There will not be an Active Club in June due to the Jubilee weekend. Therefore the next activity will be bowls/Crown Green on Preston Park Bowls Clubs' outdoor pitch on July 1st and then on August 5th we will be swimming at Saltdean Lido.





I am continuing to provide Support Sessions, which are 7 sessions of goal-orientated casework. Some examples of the goals I am currently helping people work towards are; organising their admin, creating daily/weekly/monthly visual to-do lists and feeling more confident in socialising.

If you have a goal you would like to work towards, please email me on [jenna@assertbh.org.uk](mailto:jenna@assertbh.org.uk) and I will place you on the waitlist which is currently only a few weeks long.

## **ASSERT PEER DISCUSSION GROUP (PDG)**

By Jenna Dadak

The last two Peer Discussion Groups, online and in-person, have both had the same topic: Building New Relationship. These have been really interesting discussions, with varying tangents and sub-topics. Thank you to those who attended who were willing to share their experiences; I know it helps the others who come to hear similar stories.

The upcoming topics will be 'Pets: What Animals Bring Us' that will be in-person, and 'Autistic Inertia: Winding Down at Night' shall be online. Each month, the online group is on the 1st Tuesday and the in-person group is on the 3rd Tuesday of the month.

## **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

In a 14 month period while the PIP application process went on, I pitched, signed on, researched and wrote **The Autism Friendly Cookbook**

I think one of the problems with being self-aware just enough is that immediately other individuals assume you cannot be on the spectrum; that was the case with PIP, for definite. I'd sat through the Life Skills courses at Assert prior to the pandemic, and utilised this as much as possible, as it was the only support I had ever been given. To be self aware, arguably, means recognising what your access needs and difficulties are - and then making changes to deal with that, for a better outcome. That is ill-recognised when it comes to the kitchen and being on the spectrum, too.

When it came to lockdown, like everyone else I'd been left with 'down time' to effectively 'take stock'. It allowed me to look back at a few things; between being diagnosed as Autistic and various transitions in education, I had not been afforded the opportunity or time to look more at what that truly meant.

When you're diagnosed, you are told the 'what' - the 'what' that makes you Autistic, often in terms of why this is ostensibly a bad thing according to the rest of society. No one tells you the 'how' of how to adapt, how to accept yourself, or even how to ask for basic accommodations. Autism is counted as a disability in terms of the law; thanks to The Equality Act, organisations are obliged to give reasonable adjustments. You are also entitled to extra support, such as through the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) system.

Lockdown put in motion an application for PIP at long last, thanks to Assert; I'd been braced for a horrible time, and rightly so.



The process ended up being more than a year, aided by so called 'experts' relying on stereotypes and lying. I find phone calls distressing at the best of times; it takes so much preparation. Despite having worn glasses for most of my life, I can ostensibly read without any help whatsoever - despite never being asked about this. I have 'no communication issues'; my mother laughed at my note in the margin in response: 'This is LITERALLY the medical definition of Autism.' Apparently, I can 'just learn' key skills - which is again inaccurate. My skills are very limited, and my energy fluctuates on a daily basis - and added to that, I have a 'spiky profile'.

That particularly struck a nerve; I'd often been penalised for my 'improper' cooking skills, told off as a child and teenager for 'putting it on'. This was a universal experience I found when talking to other Autistic individuals, be it as a journalist, through social media, or just socially. Strategies and adaptations - even basic things like weighted cutlery - were not known about. Other cookbooks online for other conditions relied a lot on 'junk science' - that you could ostensibly cure yourself by eating better.

In a 14 month period while the PIP application process went on, later being overturned, I pitched, signed on, researched and wrote The Autism Friendly Cookbook. I never intended to write a book; this was something that needed to be said, or at the very least dealt with to start talking about such a concept. Accessibility impacts everyone; we talk about issues such as food banks and the cost of living crisis, but no one points out the impact if you tick 'other'. Go on - Google the stats. You'll be shocked by this.

There are 100 recipes, 30 from other Autistic people, catalogued by Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner; some familiar names include Laura James (author of 'Odd Girl Out'), YoSamdySam, and Dan Jones from The Aspie World. Each recipe has an energy rating, a skills rating (to see how complex it may be), as well as how to adapt each meal. There will be information about adaptations, other strategies to use when cooking, and more, too.

The Autism Friendly Cookbook is out on November 21st this year.

-by Lydia Wilkins

# AUTISM SUPPORT ADVISOR

By Alex Barbuti

Hi everyone.

I am back at work after some time off. If you've contacted me in the last few weeks thanks for being patient while I've caught up.

I'm busy in the office with new registrations and managing all of the emails that come in asking about Assert. I'm really glad to be back and meeting people in person again.

Before I went off I really enjoyed coming along to the last of our yoga sessions, which reminded me how important it is to take time for ourselves however busy we are, and to tune in to our bodies. I also saw some of you for a game of scrabble at the March drop-in and am looking forward to this month's, hopefully, I will have improved!

I met some of the incredible artists from SPECTRA at their exhibition at Brighton Dome and was in awe of their talent. Their work was varied and really thought-provoking – congratulations to all of you who were involved. More recently I've been one of the staff at Assert looking at the plans for relaunching our website to make it as great as possible for you, our clients, and showcase all that we do.





## 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](mailto:supporters@assertbh.org.uk).

**tell us 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  
MAY



## UPCOMING ACTIVITIES CALENDAR

### PEER DISCUSSION GROUP

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

### COFFEE CLUB

21ST JUNE

### PARENT, PARTNERS AND CARERS GROUP

EVERY 4TH TUESDAY OF THE MONTH

### ACTIVE CLUB

1ST JULY, 5TH AUGUST

## PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CONTACT US VIA

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