

STAART Newsletter

15 May 2020



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 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

STAART WhatsApp Group

Being given the opportunity to write this article again is a real privilege as it is now more than ever that being part of STAART is really felt and much needed. The STAART WhatsApp group is really coming together during this difficult time and it is great to see the support that everyone gives. It is an unsettling time for everyone, but the group is really pulling together in a number of ways. Isolation is difficult for us all and having members of a community that you can reach out to is important. The STAART WhatsApp group offers this community and we are all helping each other by offering kind words, helping with queries in relation to coursework and other university related issues, as well as general updates on the current situation. It has been lovely to see people sharing pictures from their gardens and walks with family, friends and our much-loved pets who are sharing this journey with us. In a time that could be viewed as negative, you can really see that the WhatsApp group is being used for its intent, to help people come together in a positive way in offering support to university friends. We are always connected through this group and we are all looking forward to seeing each other again soon as well as some new faces!

Shona, Human Nutrition, BSc Hons
STAART Ambassador



AchieveAbility - Neurodiverse Voices E-journal launch

Neurodiversity is becoming an increasingly important topic. It has come up regularly when talking to specialists and lobby groups and is featuring strongly in public policy debates. Neurodiversity connects with our work on health and wellbeing, and on the notion of **good work**. To have a better understanding of neurodiversity this highlights we are all different, with different needs, strengths, interests and motivations. Therefore, to better support and motivate their workforce, employers need to be flexible and adaptable.

The AchieveAbility E-Journal celebrates the notion of neurodiversity, those of us who are neurodivergent (dyslexia and autistic spectra) and the collective community who are neurodiverse. It is for this reason that the values of the E-Journal are embedded within social justice, inclusive policy and practice and the recognition of different ability in education, training and employment. To promote these values, we have grouped the papers into 4 categories: Policy and Good Practice; Strategy in the Creative Industries; Inclusivity and Employment and Supported Access to Employment.

The Journal papers are the result of the research seminar: 'Neurodivergent Voices: good practice in the workplace' held at the University of Westminster in May 2019 and seeks to bridge several gaps. The first is the gap between academic research/writing on the one hand, and the experience of practitioners and neurodivergent people on the other. Perhaps even more importantly, we hope to enable neurodivergent writers and practitioners to find new audiences through their submissions to the E-Journal, and we are pleased that the majority of the contributors to our first issue identify as neurodivergent.

Journal aims are:

- To provide a forum for exchange and debate that informs policy, strategy and practice on Neurodiversity within our society.
- To support, promote and publish research-informed work of



established and new academics and practitioners in the fields of education, training, employment, social justice and cultural change.

- To foster interdisciplinary work of neurodivergent authors to find new audiences in the journal fields.

While maintaining the research and editorial standards expected by more formal research-based journals, this AchieveAbility E-Journal takes an inclusive editorial policy to encourage the particular experience, original thinking and preferred communication styles, formats and media of contributors.

AchieveAbility E-Journal Issue 1 Spring 2020

ISSN number 2634-0798

Neurodiverse Voices:
Good Practice in the
Workplace.



A copy of the journal can be found here: <https://www.achieveability.org.uk/files/1586122571/e-journal-achieveability-neurodivergent-voices-april-2020pdf.pdf>

Editors: Dr Ross Cooper, Professor Debra Kelly, Dr Katherine Hewlett

Reviewers: Dr Melanie Thorley, Liz Gentilcore, Dr Katherine Hewlett

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Dr Katherine Hewlett

Founder, Trustee and Director of AchieveAbility



STAARTing work at the University

My name is Teddy and I manage the Student Ambassador Scheme at The University of Greenwich. Our team of 400+ students work for the university in a broad range of projects and can develop skills in leadership, events management, networking, administration, presentations, marketing and communications etc. Each Student Ambassador has the chance to develop their skills through a range of training and work experiences which are offered to the whole team, and can attend specialist training so they can support specific projects including the fantastic STAART Project!

As I look back over my time with the university one of the things I take great pride in is my partnership with the STAART Project and the success of our amazing STAART Ambassadors.

When I was a student, I found university life quite tough. I was seven stone heavier, I was shy

and didn't have many friends, my mental health was quite low, and when I finished at university I really struggled to find a graduate role as I didn't have enough work experience. Now I get the amazing chance to change all of that through my work, by offering current students the chance to; join a fantastic community, make friends from across the university, and earn money and develop valuable employability skills to give them a head start in the graduate recruitment market.

The criteria to become a STAART Ambassador:

- You need to be a current student at the university of Greenwich.
- You need to have a disability; long-term health condition; specific learning difficulty and/or mental health difficulty.
- You need to be comfortable to discuss how the above has affected your education (not in detail).
- You need to have a smiley, welcoming face.



By developing a specialism as a STAART Ambassador you will be able to attend expert training to develop your knowledge about disabilities, long-term health conditions, neurodiversity and mental health, so you can better support potential disabled students in their transition to university through your work. This means you might be mentoring students in local schools, representing STAART at our Open Days/Taster Days, or supporting students with their DSA applications and ambassador applications. Our most engaged STAART Ambassadors have had the chance to represent STAART at functions such as national conferences like the Higher Education and Student Success Summit and The Westminster AchieveAbility Commission for Dyslexia and Neurodivergence.

Our STAART Student Ambassadors have gone on to achieve greatly in their working lives, as well as socially and academically. In 2019, six of

our STAART ambassadors graduated. Between them, they achieved one 2:1 and five first Class degrees. This is in part due to the amazing support network provided through STAART.

If you are interested in becoming a Student Ambassador and developing a specialism so you can support the STAART Initiative, visit our website for further information at www.gre.ac.uk/studentambassadors or email our team at ambassadors@gre.ac.uk. The first step to becoming a member of the team is to attend an introductory workshop, we hope to run the next sessions in Welcome Week in September 2020. We look forward to meeting you then!

Teddy Student Ambassador Manager



Wait.

Don't trust the overthinker

Especially if that overthinker is you.

No one is just one thing;

Good, Bad

Happy, Sad

A Spirit whose heartbeat

Is composed of soul

What can stop the determined heart?

Residing in mind, in thoughts.

Join me intermittently

For constant becomes Matrix like

Like Wonderland....

The mind is fully capable of tricks...

Wait.

Don't trust the overthinker

Especially if that overthinker is you.

No one is just one

Present. Gone. Breathe. Peace.

Peace need not be extrinsic.

Congruence. Authenticity. Spirit.

Begin at the deep

End.

I am.

I can.

I am because you are

If my money is where my mouth is

I confess, my money is on you

Even if out only comes

By going through



Wait.

Don't trust the over thinker.

Wait.

Don't press play.

Wait.

Until there is no concern

No anxious drive to listen to voices....

And voice notes....

And voicemails....

Must read texts, sm, and emails....

Wait.

May they get so old that they no longer matter

May self-healing, self-care

Not be synonymised with selfishness

And may kindness not be an exclusively selfless concept

Reserved for everyone else

Wait.

Renew your strength

Wait.

Present.

Wait.

Breathe.

Stillness.

Peace.

Wait.

And don't entirely trust the over thinker,

Especially if that over thinker is you.

Chen

MSc Psychology



Not sure whether to do a placement year?

At the start of my course I never considered going on a placement year, I just wanted to complete my academic studies and move onto full time work afterwards.

However, after listening to peers and professionals in their respective fields, I began to realise that a placement year would provide the essential experience needed to slowly transition into full-time work. Having never worked 9-5, five days a week, I wasn't aware of how intense and draining it can be; but from my experience, I have found that being a placement student offers you the flexibility to work in a professional industry while learning and adjusting at your own pace.

While in this role I have had access to multiple sources of support, including academic tutors, mentors, line management and forums with other students in your position. I have been encouraged to make mistakes and learn from them, also to get involved in new opportunities that I can put on my CV.

This position has offered me the opportunity to shadow in departments outside of my working team, and I have been included in projects that might usually be limited to senior employees. Additionally, it has been relevant to my academic studies through learning the specific ways a company will implement theories into their working practices. This knowledge will assist when writing the dissertation in my final year, as I can understand the relevance of why we study such topics and their importance in everyday working life.

Something I wanted to improve on personally was my communication skills, specifically, being able to put across my thoughts and ideas clearly and straight to the point. I have had practice in doing this through answering and making calls; when face-to-face contact isn't possible, it is essential to speak professionally and comprehensively. Furthermore, sitting in meetings has helped me to be patient and to explain things from the beginning; this is crucial as some colleagues may not be familiar with certain abbreviations or details. When it comes to management styles and getting employees to complete accurate work, it is essential to have strong communication. I am pleased with the progress I have made and believe this placement year has greatly contributed to improving my



confidence in being able to communicate with colleagues. The process of applying for placements was lengthy; frequent rejection was demotivating, and I regularly didn't feel good enough. Through talking to peers and friends from other universities, I realised I wasn't the only one feeling this way, undergraduate and graduate jobs are limited and extremely popular. Every student is in the same position, and after multiple interviews/assessment centres I have started to understand that securing a job is based more on who is best suited to the role rather than performing well in an interview. Therefore, although preparing and seeking employability advice is important, you should just be yourself and enjoy the opportunity. A strong piece of advice I was given is to apply for jobs even if you aren't keen on being offered the position. The benefit of this would be to gain interview experience, in order to feel more confident and natural when applying for jobs you are interested in.

I am pleased with the progress I have made while on my placement year and do not think I would have had the same opportunities in another organisation. I have seen a growth in my confidence and have identified new possible career paths that I would not have previously considered. Furthermore, doing a placement has contributed to understanding my personal abilities, including how I react in certain situations and what I can do to improve on this. Another benefit is the new outlook I have for my 'weird' characteristics, Melanie has supported me and helped me to explain why I might think or act in certain ways. Upon realising these things, I am now better equipped to tackle life both personally and in the working environment. In reflection, although a placement year has been great for me, it isn't for everyone; there are lots of factors to consider such as, your personal goals, the course you study and any potential career paths. However, my advice to you is not to rule it out just because you don't want to drag out your studies for another year. In the grand scheme of things, sacrificing one year of hard work could benefit your whole future.

Caitlin

BA Human Resources and STAART Ambassador



STAART Art competition

A number of the active STAART ambassadors devised an art competition to provide us with a good distraction during these unprecedented events. The competition was to draw a dinosaur following the tutorial by 'Art for Kids Hub' which provides a slow, step by step tutorial using shapes to make it easy and accessible for all. Everyone made their dinosaurs their own, making them into different characters and personalities. We had some really unique names/ breeds such as 'Lavendosauras', 'Pottersauras', 'Mrs Beysauras Carter' and my favourite 'STAARTausauras'. We were able to offer a £20 Amazon voucher for the first prize winner and a £10 amazon voucher for the two runners up.

We have had a large range of ages enter the competition. The youngest submission was Emily and she is 3 And the oldest submission was 53 from Melanie. It is brilliant to see that such a range of ages took part in this competition.

We determined the original short list by counting how many reactions there was to people's dinosaur posts on Facebook. The top 10 were then put to the shortlist. Melanie made a survey so that people could vote on their favourite three from the shortlist. The competition winners were Emily Fisher (30), Miley (10) and the runner up is Alexandria (26). Well done you three, they are brilliant drawings.



Interestingly, the survey to determine the final 3 winners showed us that this competition has reached 11 different countries: Germany, Turkey, The United States, Italy, Netherlands, Hong Kong SAR China, Estonia, Finland, Canada and India. This is incredible how far this competition has reached and not only has this meant that we have been able to provide a well needed distraction in these current circumstances, but also means that we are able to spread the STAART message far and wide.

Lastly, a final congratulation to the joint winners Emily Fisher (30) and Milly (10) and the runner up Alexandria (26). And well done for everyone who submitted work they all look brilliant and everyone should be very proud of their work.

It is fair to say this competition has been a big success, hopefully, we will be able to run another competition in the near future.

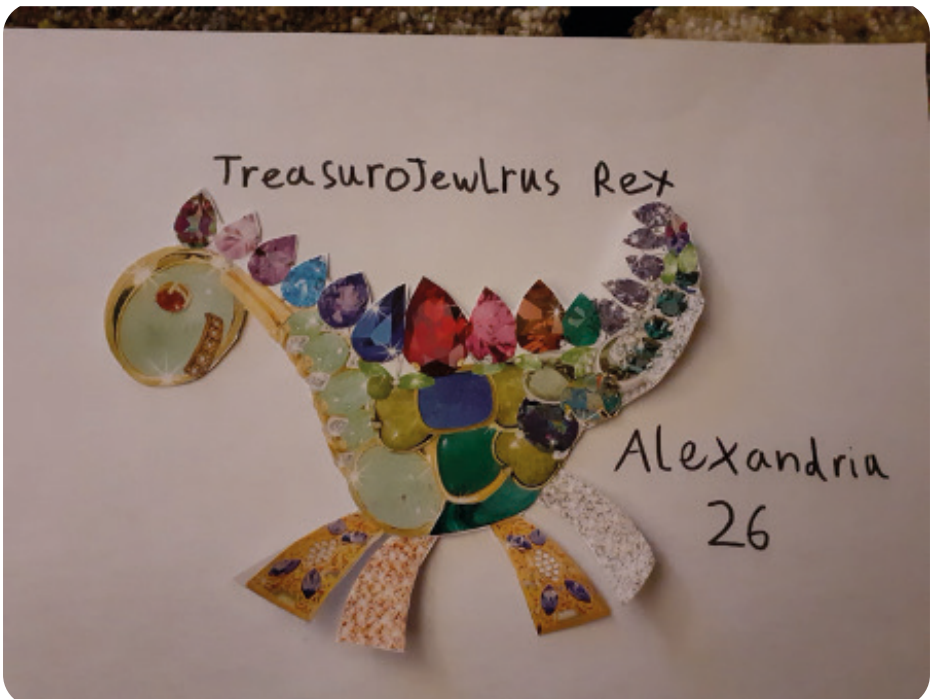
I hope everyone is staying well in these unprecedented events

Holly STAART Ambassador
LLB Law



Treasurojewlrus

I entered the STAART Art competition to get involved with something fun to take my mind of the stress and anxiety of quarantine. It was such a wonderful thing to be able to do, something creative and enjoyable. I was able to channel my energy into something positive and I'm really looking forward to taking part in any future competitions.



Alexandria (26), Runner-up STAART Art competition



Pottersaurus

I chose to make a Pottersaurus as everybody knows who Harry Potter is so my dinosaur would be well known. I would like to enter more competitions because I liked doing the dinosaur one.

To keep busy, I have tried to complete some stuff that I would not be able to do when I'm at school. I have been riding my bike more often, going on the trampoline learning tricks , arts and crafts like Easter packages for my family and cooking tasty snacks!

I would like to enter more competitions because I liked doing the dinosaur one.

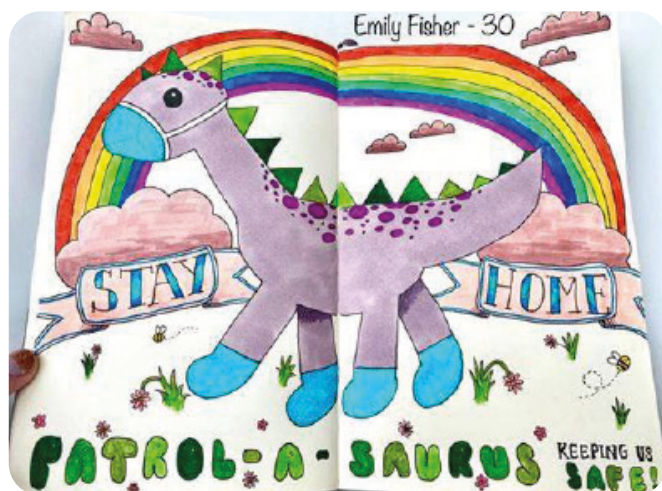


Miley (10) Joint first prize in the STAART Art competition

Patrol-a-saurus

I am so pleased to have won this first art competition hosted by STAART. Honestly, I entered simply to have an excuse to draw something fun and different, I had no expectations for winning and so it has been a lovely surprise amidst this difficult time. Coming up with a concept allowed me to create a whole narrative for my Dino, and with the COVID-19 pandemic, I wanted my Dino to continue spreading awareness on the importance of following government and WHO advice to stay home. As an English Literature student, I always have plenty to read so apart from art I've been reading and writing a lot of poetry as well as starting on my reading list for next year. I also have exams starting next week so I've been revising for those too - art being my relaxation between revision sessions. I suffer badly from depression and PTSD so it's always important for me to have some form of mindfulness and distraction from the more stressful situations in my life, this competition was perfectly timed for me to join in! I will be buying stationery with my prize money. I look forward to participating again if another competition comes along, it has been a lot of fun. Thank you.

Emily (30)
Joint first prize
STAART Art
competition



Lavendosaurus

Hello everybody. My name is Marina, and I am a graphic designer from Romania. I saw the invite to take part in the first ever STAART ART competition via the disability-research Jiscmail and was intrigued. I always liked to draw since I was little. I even drew on walls until my mother had to repaint the entire apartment. So each excuse to draw is welcome. It is the first time I have drawn a dinosaur so it was very interesting to think about a concept. I also love flowers and plants. I know it may sound strange but for me they are full of life energy and being among them is especially calming for me, so combining a dinosaur with lavender flowers was the next step. Taking into account that lavender has calming properties, I thought a Lavendosaurus would be fun to paint as a gentle giant. I finished university with a Public Relations degree. One of my teachers specialized in Imagology (image study) so since I like painting and drawing I thought the next step was a PhD in Imagology. I ended up with a PhD in Military Sciences (DScMil) as the abbreviations go. Then I made a 180 back to art.

I now work as a PR assistant for a company which is happy for me to work from home.

On another note, since I entered the contest I kept thinking about a colouring book especially for stress reducing during this time. It can be also published online in order for people to download and colour the drawings and patterns as they want. I do not always do only line art. I start with a sketch, but I do not stop there. A colouring book made by people for people in these times. Please email Melanie or follow my thread on the Facebook group. I am really glad I found STAART and cannot wait for the next STAART ART competition!

Dr. Marina (Imagology) and
STAART Ally



Where are they now?

Hi everyone, my name is Amy and I am a Graduate Ambassador having achieved my BEng Hons and MSc at the Medway Campus. I was also one of the Greenwich Portraits 2017. Having Athetoid Cerebral Palsy meant disclosing my disability was important in order for me to get the right support throughout my studies as I have involuntarily movements, difficulty with fine motor skills and my speech can be difficult to understand. Considering this, I needed support in lectures writing notes and a scribe in exams which was provided through the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). I also received funding for a computer so I could do my own assignments/projects (may have taken longer than it did other students, but I did them) and books. I had a volunteer to assist me with personal needs as I choose to live in halls, and they supported me in lectures too. I managed to achieve a 2.1 BEng Hons, took me a while to believe it.

Medway campus was fairly new when I started, so I was one of the first physically disabled students there. I can't thank the staff, students enough for all they did to make it possible for me to study for my degrees, access the campus buildings and enjoying student life. I was given a swipe card to allow me access into the buildings through the middle doors as the front entrance to buildings are not wheelchair accessible. Any lectures/tutorials/labs in rooms I couldn't get to were rearranged and changed so I could. For my MSc I had a fab scribe - Melanie who was employed by the university, who supported me in lectures. I also wanted to see if I could be more independent while living in halls, so I had a care agency to help with personal care for a number of hours a week, and of course great friends I had made. I achieved a 2.1/merit.

I was also one of the first three *AccessAbility (now STAART) in 2007 which was very enjoyable and good



experience. I had the opportunity to talk at a national conference in London for the National Association of Disability Practitioners (NADP – the professional body for disability staff in FE and HE), providing one-to-one mentoring and providing maths tuition to GCSE students. I took a year out from studying although I remained staying in halls. I did some database work for the tutors in Engineering, applied for a number of jobs, explored the option of a PhD – came up with ideas for a research. I also planned a month's trip to Canada - I flew alone and met some awesome people who showed me a great time. After the trip I graduated with my MSc and a month later I then took on the challenge of a MPhil researching how students with Cerebral Palsy interacted with a computer. Looking into speech recognition, headmice and word prediction. Unfortunately, having worked on it for a number of years, with the support of tutors and 2 different scribes, I couldn't continue to achieve a PhD, but other opportunities were opened up to me. I was able to continue supporting students instead at UTC, train as an Exam invigilator, continue assisting with interviews on the Speech and Language Therapy course on the Medway Campus, and of course remain involved in STAART!

Amy STAART
Ambassador
BEng, MSc and MPhil
Computer engineering



Brad - This is what I am destined for

Bradley Cory had planned to become a pilot, but a stroke at the age of 16 led to a different path for the gutsy biologist.

After spending so much time with medical staff in hospitals, Bradley spent a gap year working on a stroke ward, giving back to the NHS and the people that had helped him.

It was this experience that prompted the idea of studying a biology degree, given the wide range of careers available to graduates.

"I chose the University of Greenwich to study biology because it was close to where I lived and to family," he says. "It is also an amazing university doing great things."

Bradley experiences dyslexia and has reduced mobility after his stroke, so he needed a university with a strong support system. The University of Greenwich provides this through its STAART initiative. This scheme supports disabled students and those with specific learning difficulties and long-term physical and mental health conditions.

Students who are referred to STAART also have the option to make an Inclusion Plan with the Student Wellbeing team.

The adjustments for these students might include extra time for exams, additional assistance in the laboratory (such as a scribe), or adapted learning materials - which is especially important for scientific degrees.

"I can't talk more highly of STAART," says Bradley. "STAART is one of the main reasons I came to the university, and one of the biggest driving factors that kept me going."

In keeping with his dedication to give back to those who supported him, Bradley continues to work as a STAART Ambassador. Dr Melanie Thorley, who leads the STAART initiative and has worked with Bradley for the past three years, describes him as 'outstanding'.

"He is an inspiration to everyone," she says. "It's not just that he can overcome challenges, but he wants to support others



embarking on the same transformative journey as his own." After graduating with First-Class Honours, Bradley is now pursuing a PhD in biology. From a series of early knockbacks, the university experience has managed to convert his doubts into effortless confidence.

"If you'd told me eight years ago that I would be graduating with a First-Class Degree with Honours in Biology, I would have not believed you," he says.

"For once, this was a chapter of my life that I was turning for myself. And I was not scared - I knew what was ahead of me." Head of Biology, Dr Abigail Rickard, describes Bradley as a 'model student'.

"I'm personally very proud of his determination towards fulfilling his career ambitions," she says.

Bradley is now researching the biology behind wound healing in the specialist biology labs at Medway Campus. He aims to become the first STAART member to graduate with a doctorate. "I believe in my future. I believe in my ability," he says. "In light of everything, physically and mental-health wise, this is what I'm destined for. Greenwich and STAART believe in me, and now I have to push the boundaries by myself."

Kate
Recruitment
and Marketing
Manager
Faculty of
Engineering
and Science,
University of
Greenwich



Bradley Cory with Dr Melanie Thorley



£1.00 Microwave dinners

As most of us are students, we mostly have a limited income. We have sourced three recipes which cost less than £1.00 per serving.

Meal One: creamy chicken pasta

Meal Two: Hoisin, spinach and egg noodles.

Meal Three: mixed vegetable and almond biryani.

https://www.bbc.co.uk/food/collections/1_dinners

Melanie

STAART Lead

Sociology and education graduate



Calendar

May

6-12 – Deaf awareness week

13-19 – Mental Health awareness week

June

17-23 – Learning disability week

20 – Nystagmus awareness day

July

14 – Disability awareness day

24 – Samaritans awareness day

August

-

Source: <https://businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/mediacentre/disability-awareness-days/> (accessed: 27 August 2019)

Editors: Anne Blombach, Melanie Thorley

STAART - Support through *AccessAbility retention and transition

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