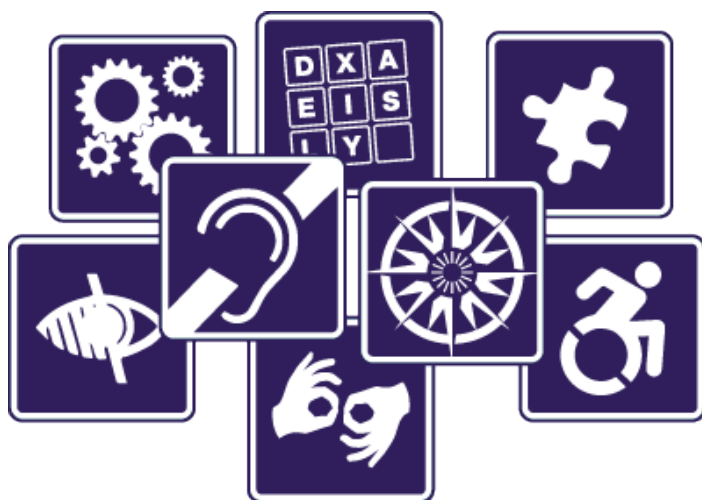


# STAART Newsletter

15 September 2019



UNIVERSITY *of*  
GREENWICH

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# How it all STAARTed

Many prospective students experience trepidation and/or anxiety at the prospect of going to university, but these feelings can be exacerbated if there is an additional factor, such as having a disability. Disability, in a higher education context, includes physical disabilities; long-term health conditions; mental health conditions and the dyslexia and autistic spectrums.

Whilst it is pleasing that the numbers of disabled students attending university continues to grow, research, anecdotal evidence and media reports state that the support for disabled students in universities varies, with many disabled students receiving little or no adequate support. The STAART model aims to change this.

The STAART Team is based in the outreach team at the University of Greenwich – we are not a recruitment activity. Our remit is to support potential disabled students in their transition into university. The team is comprised of myself (lead) and STAART Ambassadors and Graduates. Every person employed on the team has a disability (or two) themselves. We have recruited in excess of 300 STAART Ambassadors and Graduates in the past twelve years and the majority of graduates are in their chosen careers. This is to ensure the potential students we work with know that the ambassadors and graduates have a good idea how a disability can impact on education. We also attempt to provide a realistic expectation for new disabled students. This is particularly important if the student has come from a more nurtured, supported secondary education. Going from a class of 30 students, with accompanying TAs and LSAs, to a class of 120 can be daunting but imagine how distressing this could be for a student with heightened anxiety?

STAART is a member organisation for post-16 disabled students considering university. It is free to join, as are our activities. We have introduced STAART Facebook and Twitter accounts to ensure any post-16 disabled student can access information and good practice regarding disability and higher education, regardless of their geographical position, including overseas. Accessing the STAART Facebook group can enable disabled students to interact with each other and boost their social networks which may enhance their self-esteem and/or their psychological wellbeing. School staff and parents/carers are welcome to join the Facebook group (University of Greenwich – STAART) or follow the Twitter group (@GRE\_STAART) as these are useful for exchanging information. We also have a closed WhatsApp group for University of Greenwich students. The WhatsApp group is used for sharing information and arranging coffee/lunch and evenings out. We also have workshops and days out in London and Kent.

The eventual intention of STAART is to create a global community of practice to share good practice on disability issues and higher education. We have decided to introduce the STAART newsletter to share our experiences and share information to a wider audience.



# The 6 ways to wellbeing

The importance of wellbeing is fundamental to the overall health of an individual, enabling them to successfully overcome difficulties and achieve their goals. This guide helps people to achieve a healthy mental attitude to life by using the following 6 steps.

**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 chemical 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.

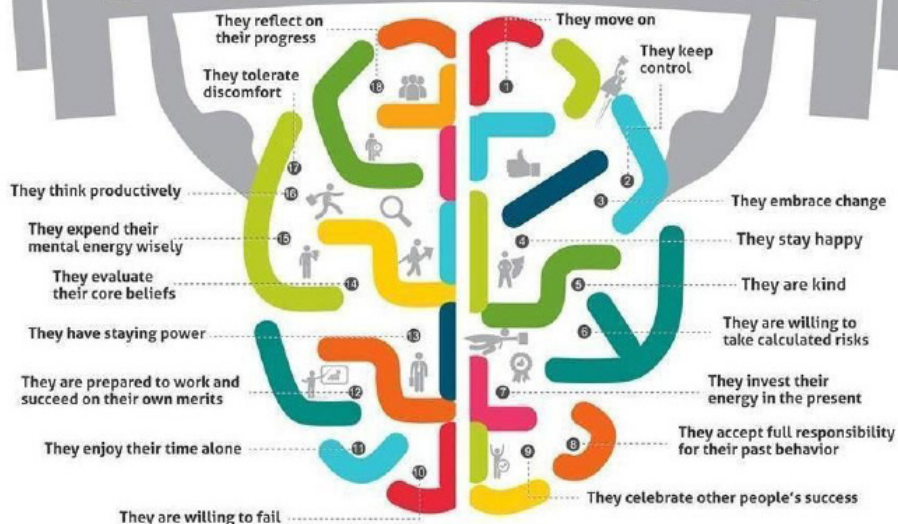
**Connect.** Connecting with others, your friends, family and neighbours helps your emotional wellbeing and these connections will support you in everyday life.

**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.

Cheryl  
Forensic Science with Criminology BA Hons

# 18 THINGS MENTALLY STRONG PEOPLE DO



Source: <https://developyourchild.co.uk/18-things-mentally-strong-people-thank-forbes-com/>

# STAART WhatsApp Group

As a main social backbone, STAART have a private WhatsApp group, curated by Melanie, which is used for a variety of different things. Are you stuck between meetings in Medway and have time for a coffee? Find a friend to go with on the WhatsApp group! Is there something bringing you down and you could do with a few pointers? Ask for advice on the WhatsApp group! Are you proud of something that you've achieved, and you want to celebrate? The WhatsApp group wants to hear about it! It's a thriving social hub for all STAARTers and knowing

that you have friends just a text away is a fantastic comfort, particularly if there's something getting you down.

Our STAART group chat is a private chat but why not start your own group chat? It's an amazing way to stay in contact with your friends, meet new people and learn from each other. And the best thing is always knowing that you have a network of people to celebrate with or to support you.

Ryan

Creative Writing BA Hons

## The current members and their emojis

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



# Why I chose Greenwich - Holly

I was unsure about going to university for a long time, as I've spent most of my childhood and teen years begging my mum to let me be homeschooled (she never gave in). Despite this, I decided to look around universities to see if anything clicked. I looked around Greenwich and it ticked all the boxes for me, as it's a beautiful campus with the accommodation lovely and close, a good law course with a high percentage of coursework which is brilliant for me as I get very anxious about exams. I also have family close to Greenwich which was another important aspect for me. However, I was still unsure as due to fluctuating health, living on my own without sufficient precautions is dangerous. Then I got an email from Melanie about a workshop where I could learn about different types of support that can be offered at university. This completely won me over and I saw the amazing community within the STAART group. The support since that day has been amazing and without it, I know I wouldn't be going to university this year. I'm so excited to be part of this group and I'm hoping I'll be able to demonstrate to other prospective students that it is possible to go to university despite having ill health.

Holly  
Law LLB





## London

People told me  
you were a mistake.  
But you were my escape.  
You saved me.

You are my home.  
The people in your streets,  
your lights, your scents, your beats.  
This is my home.

Over time and all at once  
my voice came back.  
My mind got back on track  
over time and all at once.

I wrote this poem in my first year of university. It deals with my anxiety and anticipation towards moving to London and how this mood has affected me and my mental health.

Annie  
Creative Writing BA Hons





# Megan's quilt

My second year at university proved to be very difficult. I had two major operations, an unexpected hospital admission and lots of other drama both at uni and in my personal life. I was completely overwhelmed with my health and the pressures of university. For the first time in my life, my anxiety levels were extremely high, and it was beginning to impact my everyday life. It was during this time I realised the importance in having a good relationship with your personal tutor. At the end of my first year, I switched personal tutor. Joanna was one of my first-year course tutors and she always stopped and asked how I was at the end of each lecture. After a particularly difficult couple of weeks I almost broke down into tears, at which point she offered to have a conversation over coffee. It was soon after this that I asked if she would take over as my personal tutor and was delighted that she agreed.

Over the course of the year I have had several meetings with her both in her office, through email and over lunch/coffee. She helped me apply for extenuating circumstances when I was recovering from surgery, helped me access other support at uni and even organised a summer internship for me. Most importantly, she listened to me when I needed someone to talk to and supported me wherever she could. I certainly could not have gotten through the year, let alone achieve an overall grade of 79% without her support.

At the beginning of the summer I found out she was pregnant which would mean she wouldn't be around during my final year. I wanted to give her a special present. Something to show my appreciation for all she had done, and something special to welcome her baby. I decided to use my creative skills and finally get my sewing machine out again, something I love doing but rarely have time to use any more. I decided to design and make a quilt. As Joanna and her husband both work at the university within the life science and National resource Institute (NRI) I wanted to incorporate a science theme. With Joanna's speciality being fish physiology and immunology, I wanted to incorporate this into the design. I am really happy with how it turned out, and I definitely plan on using my sewing machine more often. Having such a good relationship with my personal tutor has been a monumental to my success at university. I would recommend that any student should talk to their personal tutor. Get to know them and let them get to know you. They will often be the first point of contact should you need any support at university.

Megan, Biomedical Science BSc Hons





**'Teddy Bow'**

Artist: Amy, Graduate Engineering

Materials: Latex and Acrylic

Context: Completed after a painting retreat in Ontario, Canada



# Anyone up for a picnic?

The August bank holiday saw the STAART group meet up for one of their social jollies, a picnic at the Herb Garden based in Greenwich Park. This was an event to celebrate the end of the academic year for those who graduated, those transitioning to another year and we were delighted to meet new members. Some brought family members and friends including the furry kind. Temperatures were a whopping 29 C, but that didn't stop the 20 or so members from venturing out. Armed with blankets, golf umbrella, and sunscreen, fun was had by all. To round off the event adding a touch more heat, in the spicy form, the party vacated to Nandos.

Photo courtesy of STAART. Basking in the sunshine from left to right: newlywed Tyra; doing marvellous after recovering from the Clearing BBQ the night before, beverage in hand socialite Ryan; graduate Bradley with girlfriend Rebecca; sensibly wearing a hat Richard; the powerhouse behind STAART Melanie; the captain who organises all the ambassadors Teddy; our regular traveller abroad Kieran W with girlfriend Merry; our fighter David; former STAARTer Helena and our outstanding award winner and graduate Abi.

Vanessa  
Adult Nursing BSc



# Kieran at Pride London 2019

On Saturday 6th July 2019, I was invited to represent The Scout Association at Pride London 2019. This was the first year that The Scout Association have partnered with Pride London to run the Family Area. The Family Area was very busy throughout the day and I was so grateful to be given the opportunity.

During the event, I was responsible for an activity that involved anybody to dip their hand in a variety of coloured paint and place it on a rainbow drawn on a piece of paper. Needless to say, this was a very popular activity, and many children and adults took part. There were many other activities being run all around us, specifically focused on Scouting, and it was super busy the entire day!

Kieran  
Computer Science BSc Hons





AMAT is a local homelessness charity that has been operating in Chatham for the past 21 years. They offer support to vulnerable homeless people and people at risk of homelessness, share best practice within the homeless sector and provide rapid, suitable and safe housing to homeless people in the Medway and Kent area. Anyone can become homeless, at any time for a variety of reasons. There are currently over 1,000 people in Medway who are registered as being homeless.

For the past four years, STAART has arranged a woolly goods sale in the autumn every year to raise money for the charity. Members of the STAART Team knit and/or crochet items such as scarves, hats, phone/tablet covers and desk buddies to sell. However, we also give people the opportunity to buy the goods and gift them to a homeless individual. Myself and Brad were lucky enough to be involved in Autumn 2018 when we raised £267 in cash and received 20 hats and scarves to be donated to local homeless people in Medway. This year, STAART has pledged to raise £100 for AMAT but we hope to exceed this as part of their Big Campaign 2019.

Zoe Robinson  
Nutrition student

[www.amatuk.org/](http://www.amatuk.org/)

<https://www.kentonline.co.uk/kmtv/video/hundreds-of-homeless-people-living-in-medway-8908/>



# Brad's graduation

I suffered a stroke in 2011 which left me completely paralysed on my left side. I had to learn to walk, eat and look after myself again. If you told me then that, on July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019 I would be graduating from the University of Greenwich with a first class degree in Biology (Hons), I would not have believed you.

Graduation was everything I could have hoped for. A day of joy and celebration of the journey I had been on for the last four years. The ceremony was amazing and the people that I surrounded myself with, even more so. There were times, however, I wanted to stop studying, times, where I did not think it was worth the stress and pain. On the other side of it all, I can say that the resilience that I had to put into my degree was all worth it. I can say that I did it, I was successful, and that I have made my life better.

STAART showed me that there were others out there like me. Others that support you through the hard times and push you to be great. People that will celebrate the good times like they are going out of fashion because they know how hard you worked. People who care and that just want to make a difference. It was so amazing to celebrate with other STAARTers the year before, this year and I'm sure in the years to follow.

The question that I'm now being asked is "So what's next for me?" So, I asked myself "What is next for the student that is very capable despite his disabilities?" Having graduated with a first even though I have dyslexia, have had depression, suffer with fatigue and that I can't use my left hand very well or walk very far, I'd like to keep pushing the boundaries of what I can do and what the world can offer me. I'd like to do a PhD and contribute to the community that saved my life and that inspired me to keep getting better. So that I can give back and save others!

Brad





# Where are they now? - Helena

I started at the University of Greenwich in 2007 studying a Psychology degree, however, due to my ongoing health issues, I had to restart the year in 2008 and decided to move to an English degree. It was around this time that I became aware of STAART. I have a condition called Crohn's Disease alongside a host of other medical conditions including



enteropathic arthritis. Additionally, I also have dyslexia. Working with Melanie and the team helped develop my self confidence and introduced me to the world of education. It was through this that I decided to pursue a career in teaching. When I finished my degree, I went on to complete a Masters in English at Greenwich and then went on to study for a PGCE at the Institute of Education. I started work as an English teacher in 2013 in a mainstream school. In 2015, I moved to a specialist SEMH (social, emotional and mental health) school where I finished my Masters in Education and have now moved on to be Head of School. Through this time, I have had difficulties with both my health and my dyslexia however the struggles have been worth it and I have managed to use strategies that I learned throughout my studies to support me. There are no easy shortcuts in life and it can be difficult to reach your goals, however, what the team at Greenwich showed me is that it is possible and I am proof of that!

And yes, as I have been asked many times, a person with dyslexia can be an English teacher. Although it takes hard work and a lot of creativity!!

Helena



# Calendar

## September

World Alzheimer's month

10 – Suicide prevention day

21 – World Alzheimer's day

23 – International day of sign languages

23-29 – International week of the Deaf

29 – World heart day & World Deaf day

## October

1-7 – Dyslexia awareness week

2 – World cerebral palsy

10 – World mental health awareness day & World sight day

12 – World Arthritis day

22 – International stammering awareness day

## November

6 – National stress awareness day

## December

3 – International day of persons with disabilities

## January

4 – World Braille Day

11 – Paget's Awareness Day

31 – Young Carers Awareness Day

Source: <https://businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/media-centre/disability-awareness-days/>



# Healthy (ish) microwave meals

Some of you will have heard of Fresher's 15. This is because many students put on 15 pounds in weight during their time at university. Mostly because some of us eat convenience food and/or at random hours. However, STAART has a solution which may prevent this. The website below provides ten microwaveable meals which are healthy (ish), all contain fruit or veg, all ready in less than 30 minutes, and result in very little washing up. This website has the following recipes:

Jambalaya

Risotto primavera

Lemon pudding

Scandi supper

Leaky salmon in a parcel

Butternut squash risotto

Banana pudding

Apricot and orange rice pudding

Tuna sweet potato jackets

Spiced hot chocolate

The jambalaya is my particular favourite. Enjoy!

<https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/what-cook-without-cooker>

Melanie

STAART Lead and sociology and education graduate

# STAART - Support through \*AccessAbility retention and transition

Contact us for more information



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