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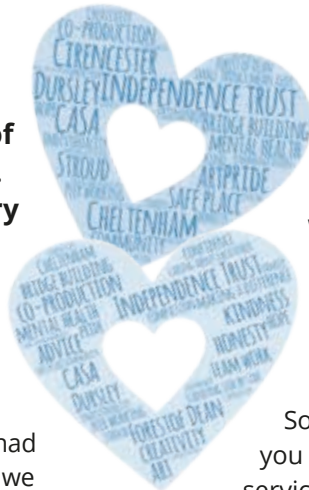
Newsletter from
Independence Trust
Mental Health &
Wellbeing Services

Issue 17

Welcome

This issue comes out at the end of what seems like a very long year. The times we are living in are very difficult, and I know they have had an impact on many of you. We still don't know what 2021 will bring, but we can hope that it will be a better year than 2020.

Users of the service and staff alike have had to face many challenges in terms of how we continue to deliver as comprehensive a service as we can. Obviously, we were restricted in what we could offer and had to stop groups and face to face meetings. What gave me hope was the way in which everyone embraced the new way of working. Staff had to adjust to working from the home environment and clients had to adjust to support by phone, email, text or video calling. It has now for many become the 'norm' and it has given me some insight about how we move forward into 2021 by taking some of the positive learning with us. I do hope that we can get back to face to face sessions and group



activities as soon as possible, as I know that many of you have missed this element of the service.

However, there have been online groups which many have engaged in, as well as Zoom coffee sessions that are a way of keeping in contact as well as having something social to look forward to.

It is fantastic how clients and staff have come together to co-produce projects during lockdown and also to keep the service functioning. I thank each and every one of you for that.

So, as we move toward 2021, I just want to remind you that we are here and will continue to deliver services as best as we can. We will continue to follow guidelines but hopefully we will see these relaxed more next year. We will be open during Christmas and New Year, so if you need to chat feel free to ring one of the offices as there will be skeleton staff in to cover. We will only be closed for the bank holidays.

I hope you are able to meet with your bubbles, family and friends over Christmas. May I wish you all as good a Christmas as possible. Please stay safe and follow the guidelines.

Cynthia Kerr, Senior Operations Manager

I'm Claire Redwood from Gloucestershire

Independence Trust have helped me recover mentally after I became unwell. They have also been supporting me in displaying my artwork over the last few years, and now I feel well enough to begin working, they're supporting me in getting my art business set up. I've always had good creative skills but it was only a few years ago that anyone told me about my potential and encouraged me to put it to good use! I'm developing my painting, mainly using acrylics.

I really enjoy walking and working in the countryside and appreciate the outdoors which provides me with inspiration for my paintings, and my abstract mind and sense of humour gives my paintings quirkiness and uniqueness.



© Claire Redwood 2020. Robins around snow with holly leaves and berries: Acrylic

I really want to make a positive difference to you and others with my artwork and welcome your commissions. However, because I have been out of work so far, I sometimes find it difficult to manage deadlines, so all I ask is for you to be patient. Good things come to those who wait! Hope you enjoy my work. I look forward to creating something special and unique for you.

Lived experience



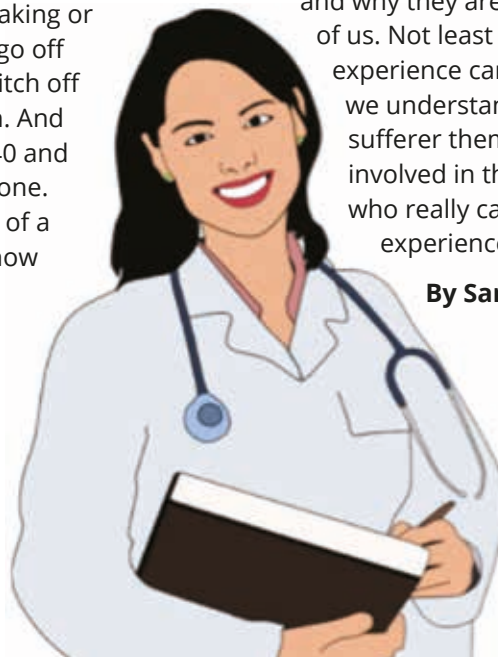
As a 42-year-old, diagnosed with autism at 38, I have had a lot of catching up to do over the past few years. I've realised this is why I have always felt chronically unsafe, always tense and needing to take control in every situation. I can't read people's facial expressions so I always think they are annoyed or bored with me, unless they are actively grinning. And how many of us grin all the time?!

I have realised the things that make my heart sing make me isolated, instead of giving me things in common with others, that we bond over. My relationships have often been superficial because my interests are 'niche'. I remember saying to friends in the past, just come to me with your problems, I'm good at that. Don't expect me to be the go-to have a laugh person because I don't know what I'm doing, (although, I laugh all the time but I'm not good at fun for fun's sake unless I'm around someone I feel super comfortable with). So, I appear intense or aggressive when I'm enthusiastic and happy. Great.

I always enjoyed working to the point of not rating leisure time, but put bosses on edge as I emailed around the clock, not wanting to intrude on their private time or say "look at me working overtime", but just bubbling over with a love for the job, regardless of what the clock said.

Apparently only 3% of diagnosed autistic people live in couples. Well I can see why. An ex-partner once said, I sleep through them. Or if I didn't sleep I wanted an extra glass of wine that bit too early in the day, or to watch a film together (no speaking or social interpreting required), or to go off on my own for hours to try and switch off from being around another person. And then there were smear tests. I hit 40 and thought, this is why I've never had one. I realise they are not anyone's idea of a good time, but couldn't articulate how they made me feel over and above general discomfort.

I have bitten and kicked doctors before and being examined makes me feel nauseous, like someone is poking their fingers down my throat. I disassociate. I freak out. This isn't normal anxiety or discomfort. It's disproportionate. I asked Independence Trust to



accompany me so I could tick this off and I was so glad to get it done. Having someone there who could advocate for me, meant I stayed grounded and had a mouthpiece if I became non-verbal. It was like having someone keep you conscious when you are blacking out. I have no reason for any trauma 'down there'. I am fortunate in that respect, and yet I still feel traumatised in matters to do with being checked.

So, I was delighted to have the chance to sign up with Independence Trust as a volunteer this year in order to lead on an Accessible Smear Test project. We are working together to feed back the views and ideas of service users to the local surgeries and we are creating a system where surgeries become 'autism' friendly. This will attract more women and mean the very low 15% of women on the spectrum can move upwards towards the 80% of women going in general.

We have found a great partner in a group of three local surgeries that were already asking themselves how to up their smear stat's. Going to speak to 25 doctors and nurses about why someone with a specific Learning Difficulty might need a phone call not a letter, a verbal reminder, to be given a double appointment, a chaperone trained in autism and spLD, to handle the medical items used, to be talked through the process and why they are having a smear, has benefitted all of us. Not least it's a great example of how lived experience can shed a light on a subject we all think we understand and how it can be cathartic for the sufferer themselves. I for one am very glad to be involved in this and working with great people who really care about improving the smear test experience for local women.

By Sara-Louise Ackrill

If you are an autistic female who would like further information on this project then please contact pippa.baker-walsh@independencetrust.co.uk

If you ever need a unicorn...

Local drama group, "The Randwick Revellers", were in desperate need of a life size Unicorn for the troupe's next Pantomime production of "The Snow Queen".

A life size unicorn is not something you come across on a daily basis, so the art groups stepped up to help, from hand painted silk tresses for the mane to the hand-crafted willow structure for the frame in which, when completed, two people would stand inside this majestic beast. The willow structure was engineered by the Men's Shed at Weavers Croft. Clients were thrilled to have a special invitation to see the production with some invited to take part in the audience participation bit. Great fun was had by all.



Hi Everyone

My name is Susan Spencer and I am living the best I can with M.E. & Anxiety / Depression.

After a long period of relapse, I found myself very isolated and my G.P. suggested I contact Independence Trust. After doing so, I found myself being allocated to a Bridge Builder - a wonderful lady who was there for me to air my problems and help any way she could.

She suggested a few activities she thought I may be interested in. Unfortunately, because of low energy, even on my good days, I had to decline, but I did take up one of her suggestions of counselling which helped me enormously. It gave me space for myself, to talk and think, and to work out how I could help myself in my daily management of my M.E., without being interrupted - all too easy in this busy world we live in.

The centre itself I found a very comforting place to be. There are many activities to join if you'd like to, without

any pressure, or you can just sit with others and just be. Of course, when the Pandemic hit all of that stopped, but my Bridge Builder and myself kept in weekly contact by phone.

After several months I found I no longer needed the support, but I wasn't left out on a limb as I now have a Peer Support Worker

who was once a person who came to Independence Trust with his own personal problems, but who now volunteers his time to talk to others, and make sure they are staying on top of any problems.



'Hope'

By Sally Hayward

Down this dark, dark tunnel and it seems to go on forever.

Never did I think I would end up in this state,

Of late everything has got on top of me, seeing things in a different light;
Nighttime seems to go on.

"Avon calling" - I can remember the lady calling around when I was small.
Recall my Mummy buying a deep pink lipstick and eye-shadow to match.

My first watch was from my Nanny Hayward.

Hard to move on out this dark, dark tunnel. Maybe one day I will.





Finding hope and positivity in the Coronavirus pandemic

I don't think I have ever felt as scared as I did when my world turned upside down when we were all told to shut ourselves away from others, from our everyday lives. I thought I'd buckle; I thought I would resort to hiding in my cupboard like I used to as a young child, but I was wrong. I quickly realised that there was no shortage of volunteers to help the shielded like me with whatever help that may be. At times it was tough with my autism. I struggled to communicate to numerous people over my food choices and I had to change delivery slots and orders continuously. With my Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID), things were really challenging, and I went through waves in my mental health. There was a point for about a month where I felt weighed down by doom and fear and could barely climb out of bed.

I decided after I'd processed the change which took me at least a couple of months to do (I have a processing delay) in spite of everything that was going on around me there were things I could control and I could do to help me feel safe. When I say help me feel safe, I'm talking about my sensory world which is as important to me as it is to you wearing a seatbelt as I have sensory integration disorder so, for example, a song may make me feel literally warm with its words and the silence can be the difference in determining if I can speak or not - sound can be painful. I set about creating my new world with nothing but my notebook and the eerie silence of lockdown to steer me into my planning. Along with ensuring I stuck to my routine as much as I could, I actively continued to try to keep in contact with my family especially by mail and phone and ordered plenty of marshmallows to cheer me up. I tried to listen to nature on my walks and allowed myself time to write and reflect on my feelings and continued to go out on my walks with a smile and I'd even sing convincing myself I was getting praise from every car that drove by in order to keep my self-esteem at least level.



I knew after a while I needed to go one step further as I found out how much I relished the challenges I was thrown every day. I started an Open University degree and eventually got my DSA assessment. I'm still waiting for support, but I accept this having had plenty of cases where I've waited for my needs to be met before. However, I don't think I would have made any such sensible decisions around my future if I had not had the support from the Independence Trust CASA Team to help me stay safe. It frightens me to think where I would have been had I not had those essential food supplies at the start of this pandemic when everyone went mad in the shops. It isn't just the delivery of food that I'm truly grateful for, but I believe I have overcome

adversity through this support. I have had visits to check on my mental health and I continue to be encouraged and motivated to do things which, with my autism, can be challenging anyway, but more so without guidance and support such as cooking sensibly and cleaning with the right substances.

My worker has helped me in so many ways and continues to do so which I am so grateful for. I feel understood, I feel confident and I know that he will never judge my attempts to try to manage and cope with the challenges I have outlined living alone. Probably the best thing so far has been the introduction of a blender I use daily now. My worker helped me to order a blender and showed me through video links how it operates. He also worked with me to try out different mixed vegetables so I could find ways to increase my nutrition and decrease my anxiety when it comes to seeing a variety of food, and enabling me to continue to eat with my sensory differences, limited availability of foods due to the Coronavirus outbreak and my teeth pain issues.

Psychologically I can see how much stronger I am now. When given the right support even a global pandemic will not stop an autistic person's determination to navigate their world. I just hope this shines a little ray of hope in the mists of darkness.

By Holly Wright

My name is Becky

My name is Becky and I'm going to tell you a bit about my story and how I found Independence Trust.

During the late part of 2019 going into 2020, I found myself in a vulnerable position. I had a relationship breakdown and started my life over again. I was self-medicating by way of binge drinking on top of my medication. It felt like there was no hope for me and that I'd let everyone down. I felt like my whole world was falling apart and there was nothing that could stop it. After speaking with my doctor and telling her my current situation I was referred to a Social Prescriber (something that I never knew existed before). I had always just kept my head above the water before, struggled through and had never even thought that there were people out there that could offer me support and kindness.

I met a Social Prescriber for an initial chat about my circumstances and she told me that I was doing all the right things and gave me a referral to Independence Trust. With no idea how long the waiting list was, I was surprised when I was told that there are other local charities that support people in similar situations and gave me all the details. My mindset at the time was 'surely I'm not worthy of other people's kindness - I have a job, I have shelter and food.' What I realise now is that I really had little emotional support. I didn't want to bother anyone and I didn't certainly didn't want to be a burden. In my mind, there were people in worse situations than me that were more entitled to help.

My referral came through and my assessment interview took place a few weeks before lockdown with a lovely lady. She told me she would be in contact. Fast forward a few weeks and bang COVID-19 arrived. I thought, 'great, nothing is going to happen now, finally get some support and now it's been whipped away due to a global pandemic (just my luck)'. How wrong was I? Every week without fail, my Keyworker has called me, listened to me, heard me cry, and eventually laugh. She has enabled me to change my mindset and find 'me' again. It's been a real gradual process, making sure I stay away from negative influences, good sleep hygiene, taking my medication. I have photos of 'before' and 'after' projects to remind me of my achievements in some of my most negative and dark times.

Luckily, I also have some amazing friends that noticed I'd come away from social media and also messaged me. When we were allowed to socially distance in my garden they came to visit for a cuppa and told me how amazing I am. I am in a much more positive frame of mind now and long may it continue! I have learned to notice my emotions, sit with them, buckle up for the

ride and know that eventually things will be okay. Our NHS is so overstretched for mental health services, although I have been fortunate enough to have been able to access help by way of therapy and through my mental health nurse. As soon as I have seemed well enough at the time of discharge, I then end up a few weeks later in the same position I started in.



This is where Independence Trust has really helped me, supported me, like a sort of during and aftercare package. So, to my Keyworker and all of the volunteers I would like to say a huge thank you for helping me and other people that are really struggling with their mental health now or in the past. If you are in a negative mindset, it is so difficult to see any positivity in anything, therapy included. Since the age of 18 I have had countless CBT appointments, talking therapy, you name it I've done it and most of it I came away thinking it was pointless due to my mindset at the time. I now take comfort in the fact that I am armed with a wealth of coping strategies and so glad that I kept trying. I've even volunteered to do a small amount of art with one of the peer groups! The only advice I would give to my past self is ... keep trying, there will eventually be positivity, however deep you have fallen into that dark place.

“Lights, Camera, Action”

We’re making a film...



Pre-pandemic, we ran a pilot project called the 3P’s. This is a weekly group session which runs for 6 weeks. It educates and/or re-educates the participants on the (basic) working of the brain - what happens during the feelings of fight, flight and freeze. It looks at learned patterns of behaviour, why we adopt these and how (if appropriate) we can change them for healthier habits via Positive Thoughts, Positive Actions and Positive Interactions. In learning these things, we learn that change is possible and that we have choices in life. This gives hope. Client feedback to this pilot project was outstanding.

As a result of the successful pilot, we had planned to run the 3P’s course in more of our Drop In Centres across the County. However, due to the current pandemic, we have had to re-think how to achieve this in order to reach as many people in need as is possible.

Our goal, therefore, is to have a film made of the 3P’s course, which we would then release on a weekly basis to those people who have expressed an interest in it. The intention would be for them to view it at the same time each week, and then we would host a zoom group/ phone meeting with those participants who choose to attend, together with the course facilitator and a member of Independence Trust staff to answer any questions that the participants may have, and also to ensure that they are all safe and well.

We also plan to run this course again in person when restrictions are lifted. We feel it important to be able to offer this option to those who may not be able to access the course via electronic means or who are experiencing extreme social isolation and would benefit from socially distanced interaction.

We know that the mental health and wellbeing of many has been severely and adversely affected during the

COVID 19 pandemic. We also know that the 3P’s course can have a beneficial and potentially long-term positive effect on the mental health and wellbeing of individuals. By offering the course via a variety of mediums, we would reach a much bigger audience, thus supporting and helping many more individuals within our County.



About the course

The 3P’s course is designed to offer anyone suffering from mental ill health the chance to improve their wellbeing by giving them the opportunity to:

- Learn the basics of how the brain works
- Understand why we may react in a certain way
- Consider alternative behavior
- Choose new ways to react and respond

The course is simple, repetitive, and supportive. Everyone attending is given the opportunity to ask questions and share suggestions within a completely safe and confidential space. This may be face to face, via the zoom group or telephone.

The course is designed to encourage all participants to build up their capacity to practice the 3P’s within their daily lives

- **Positive Thoughts**
- **Positive Actions**
- **Positive Interactions**

This film would not have been possible without the generous grant awarded by: “Thriving Communities Fund”, Gloucestershire County Council



We would like to thank Pin Point Media for their outstanding support and creativity in producing the film



The course will start in January. Please call for more information 0787 080 8629.

I have a diagnosis of chronic schizophrenia

Schizophrenia affects about one percent of the population. When my schizophrenia is active, I can experience delusions, hallucinations, trouble with thinking and concentration, along with a lack of motivation and paranoia.

When the Pandemic started it was like all my worst nightmares rolled into one. I suddenly found myself totally isolated. I live on my own and have my routines that I know keep me safe and well but the Pandemic totally threw me.

My parents live some distance away and I use public transport to visit them. The rules of wearing masks when using public transport were just too difficult for me to cope with. It gave me the sensation so suffocating it felt like I was being enveloped by a fog - it was a total nightmare. I withdrew to my flat and I felt I was becoming ill again. I really needed to see my Mum and Dad, but as I couldn't go on public transport because I could not wear a mask, I had to go by taxi which cost me a considerable amount of money.

I joined the Stroud Independence Trust client Face



Book page. This was something I could do while being shut away at home and being part of something meant I wasn't totally on my own. As lockdown started to ease, it meant we could organise a couple of us to meet up for a chat. This would have been the first time I had seen a friendly face in months. I was called by a member of the Inde team explaining there was an exemption card which they thought would be really useful to me. I have now visited friends as well as my family so this has opened my world. I also had been really worried about getting my hair cut as that also requires you to wear a mask. Luckily after talking through my anxieties, the team member presented me with my very own Perspex face mask. This was such a relief - I cannot thank them enough.

Our Golden Hive

We have been very fortunate to be able to monitor our hive throughout lockdown and as you can see the bees have been very productive sharing a small amount of their honey with us. The majority of the honey is kept for the bees own consumption enabling them to prosper and thrive in our very tranquil walled garden at Weavers Croft.

In the wild, bees would choose the warmth of a cavity in a tree as it has a good thickness of wood keeping the bees warm and able to maintain a constant temperature.

Most modern beekeepers use thin walled hives to house bees. This means the bees have to work extra hard to maintain a central temperature of about 36 degrees Centigrade. With temperatures fluctuating daily by as much as 10 degrees this can cause considerable stress that increases their susceptibility to



diseases and viruses.

The Golden Hive has insulated walls and a roof that is the equivalent to a thickness of 150mm (6") of wood. It is also designed to imitate how bees would naturally organise their nest.

In a fully occupied hive in the height of summer, there could be up to 70 000 bees, of which only 10% are drones (male bees), the rest are worker bees (female bees). There is only one queen, who in her prime can lay up to 2 000 eggs a day.

The life of a worker bee and drone in the summer is only 45 days. In the winter there are no drones, and worker bees can live for up to 4/5 months. The queen can live for up to 3/4 years.

Swarming is the process of the reproduction of the colony of bees that is a super-organism. It is when the queen flies out of the hive to establish a new nest, leaving behind a new queen to emerge, get mated and return to start laying eggs and build up a new colony.

“One in a Million”

We are so lucky to have such an eclectic group of volunteers - Independence Trust could not offer such a diverse service without them. Though we may be apart, we are still connecting.

A few words from Jim (volunteer):

“Before I came to the trust no one called me and I didn't have anyone to call either. I was totally on my own apart from my dad (he's 87), it was just me. Then I started with Independence Trust as a client and things started to get better. I know what it's like not to have a soul to talk to, so if I can help in any way I will. I have over 40 people on my list which I spread over the week. It's been really tough for people and when speaking to them they tell me how their mental health is really suffering because of the limitations imposed. So many live on their own and isolation can be overwhelming, so I am there to offer a chat. It's a chance for people to let me know how they are and if they need anything, only if they want to. So often people would say I was the only person they had spoken to all day... as they say it's good to talk.”

And some feedback from clients:

“So grateful for all your help, I really don't know what I would have done without you.”

“Jim is very kind and generous. He is a real sweetheart.”

“Jim is a very kind sincere Man. He goes out of his way to help people. It does not matter who you are, if you were in trouble he would help you.”

“Jim, always cheerful always looking out for others. I have severe visual impairment. Jim helps me with my garden and has fixed my mobility scooter. It's things like this that mean so much. I like to help Jim out too. When I make my famous spicy sausage casserole, I make a couple extra that keeps him off the ready meals. Jim - he's One in a Million.”



“I look forward to our little chats. It just breaks up my day and lifts me out of myself.”

“I lost my dogs and Jim helped me. Thanks to Jim - I don't know what I would have done without your help.”

“This has been an extremely difficult time for me. I feel totally alone. I have no family (it's like being in prison) but when Jim calls it really lightens my day. Sometimes he will call several times in a week just to check I am OK and we have a bit of a laugh. It is so easy talking to him. Thankyou Jim - you don't know how much your calls mean to me.”

Unzip the layers and step out of yourself.

Listening to the birds really relaxes me and keeps my mind off the negative.

Some might call it mindfulness; I call it “taking notice”.

Mike



Our addresses are below:

Gloucester	31 Worcester Street	(01452) 317460
Cheltenham	Gas Green Community Centre, 6 Baker Street	(01242) 512812
Forest of Dean	Colliers Court, Latimer Road, Cinderford	(01452) 317460
Cirencester	Ashcroft Rooms, 21 Ashcroft Road and The Bothy, Ashcroft Road	(01453) 767999
Dursley	Tyndale Centre	(01453) 767999
Moreton-in-Marsh	50 Jameson Court	(01242) 512812
Stroud	Parliament Street	(01453) 767999

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