

# STAART Newsletter

September 2020



UNIVERSITY *of*  
GREENWICH

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# Another update from the world of a disabled postgraduate STEM student

So, lockdown happened and just before I was about to start working in labs, which was great. I mean that it was great because it gave me a chance to read and to write. At the start of May I had read over 40 papers related to my topic and areas that I had not covered in my undergrad and had started chapter 1 of my thesis. The part of lockdown that was not fun, but I made it an awesome part of my life, where the lockdown affected me and my research student lifestyle was that of lab down time, motivation and confidence.

Lockdown meant that I was in the same routine every day. For me, this often means that I get distracted. I did not have any pressing deadline, nor did I have lab work to guide my reading. So, I started to stagnate. I started to get down about my work and lose confidence. This also meant that I lost the motivation to keep reading as this is an area that I struggle with already. I know that this has affected my mental and physical health.

The tide changed when we were allowed back into labs though! After several risk assessments drafts, mine finally got approved under the Proviso that we clean everything before and after using it, wash our hands every 30 minutes and be careful to protect ourselves and those around us. There is now a balance and planning that goes into a day. I think there is a balance between working in labs and at home. I know I'm looking forward to attending the lectures I need to attend next year online.

Now I get to do what I love; I am doing science. It is also great to work with a fellow STAARTer, Becca who is my support worker to protect my bubble.

A final point is that I bought myself a 3D printer. These things are awesome! Ranging from cool knickknacks, used for home improvements, as well as, disability adaptations, I can print almost anything. This even includes adaptations for the lab!

It's good to be back in the lab and excites me every day. Performing experiments, getting results and living that dream is something that I would love to encourage every person to do, especially those living with difficulties.

“...every PhD has its setbacks”.



Brad, STAART graduate, biology



## Silence please - don't talk about Covid

Lockdown seemed to be the perfect time to embrace my illness. I'd been diagnosed with pneumonia, after never having anything wrong with my lungs at all.

The solid red chair in the 'red Covid zone' of the accident and emergency department gave me four hours to write what I could see, feel, touch, experience, and semi hear. I wrote a blog post about not being tested for Covid-19 there and then. It became popular, and before I knew it, I was out of bed (following three weeks of giving in to the cocktail of medicine) and thankful for lockdown. Finally, I was allowed to stop struggling and embrace what I love to do; sit home and write.

My undergraduate degree in Human Nutrition gave me a huge love for the body, science, and the miracle of the cell. My postgraduate degree in Creative Non-fiction confused some people. To me, it made perfect sense. Write the science, the human stuff, coupled with life stories, health, thoughts, and feelings - in a way that its narratively understood and relatable. This worldwide story had to be written, recorded, and published for future generations, and for us, to remember. I felt a joyous sense of obligation under the title I had given myself of 'life writer'.

Knowing many interesting characters, I felt the book would have an eclectic feel to it if the story were to contain short pieces from different perspectives, several points of view, and even from various parts of the world. So I began to choose wisely and contacted some of the people I respected to embrace this position of the author of our book "Covid-19; how it made us feel."

Three of my MA cohort wrote, as did another STAART member, Megan. Six other authors

made up a great book that I published and it was an instant Amazon bestseller. I had joked about it becoming a bestseller but the dream seemed impossible to realise in the beginning as Amazon refused to publish anything with any reference to the virus at all. I was devastated. I had gladly worked at my desk for 14 hours a day for six weeks while the rest of the world baked banana bread, worked out to Joe Wicks, laid in the sunshine, or complained on Facebook about how bored they were. Now we were being silenced. My MA supervisor was furious as she explained to me our author voices were being censored.

“But I’m not talking about the virus as such, I’m talking about how it made us feel,” I protested. She was helpful and pointed me to a book printing service where I could get my hands on a physical copy (or fifty) and I bought ISBN’s for the book. Twitter people provided answers for publishing a digital copy and Apple were the heroes there. We were rocking in the ‘indie’ publishing world and selling copies already when suddenly my book appeared on Amazon too. I wasn’t sure if it was an oversight but I wasn’t going to question it.

Readers found warmth through the stories and related to the thinking patterns which we, interestingly, seemed to share. I wonder if you felt the same as us. How did it make you feel?

Louise



STAART Graduate - Nutrition and

Creative Non-fiction

# Scope Online Forums

Scope is the UK's leading pan-disability equality charity. It campaigns tirelessly to secure everyday equality for the 14 million disabled people in the UK and delivers a range of vital services, including their online community, to provide support, advice and connectivity to disabled people and their families.

The online community is an incredible resource for those with questions and offers great peer-to-peer support, as well as the opportunity for its 65,000 members to share experiences.

The platform is simple to use and optimised for accessibility. Discussions are divided into categories to help you seek out relevant discussions and participate in the ones that interest you the most. Not only do members visit the community to find advice on just about every aspect of being disabled, but they also use the community as a crucial support network - reading blogs, participating in live Q&As, discussing hobbies, current events and interests, and playing games as a way of reducing their isolation.

Members can come onto the online community to gain support about any aspect of being disabled. On the other hand, the community also strives to facilitate

conversations within their virtual coffee lounge about hobbies, current events and interests. We also have guest blog posts and live Q&A's to allow people to further share their experiences and knowledge.

A few recent discussions include:

- [When your physical disability impacts your mental health](#)
- [Care and support at university](#)
- [Do I need to request an EHCP myself for my 9-year-old son who has ADHD?](#)
- [I'm exempt from wearing a face covering](#)

Isolation, especially during coronavirus has been a huge issue for many disabled people, but throughout lockdown and the 'new normal', the online community has remained a place for disabled people and their families to chat.

Do you have a question you would like help with? Would you like to socialise with like-minded people? Join [Scope's online community](#) today and connect with others.



Scope - STAART Ally





## STAART ART 2: Cats and Dogs Colouring Books

As the first STAART ART competition was such a success, we designed another crafty activity. We have created two online STAART colouring books - one with cats and one with dogs. The drawings have come from various people attached to STAART and the artists are different ages and in different locations, including one from Italy.

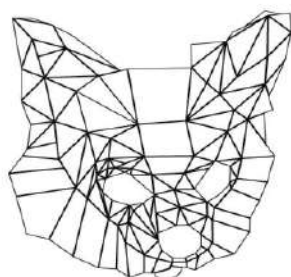
There were three stages in the process:

1. Entrants drew their cat or dog (sometimes more than one, and some have a cat and a dog) and then captured the blank image. Some people have drawn portraits of family pets whilst others drew from their imagination.

2. Entrants then coloured in their drawing to suit their own tastes and what they envisioned that particular cat or dog to look like. They added their own name, location, age and the name of their animal/s. They then captured the completed image.

3. Entrants then posted both of their drawings to our specialist STAART ART Facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1494748690692646>. You can access the page to see the drawings for yourself.

The drawings were then compiled into two colouring books by Holly, one of our STAART Ambassadors. All of the images in the colouring book can be downloaded individually for anybody, anywhere to colour in. As a taster, here are the top cat and top dog entries:



Arly by  
Ruth, 22,  
London.



Lucinda by  
Amanda, 39,  
Bristol.



We will be running our second STAART ART prize competition throughout October. Anybody will be able to enter a drawing (or two) using any of the drawings in these two colouring books. It will be very interesting to see how different people interpret the same design. Details of this competition will be available via our STAART webpages from October 1<sup>st</sup> 2020.

Melanie STAART Lead and Sociology & Education Graduate



## STAART WhatsApp Group

It feels like a very long time ago since we were on campus and seeing each other in person, but the communication via the STAART WhatsApp group continues during these uncertain times.

As we all know, the past few months have not been easy for us all but being a part of this community has been and continues to be an important aspect for many. Not only for the help and support that the WhatsApp group always offers, but for people just being there for one another. As one former graduate recently said, “you can share the best and not so great moments with friends and family, and for that I am really appreciative and thankful”.

































The group chat can vary and as well as university related queries such as library opening times and recommended software, we have also suggested recipes to each other, shared our latest lockdown makeovers, and laughed about our mischievous pets. Since the last newsletter the WhatsApp group has also hosted numerous video calls to catch up and see some friendly faces, organised a much needed socially distanced picnic and enjoyed a virtual graduation for four of our STAART family.

As we draw closer to September and the return to study I have no doubt that the on-going support will be available through the group, and I know that we will all look forward to more video calls and hopefully in the near future some STAART get-togethers.

I am humbled and grateful to be a part of STAART and this WhatsApp group, and long may it continue!

Shona, Human Nutrition, BSc Hons STAART

WhatsApp Emojis:

Melanie		Cheryl		Kieran		Sophia	
Annie		Bradley		Amy		Shona	
Jenny		Abi		Kieran		Nathalie	
Ryan		Kaitlyn		Holly		Sarah	
Jimmy		Luke		Connor		Boris	
Zoe		Megan		Lily			
Aida		Rebecca		Tyra			
Mariya		Ru		Bradley			
Billy		Vanessa		Jo			

Other Emojis:

Becca - 

Georgia - 

Brydi - 

## What I have been creating this summer

I've always had a passion for art which I lost after my exams in 2018. Last year I began to struggle a lot with my mental health and this Christmas it wasn't great. I decided to start drawing again as something to keep my mind occupied and for something to work towards and be somewhat productive. One of my lovely teachers had got me a sketchbook months before which I started but didn't continue which I decided to use. I finished this book in a couple of months and filled it with drawings I found from Pinterest and became passionate about art again. I've since filled two more and started on coloured detailed drawings of live objects and my own photos of subjects. For me this has massively helped with my mental health as it means I felt more productive and felt I was actually good at something

with helped with my self-esteem. People comment on my artwork which boosts my esteem because people are

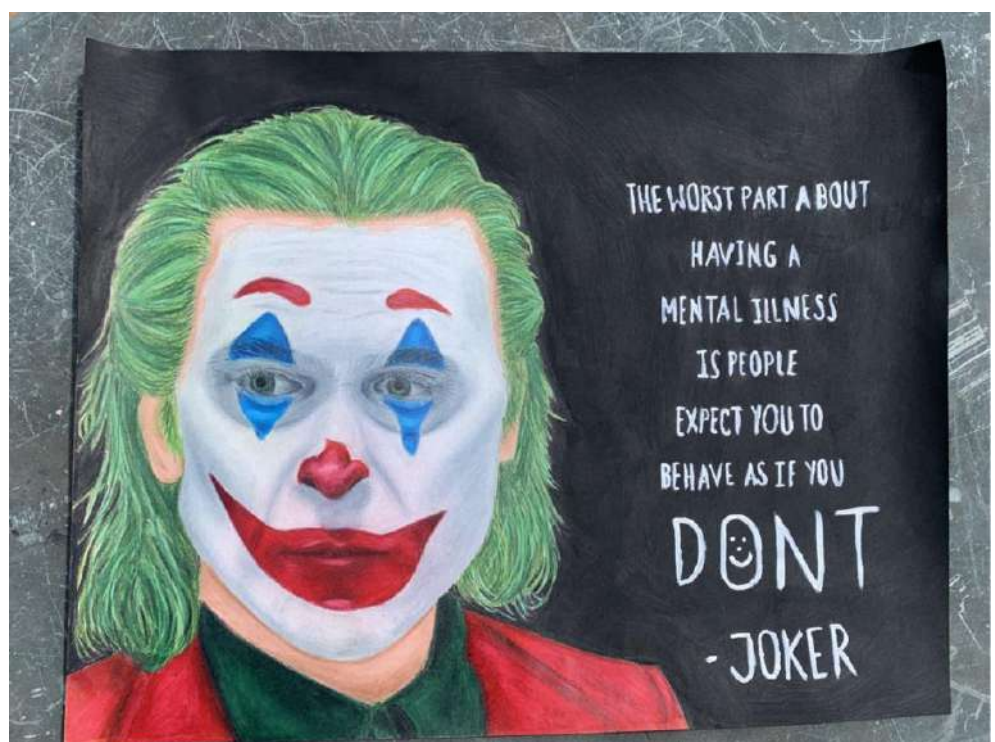




proud of my work and I must be doing a good job with it. Of course, I still have my bad days and my issues haven't disappeared, but it definitely has helped and gotten me out of some dark places.

I would highly recommend drawing, and I know a lot of people say things such as 'I can't even draw a stick man', but Rome wasn't built in a day. You can start with things such as step by step drawings and work your way up, you'll mess up but as you work your way up, you'll learn skills and techniques. You can even start an Instagram or Facebook page for it to document your progress, I started an Instagram page from when I started so I can see my development and so can other people, which I think is interesting and inspiring as I personally love looking at others art.

Beth - STAART  
member



# Wisteria

The wisteria painting was done during the quarantine period with the main thought that if one cannot go outside due to various circumstances, we can use our imagination to go out and explore peaceful places. When I paint sometimes, I visualize myself in the painting especially when I try to judge the perspective so you can say that I project myself into a painting. This helps me "travel" so to speak into

the place that I paint.

I mainly use acrylics, water soluble oil paint and



oil pastels. Some minor details are done using wax based patina. The painting is done on three separate canvases, each having a wisteria tree as a focus point. Although the painting was thought to be formed by three parts, the two larger canvases can also stand separately. Only the narrow middle canvas was mainly thought to be a liaison for the other two and can be a bit awkward to place it by itself, but maybe it can work in a narrow space. I hope that this painting can act as a catalyst for the imagination to enable people to "travel" to beautiful places regardless of circumstances.

Dr. Marina (Imagology) and STAART Ally



## Disabled? Looking for Work?

You've worked hard at university. Being a disabled student is never easy, and in this unexpected economic climate, it's also hard to find work. There are more people looking for jobs than there are jobs. And if you are disabled, it's doubly hard. Depressing, isn't it? But the good news is that actually, you are a premium candidate. Disabled people have the same diverse range of skills as anyone else, of course, plus all the extra ones we've had to develop by living in a world not designed for us, like problem-solving, creative thinking, resourcefulness, determination and tenacity. And a number of employers are enlightened enough to know this!

Being disabled myself, I wanted inclusive employers to find talent like yours. So, I founded Evenbreak, a specialist job board run by and for disabled people. Our team all have lived experience of the barriers you face.

Evenbreak is a not-for-profit social enterprise, and it's completely free to register, search for jobs and set up job alerts. You can be confident that employers who pay to advertise their vacancies on a site specifically for disabled candidates are likely to be far more receptive to us. Employers as diverse as ITV, John Lewis, Financial Times, HS2, Amazon, Heathrow and many, many more.

We can't guarantee you'll find your dream job on Evenbreak, but it's worth a try! Have a look and see what you think.

Jane Hatton, Director, Evenbreak.





## Six Ways to Wellbeing

In addition to the current wheel of wellbeing that offers six sections of wellbeing strategies to help cope with leading a healthy well-balanced life, I believe that in this current situation, a new section could be added Stay Safe. Unfortunately, many people globally are suffering the after-effects of a global pandemic, and therefore staying safe is paramount.

But let's not forget the 6 ways of wellbeing:

**Be active.** This suggests that going for a walk or exercising makes you feel good about yourself. Exercise decreases the stress hormones and increases endorphins within your brain. Endorphins are the body's natural feel good chemicals and give your body a natural boost.

**Keep learning.** Doing the same old thing day in, day out might be right for you but why not try something new? Achieving new goals is not only fun but will also make you more confident.

**Give.** Always try to be humble, help others and give thanks. Smile because that one smile can mean the world to someone that is feeling down at that moment in time. Taking your time to help can be beyond rewarding.

**Connect.** Connecting with others, your friends, family and neighbours helps your emotional wellbeing and these connections will support you in everyday life.

Take note of everything around you. Take your time to take things in and reflect on past and present experiences because it will help you to find new ways of approaching and dealing with situations.

Look after your planet because it plays a big part in an individual's wellbeing. Try to be more energy efficient by taking these small steps to a greener life. They can make all the difference in achieving a happy and healthy lifestyle.

Staying safe in this current situation is paramount to your wellbeing especially now. It has to be mentioned that mental health has affected a great many people globally over the last couple of months due to Covid-19. I believe the six ways to wellbeing are more important now, than they have ever been. Following the wellbeing steps in these worrying times could make it easier to lead balanced life. Stay safe.

Cheryl STAART member and 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Forensic Science and Criminology student



## Boccia

While I was tackling my MPhil, I was persuaded to take up a hobby/interest as a slight distraction from university work. I took up Boccia. What's that I hear you say? It is a Paralympic Sport originally for athletes with Cerebral Palsy but everyone can play, no matter your abilities/disabilities.

It is a sitting-down sport, similar to bowls. You have 6 red and 6 blue balls. The object of the game is to get your ball closer to the jack (white ball) than your opponent. You can play Singles or Pairs or in Teams (3 players) with an opportunity to enter competitions and travelling places.

There is potential to support competitions and/or become a referee which would look good on a CV. I have been playing for 6 years, first for fun then for the last 3 years I have competed in the Kent League and Singles Nationally where I travelled to Sheffield. I entered my first competition as a novice, and have managed to progress to National Level competing against athletes who play for England and Great Britain. Two years ago, I am proud to say I got a silver medal for the first time on one of playoffs, I reached the BE Single Finals last year in Sheffield and I'm determined to get there again! I also time keep games for competitions.

If anyone would like more information on Boccia, or even how to create a STAART Boccia team (or two!) contact Melanie who could arrange for me to meet with you. I am more than happy to help, could be just a chat!



Amy STAART Postgraduate Ambassador - ICT and Engineering



## What I have been reading during lockdown

I have found reading a good way to pass the time during lockdown, not only to distract myself with light reading but also to get educated on certain subjects.

I found the book *Why I am no longer talking to white people about Race* by Reni Eddo-Lodge a really educational and informative book. After George Floyd's death I realised that I was not educated enough about racism and I found this a brilliant way in to learn more about it. It is very eye-opening and covers racism in the UK and in America. I have also read the book *The Hate You Give* by Angie Thomas. This is a fiction novel based on a true story about police shooting an innocent man. I have also watched the film which is based on this book which is also very good. Since reading these books I decided I wanted to learn more about racism and what can be done to assist with reducing racism so I have since purchased another book about racism called *White Supremacy* by Layla F Saad, which I am yet to read but I am looking forward to having more knowledge on this subject.

I have also read *Invisible Women* by Caroline Criado Perez. The book talks about gender gaps throughout the world and how the patriarchy effects women in different ways throughout different countries. I found this really interesting as previously I had only heard about how women are affected by the patriarchy in England and America.

Some fiction reading that I have been doing which is much lighter than the previous books I have recommended is *The Light Between Oceans* by M L Stedman which was a really nice story about a lighthouse keeper.



Another good read was Mythos by Stephen Fry. It is a story based on Greek gods and mythology. I found it a humorous and a witty re-telling

I have also read All The Light We Cannot See by Anthony Doerr. It is a bittersweet novel about a woman who has been blind since the age of six and her father helps guide her home while hiding from the Nazis.

Telling the Bees by Peggy Hesketh is a really clever novel about a man who spends most of his life in solitude, and his daily routine focusses on bees. He bumps into his neighbour who is quite brash and whose boldness starts to transform his life. One day he follows a trail of bees to her body (spoiler alert!) and he helps to discover what happened to her.

If reading is not your forte, I have also found painting-by-numbers a really good way of productive distraction. It is very soothing, and I found it very mindful.

Holly

STAART ART Ambassador and 2nd Year LLB student

## Megan's Graduation Story

My name is Megan and I am one of the University of Greenwich most recent 2020 Biomedical Science Graduates. I am a disabled student and I have a condition called Neurofibromatosis type 1. In simple terms this causes tumours to grow on any nerve in the body. I literally have hundreds of them, some small others big. Some can be removed whilst others are inoperable. To date I have had 10 operations to try and remove particularly problematic tumours spread around my body.

Like many people with NF1 I also have a range of other conditions including ADHD, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, anxiety and depression (I actually have about 13 diagnosed conditions and under investigation for a few more). This has impacted other people's opinions on what I am capable of. I spent most of my life being told what I cannot do and what I will not achieve, I was told I would not achieve academically, I would not go to university and people should not expect too much from me. At secondary school I was told that I was not academic and should not have such high expectations.

In 2017 I started the University of Greenwich and received tremendous support from my tutors and funded support from DSA, for the first time in my life I have not had to prove myself to anyone. Staff have seen what I am capable of and done everything positive break down the barriers I face and not put more in my way.

Since joining University of Greenwich in 2017 I have dealt with some

major obstacles from my Dads declining health (he is bed Bound due to MS), constant pain, 2 major operation, 2 unexpected hospital admissions, hundreds of hospital appointments, a global Pandemic and much more. Trying to juggle all of this with assessments, work commitments and general university life has been challenging. I will always be thankful for the support from the university, for the first time in my life i have not had to prove myself to anyone, staff have been able to see just what I am capable of. They have done everything they can to help break down the barriers I face and not put more in my way.

I have gained so much confidence in my academic abilities, attended 5 global conferences (3 scientific, one mentoring and the other for disabled and LGBTQ+ Staff in higher education), was published in a book, helped prove that disabled students CAN achieve when the right support is in place. This would not have been possible without the support from Dr. Melanie Thorley and the STAART team.

After years of hard work and determination I was delighted to achieve a First Class Honours.

When I dreamt of my final year of university and my graduation ceremony this is certainly not what I expected. Due to the coronavirus pandemic our final months were completed online and graduation ceremony took place on Zoom. This is not the way I had planned to end my time at the university and it is definitely not the graduation ceremony I had dreamed of. I sat at home In my academic cap and gown as they read my name and I waved awkwardly at the screen. It was then announced



that I had been awarded The University of Greenwich Merit award for Outstanding achievement. I couldn't help but cry with happiness. Despite how difficult growing up disabled has been I have used my experience as a source of motivation in my academic and personal life. I do not think I would have achieved as much I have done without having faced the challenges in my daily life. I have had to break down barriers for myself and prove just how much I can do and what I can achieve. I have always liked to prove people wrong and achieve more than they believe I can.

I am looking forward to starting my next chapter completing a Master by Research in Biology at the University of York. I will miss Greenwich very much but they have given me the confidence to 'spread my wings' and achieve great things wherever I go.

**Megan - STAART Graduate Biomedical Sciences**



# Calendar

## September

21 - World Alzheimer's Day

29 - World Heart Day

## October

1 - Dwarfism Awareness Month

1 - Black History Month

1 - Breast Cancer Awareness Month

10 - World Mental Health day

10 - World Hospice and Palliative Care Day

12 - World Arthritis Day

13 - World Sight Day

22 - International Stammering Awareness Day

## November

2 - National Stress Awareness Day

14 - World Diabetes Day

16 - International Day for Tolerance

Editors: Brydi Edwards, Anne Blombach, Melanie Thorley

# STAART - Support through \*AccessAbility retention and transition

Contact us for more information



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