

STAART Newsletter

15 January 2020



UNIVERSITY *of*
GREENWICH

Contents

How it all STAARTed	3-4
6 ways of wellbeing - Cheryl	5
STAART Whatsapp group - Shona	6
My experience of term 1 - Holly	7
Disability Rights UK -Rabia	8
Celebrating Toni Morrison - Chen	9
STAART winter dinner - Tyra	10
General Practice Ambassadorship - Vanessa	11
My placement year advice - Tope	12
Neurodivergence Checklist - Kallan	13
Autism Awareness Month - Abi	14-15
Are you getting Vitamin D? - Zoe	16
Life after Graduation - Brad	17
Exam day breakfasts - Melanie	18
Calendar	19

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

The STAART WhatsApp group continues to thrive and is one of the main sources of support for STAARTERS across all courses and campuses. Being new to STAART myself, it has been great to join such a supportive group and it's always positive to see the group expanding. In the past few months we have organised and shared photos of our meet ups and STAART events; given each other advice on all kinds of things from coursework, revision and personal issues; and shared achievements and news. The group is also an

amazing way to make new friends, but whether we have met in person or not we are always there to offer support and no one ever has to feel alone.

The WhatsApp group is always alive with messages even over the festive season when we all wished each other a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. We're looking forward to welcoming new members to our group and can't wait to meet you all soon! Shona Human Nutrition, BSc Hons

The current members and their 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			



My experience of term 1 at university

Throughout my life I have baffled a variety of people; nurses, doctors, teachers, family members etc. I am proud to say that despite all the odds I am here at university and doing well. I finished last term on a high 2:1 and I'm so proud of myself. For years I was told I would never be well enough for university and would never be able to live independently. But with an amazing supportive network of people around me of family members, my partner, friends and of course the STAART community I am here and thriving. So far this term I have struggled with a number of battles, including fainting and waking up 3 hours later, having my purse stolen 3 times, lecturers not understanding my health conditions, attempting to manage my health conditions completely independently, living independently and home sickness. Learning to live independently with complicated - health was always going to be difficult but it still hit me with a shock. But as always adaptations can be put into place. Such as a flat mate comes to do my shopping with me and I now have a watch that alerts family members if I fall unconscious.

I have also been learning to say no. So many opportunities arise at university and I found myself doing different barrister events three or four times a week, with volunteering, lectures, seminars, babysitting and work also. I have now learnt to limit my week and prioritise my health to make sure that I am well enough for university.

Despite my difficulties this has been my favourite three months of my life. I have loved proving everyone wrong and showing them that I can do it. I truly believe that I wouldn't be here without the STAART community: the kindness, support and friendship is amazing. Meeting so many people at different workshops and events that are going through similar situations has given me the confidence to carry on. Thank you all so much. Wish you the best going into next term.



Holly
Law



Disability Rights UK

Disability Rights UK is a nationwide charity that provides a range of information and resources for disabled people and people with physical and mental health conditions.

Student helpline

Our advisors can advise and support disabled people and people with health conditions who are studying or wish to study at any level on full-time or part-time education or training courses if the course is in England and they are over 16.

Tel: 0330 995 0414

Opening hours: 11am-1pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Calls are free from a landline but mobile providers may make a charge.

email: students@disabilityrightsuk.org

Education Factsheets and Guides

We have a range of factsheets and guides on education related issues that offer support and information including on funding and adjustments.

<https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/how-we-can-help/benefits-information/factsheets/education-factsheets>

Into Higher Education Guide
<https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/sites/default/files/pdf/IntoHE2019.pdf>

Work related Factsheets

We have a range of factsheets on work related issues and benefits.

<https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/how-we-can-help/benefits-information/factsheets/work->

[related-factsheets](#)

Access to Work

Access to Work is a government scheme aimed at supporting disabled people and people with health conditions to take up or remain in work. It can provide personalised support such as a support worker, communication support at an interview, specialist equipment or help towards the additional costs of taxi fares if you cannot use public transport to get to work.

<https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

<https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/access-work>

The Right to Participate

An animated introduction to the Equality Act, videos of campaigns, information, resources and template complaint letters to protect disabled people from discrimination in everyday situations including education, work and when they are out and about.

<http://righttoparticipate.org/>

Upcoming DR UK Event:

Into Apprenticeships and Training: Why Employing Disabled Young People Will Benefit Employers

<https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/2019/december/apprenticeships-and-training-why-employing-disabled-young-people-will-benefit>

Rabia

Disability and Skills manager
Disability Rights UK



Celebrating Toni Morrison

In October 2019 I was invited to attend an event celebrating the life of Toni Morrison. I was asked to share some thoughts on what her work meant to me before sharing a poem. I took the plunge because I had not written for some time and had felt, what can only be described as a creative death. I was in a season of heightened anxiety and had started experiencing attacks a couple times a week; they were exhausting and debilitating and whilst I may not be over it all, writing despite having dyslexia, has allowed me to reclaim a part of myself.

The following is what I shared at the event:

Ms. Toni Morrison's work was to me, an authentic, organic extension of her person. The values she exemplified were authenticity, service and presence.

Authenticity – She seemed a calm being, yet her work had the propensity at times to be violent reminding me of water (e' no get enemy). These composites were reconciled and coexistent. Ms Toni termed herself, not as an author, but as a reader and a writer. She was unapologetic in her work and that authenticity, regardless of those who thought her perspective, in the context of the civil rights movement 'too black'.

Lesson: There are those who will seek to invalidate who you are, where you are but if we fail at authenticity, we may rob the world of a perspective that may just change it for the better.

Service – We may think it a safe presumption that Ms Toni's most important work were her novels.

However, she started as a lecturer, then an editor fostering generations of black writers and empowering voices of icons such as Angela Davis, Mohammed Ali, Gayl Jones and Huey Newton. Before the internet she took strides in making African literature known and accessible to the diaspora. Ms Toni's service has shown and encouraged us to tell our own stories in a way that is unapologetic and unconcerned with the extrinsic gaze.

Lesson: Not being at the forefront is not the same as being unimportant. Service does not equate you to a servant. Keep your integrity and take ownership of your life.

Presence – Ms Toni was who she was and where she was, fully. She occupied her space and was present. No matter what she worked on, Ms Morrison filled her given space. I recall an interview where she spoke about the circumstances surrounding her first book 'The Bluest Eye'. She explained that she was newly divorced, had just moved house, had two small children and was miserable. She said she wrote the novel because it was what she wanted to read. The way she spoke of her career, the highs and lows, she never sounded as one wanting to escape but rather one who honoured the twists and turns by occupying them fully and going through each stage.

Lesson: You are where you are and if you become so anxious to skip that stages of life you find yourself present in, you may forfeit the lessons and skill development they have to offer.

Chen
MSc Psychology



STAART Winter Dinner

Myself and Vanessa arranged a lovely STAART winter get together on the 14th December. A group of us went for a three course winter party meal. As we are students, we were amazed to find a three course Christmas meal for less than £17.00 each. It was a great chance to get together, catch up and check in before the busy time of year caught up with us all. We decided on terming this event 'the winter get together' to be inclusive of those who may not celebrate Christmas (mostly Melanie). I also bought everyone a little well-being gift, The Little Book of Calm. It's a great little tool to carry around with you to find a quick way of bringing yourself back to the ground in moments that it may seem impossible. Everyone was surprised and delighted by their gift. All but one of us went dancing afterwards which we thought was a great ideal until we realised we had all had a big dinner. As in the words of Audrey Hepburn, even the words impossible spell I'm possible.

Tyra
Child Nursing



General Practice Ambassadorship

This semester has been a whirlwind for me due to the uptake of my General Practice Nursing Student Nurse Network (GPNSNN) ambassador role. As a nation, Britons have longer life expectancies due to the advancements in healthcare technology, practice and medications. However, this comes with the price of living with more complex conditions which, if managed appropriately, can be monitored in the community alleviating the pressures of the acute hospital setting. The GPNSNN, a national regional network, is commissioned by NHS England and our aim is to promote the general practice field, routes into the field and career opportunities available; this includes a target of delivering a presentation to 20 universities and doubling our social media followers by the end of March 2020.

Following one of our regular video calls, 6 ambassadors, including me, were designated to collate information to compile a generic PowerPoint presentation. The last 3 weeks of my summer break, I networked with Clinical Commissioning Groups for south east London via email, some communications resulted in meeting in person to gather information. The support from the nursing teams was very insightful and hearing the experiences of practice nurses not only gave me encouragement but ignited my enthusiasm and passion for the cause further. One of the meetings closed with a potential

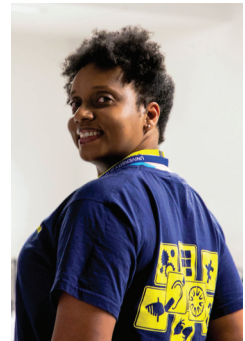
invitation for the Lewisham CCG Annual General Meeting Christmas Event and for me to share my experience as a GPNSNN ambassador. I took this as a sweeping statement and thought it would be forgotten about.

On the contrary: I received an email inviting me to the said event having 3 days to reply. So, the big decision was on the table for me...was I going to miss this opportunity, no way!!

November arrived and the Acting GPN Associate Lead sent me some guided questions which I would be answering at the event as part of a Q & A session. The night of the event all dressed in evening attire I had to scrape my car, unknown to me were the colder temperatures as I had been indoors all day. Not a good look, but my outfit remained intact.

When the speaker on stage scheduled just before me was presenting in true style, I got sweaty palms and discretely wiped my hands with a spare table napkin. The moment came, the audience were engaged, eyes fixated on me, a few smiles and laughs (they understood my humour) and it was all over with an unexpected huge round of applause. Public speaking ticked off my checklist, what's next? Watch this space!

Vanessa
Adult Nursing
BSc



My placement year advice

I thought it would be helpful to share some advice on things that I learned on my placement year as an Advertising and Marketing graduate - to students who have a placement year lined up or are considering doing one. I can't recommend it enough. My placement year was such a good way for me to gain insight into the industry I wanted to go into and learn so much at such an early stage in my career.

1. Ask yourself what skills do you want to learn?

Whilst I was able to learn a lot on my placement, there are so many skills that would be helpful for Advertising and Marketing students to know before they graduate, such as SEO (Search Engine Optimisation). Therefore, before my placement, I wish I did a bit of research around the skills that are useful to know within the industry and pick one or two skills that I wanted to learn and discuss with my HR manager.

2. Get used to social media.

In this digital age, there are an endless amount of companies that use social media to communicate with their consumers or advertise their message. That's why my second piece of advice would be to get social media accounts and get used to using them. However, I do recognise that some people decide to stay away from social media for a number of reasons. So, I recommend that if people wanted to get social media they use it for professional use rather than personal use.

3. Learn

On the topic of learning, it's important to learn whilst you are on your placement, as much as you are there to help the company you are there to learn and enhance your career development. Therefore, make sure you take advantage of all the training opportunities that are available to you and don't be afraid to ask questions. It will not only benefit you but show your employees that you are being proactive and you really care about your future career.

4. Socialise

Now, this was quite difficult for me at first as socialisation doesn't come to me easily. But once I pushed myself outside my comfort zone, I realised how important it is to socialise and how fun it can be to get know your colleagues. Even though it's scary, I would definitely encourage you to socialise and don't be afraid to say no sometimes as it's not every after-work event that you have to go to.

5.Document

Now my last piece of advice would be to make sure that you document your journey. This can be done by taking a bit of time out at the end of the day to write a shortlist of things that you did that day. Documenting your placement can be really useful when you need to update your CV and reflect on your experiences.

Tope
STAART Graduate – Advertising and
Marketing



Neurodivergence Checklist

At the start of this semester, Melanie and I agreed that I would sit a Neurodivergence Checklist. I had been considering taking the checklist for a few months but waited until I was more settled after a catalogue of difficulties. The checklist is not a diagnosis – more of an indicator.

After a short wait, I sat down for this checklist. At least a few of those reading this will have sat it, but for those unaware of what it is, It contains a set of “questions” relating to common signs or symptoms of five separate categories: Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia, ADHD, and Autistic Spectrum Disorder. It’s a short form “test” with the traditional “None, Sometimes, Often/Always” answer scheme (with green, amber and red being the colours for each of the choice respectively). The more red a category is, the more you tend towards it.

So, thirty minutes after beginning the checklist, after answering a series of statements, I had my results. Me being a Maths student pretty much guaranteed I wasn’t Dyscalculic, alongside my overall good language skills meaning I didn’t have Dyslexia. I showed more than enough red for Dyspraxia for it to be likely that I am Dyspraxic. The following page was quite a different story compared to the first. This page related to Autism and ADHD (which I’ve now learned is deeply linked with ASD). Of this page of 36 statements, 21 were red.

After sitting on this for a few weeks, I still am unsure on how I feel about this revelation. Getting 24 years in and finding out I show significant traits for Autism. The only part I do have some emotion about is one statement in particular that showed up as red. “Makes honest but inappropriate observations.” Both me and my partner have had a laugh about this as it is so appropriate.

Kallan
Mathematics



The evolution of Autism Awareness Month

As you may know by now, there are a lot of awareness days or months for specific disabilities, conditions and neurodivergencies. I personally think these days/months are extremely important, especially months focusing on history (such as UK Disability History Month in December). For lesser-known conditions, they provide vital exposure to fund potential scientific research into the condition. They open up the opportunity for people to do research and potentially bust some stereotypes of these conditions. However - there is one interesting evolution for an awareness month and that is the month of April - Autism Awareness Month. I will focus on this due to the fact I am autistic and have seen this positive evolution for the push to make it Autism Acceptance Month.

Autism Awareness Month started out to do exactly what it says on the tin - to increase awareness of autism, the traits of autism, and to normalise autistic people existing in your everyday life. For the most part, this has worked surprisingly well. You will be hard-pressed in the UK to meet someone who doesn't know what the word autism means now. However, although basic awareness has been raised for autistic people, the act of accepting autistic people is lagging far behind, which is why Autism Acceptance Month was developed by autistic people to ensure autistic people came first when it came to awareness and acceptance days, as in history, autistic people have been hindered by assumptions of neurotypical people - thinking we are not as capable as them (which is total garbage!) causing our voices to be drowned out by neurotypical parents and medical professionals, everyone deserves to get their voice heard but when it comes to days dedicated to a condition, I want those people who have that condition to be speaking up about what it's like for them.

The issue we are facing now is that although neurotypical folks don't really bat an eyelid at somebody saying they are autistic, the moment we have a visible autistic trait (such as stimming, fidgeting, having a meltdown, lack of eye contact) they become annoyed, disgusted perhaps even insult us, which is quite disheartening to see. Or when you try to act neurotypical which society forces you to do to be accepted amongst your peers, you



are applauded and celebrated - although it is society, not autistic folks, that have to accept that we shouldn't be acting to fit in, they should make society inclusive of us! It is a classic case of 'Seen but not heard', and pushing for acceptance in the autistic community is our way of trying to combat stereotypes, negativity and to increase our wellbeing and happiness, which goes hand in hand with the Affirmation Model which STAART adopts and advocates for. I am happy to say I have never had to mask or act neurotypical to my STAART friends because we are the ones more likely to be empathetic and accepting of anyone.

Increasing awareness is one thing - but when people get uncomfortable when we're being who we are, that then becomes a problem! I would very much enjoy getting the same opportunities as my neurotypical and non-disabled friends which is why a push for acceptance is needed, and it is good to see it happen in the autistic community! So, next time when you see an awareness month, ask yourself - what could I do to accept this condition? Sometimes it's just as simple as including neurodivergent friends in your plans, accommodating for their unique needs, or just being a good listener. Everyone is capable of accepting and I am glad to see it happen with the STAART community!

Abi

STAART Graduate – Environmental Science.



Are you getting enough Vitamin D?

Vitamins are essential molecules required by the body in small quantities (micronutrients) to enable metabolic processes. However, in large amounts they can cause toxicity which is why a daily limit was established.

Vitamin D is a fat-soluble vitamin, it's a pre-cursor of hormones and it maintains the function and structural integrity of muscles, teeth and bone by regulating Calcium levels.

Minimum recommended daily requirement: **10 ug (micrograms)**

Maximum daily intake without negative side effects: **100 ug (micrograms)**

Where can we get it from?

The sun - From April to September Vitamin D can be synthesised in the skin by absorbing UVB rays from the sun. 10 minutes of sunlight exposure between 1-2 pm, 3 times a week has been shown to provide a light skinned person with more than their recommended amount. However dark-skinned people can require up to 50x more sunlight exposure to absorb the same amount of vitamin D. Clothing, hats and

sunscreen with an SPF of 15 can also reduce absorption by 99%.

Oily fish such as sardines, mackerel and salmon. Farmed salmon contains 4.25 ug per 100 grams.

Meat - Beef mince contains 0.1ug in 170g, Beef rump steak contains 0.2ug in 160g, Lamb chop contains 0.4ug in 128g
Liver – there's 480 ug in 99g of beef, chicken and lamb.

Egg yolks - 1 large egg contains 0.16 ug.

Fortified foods - such as cereals and fat spreads. Kellogg's (and other manufacturers) cereals contain 50% of the daily recommendation for vitamin D.

Supplements – The health department recommends a supplement of 10 ug per day during the months from October to March due to the lack of daily sunlight. When choosing supplements vitamin D3 is the best type to take because it is the easiest form to absorb, this can be checked in the ingredients section. Supplements don't have to be expensive you can buy supermarket own brands that cost a few pounds.

Zoe
Human Nutrition



Life after graduation

As I mentioned last time graduating was the most amazing experience. It was the closing of a chapter in my life that I was finally ready for. I got a job working with people that have mental health difficulties which is really rewarding. I moved into an apartment with my partner, Becca, who is also a STAART ambassador and a student at Greenwich.

However, I wanted more for myself. I applied for a PhD position at the end of September but I did not get that one. I was disheartened but picked myself up and consequently I sought to do a Masters but was turned down as well until I met an amazing man again. I remembered him from exams that he invigilated at the university for me. I approached him and he sought to help me put my future plans into motion. Offering me a chance to design and apply for an Mphil instead of a taught Masters. I ended up interviewing in December and they offered me a Mphil/PhD.

I cannot begin to tell you how excited I am to start this new chapter of my life. How excited I am that I may be the first STAART member to graduate with a PhD at Greenwich. The only catch is that I'm currently self-funding it. I believe in my future. I believe in my ability and, in light of everything, physically and mental health wise, this is what I'm destined for.

Greenwich and STAART believed in me all those years ago and now I have to push the boundaries by myself. I've found supervisors that are right for me, and believe in me. This is vital for success and I hope that others will invest in me soon enough. Only time will tell, watch this space.

Brad
STAART Graduate -
Biology



Exam day breakfasts

As quite a few of you have exams in April and May, we thought this article would be timely. Studies have shown how important a good breakfast is for exams but you need to be careful to eat the right type of breakfast.

The two main things to remember is to eat high protein foods such as yogurt, milk and eggs and slow-release carbohydrates, such as whole grain bread or porridge. But avoid too much sugar and caffeine.

There are 12 recipes via the link – including vegetarian options. The recipes have been provided by a variety of chefs, including The Hairy Bikers and Brian Turner. All of the recipes list preparation time, cooking time and ingredients. Recipes include:

- Veggie breakfast fry up
- Boiled egg with rye bread soldiers
- Crunchy banana yoghurt
- Overnight oats and nuts
- Scrambled egg and smoked salmon on toast
- Blackberry and apple crumble smoothie
- Overnight oats with cinnamon apple and date butter
- Banana cocoa crunch overnight oats
- Smoked salmon omelette
- Easy omelette
- Toasted crumpets with berries, yoghurt and honey
- Eggs Benedict

https://www.bbc.co.uk/food/collections/breakfasts_for_exam_day

Melanie
STAART Lead
Sociology and Education graduate



Calendar

January

31 – Young Carers Awareness Day

February

4 – World Cancer Day

7 – Time to talk Day

18 – International Asperger's Awareness Day

March

1 – World Wheelchair Day & Employee Appreciation Day

3-9 – Hearing Awareness Week

3 – World Hearing Day

15 – World Consumer Rights Day

16 – Disabled Access Day

18-24 – Sign Language Week

21 – World Down Syndrome Day

April

Loss of Limb Awareness Month

1-7 – World Autism Awareness Week

2 – World Autism Awareness Day

7 – World Health Day

STAART - Support through *AccessAbility retention and transition

Contact us for more information



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