New Name, Same Spirit

Twenty-seven years ago, James Ledward started this magazine and chose a name, GScene, which represented gay Brighton and the then focus of the community. Almost three decades later, after James and many other committed people like him built an accepting world out of a small gay village, we think it’s time to update ourselves a little and reflect the real diversity of our readership. Our city has become an LGBTQ+, trans, queer, non-binary haven. This magazine is our voice, campaigning, promoting and platforming our issues and views. Sharing our triumphs and marking our important moments. A small change can be transformative, so from January we’ll be known as Scene: where our stories are told, and our news is shared. Our Scene is your scene, whatever your scene is...

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The sexual health/HIV charity launches new trans and non-binary sexual health information to ensure needs are met in terms of navigating health sex, hormones and surgery, and HIV and STI prevention

New trans-specific sexual health information – led by trans, non-binary and gender diverse people – has been published by HIV and sexual health charity Terrence Higgins Trust (THT) after new data from more than 200 trans, non-binary and gender diverse people shows the sexual health needs of these groups are not currently being met.

The charity found that more than half (52%) of respondents said they didn’t feel fully in control of their sex life, with over 70% saying that feelings of negativity and low mood or depression were a factor in this. Forty-five per cent of respondents had never tested for HIV, while 25% hadn’t heard of PrEP despite almost half (46%) having reported condomless sex in the previous year. In terms of what should be done, 90% said there was a need for targeted sexual health info that includes navigating sex, consent and empowerment. Respondents also said that new webpages and printed leaflets should feature happy, empowered trans people – a departure from how this community is often represented.

Celebrating and reflecting the diversity within the trans community, the new health information features eight trans and non-binary people from different cultural backgrounds with different body types and identities. It provides up-to-date HIV, sexual health and contraception info and advice, including the impact of hormones and surgery, considerations when taking HIV prevention pill PrEP and how to navigate happy, healthy sex.

Feedback also showed that around one in five people from these communities feel uncomfortable attending sexual health clinics and prefer online information. A large number of respondents felt unrepresented.

The resource is peer reviewed by sexual health clinician Dr Kate Nambiar and Dr Michael Brady, medical director at THT.

Dr Kate Nambiar, sexual health and gender identity clinician, said: “I’m proud to be involved in such an important project to ensure the sexual health needs of trans and non-binary people are properly met. I have no doubt that what we’ve produced is so impactful because it’s based on the feedback of trans and non-binary people and our communities have been involved every step of the way.

“Good sexual health is vital for everyone but too often trans, non-binary and gender diverse people are left out of mainstream information relating to sexual health and feel uncomfortable accessing mainstream services. As trans people, we need to see ourselves in sexual health campaigns and know that the information is written with us in mind.

“As well as educating the community on sexual health, it’s important to celebrate and empower trans and non-binary people. I think we’ve achieved that aim and I’m excited for everyone to see the new webpages and leaflets.”

Rory Finn, Health Promotion Practitioner at THT in Brighton, who worked on the new resources, said: “As a trans man, I sometimes feel as if I fall between the gaps. I’ve had numerous interactions with health professionals who don’t understand my body.

“Whenever I’ve tried to look for sexual health information for myself, the resources I find online are never detailed enough and don’t include bodies like mine. I have often had to resort to reading women’s health articles online, just to get some sort of understanding of how my body works. But even then, there’s a lot of guess work. I do not have a female body anymore.

“I decided to be a part of this resource because I want trans people, however they identify, to know that they are worthy of having an enjoyable and healthy sex life. Our bodies deserve to be empowered and celebrated, just like everyone else.”

To see the new resources, visit: www.tht.org.uk/hiv-and-sexual-health/sexual-health/trans-people
OBITUARY: James (Jim) Brand
10/03/1950-14/11/2020

James (Jim) Brand passed away at home on November 14, 2020, following a brief spell in Royal Sussex County Hospital, aged 70.

James was born and brought up in the small town of Dufftown in the heart of Speyside in north east Scotland, famous for its single malt whisky. James was educated at Mortlach School and Keith Grammar School.

In 1972 he moved to London to work at Drummonds Bank in Whitehall, almost next door to Scotland Yard where, on March 9, 1973, an IRA bomb exploded while he was at work, blowing in the windows.

But James’s real interests lay in travel, so he joined Gulf Air as a flight attendant, flying mostly to the Middle East. In 1980 he moved to Brighton and, after a short spell at Dan Air, joined British Airways, where he worked on long haul flights for more than 28 years as a cabin steward and latterly a purser.

His love of travel started at an early age when, as a four-year-old, he got on a bus taking him to the railway station, from where he planned to travel to the seaside. His subsequent career took him all over the world, but his ‘go to’ places were always Sitges, Gran Canaria and Berlin, which he visited countless times. There he was able to relax and be himself after “working in a metal tube in the sky” and he made many lasting friendships.

Having a lifelong passion for music and theatre, James would often travel to London to concerts or theatre productions. His first love was musicals - he saw Everyone’s Talking About Jamie seven times. It was his passion for theatre that led to him becoming a dresser for several of the Brighton Alternative Panto productions, where his quiet and reassuring presence was appreciated by both cast and crew.

James would often be found sitting quietly at the end of the bar in Legends, Bar Broadway or The Queen’s Arms, with a large cigar, watching one of his favourite drag acts on the Sunday circuit and chatting amiably to friends old and new.

James was a man of contrasts: being very private but sociable; ‘careful’ but generous; gentle but passionate. He will be sadly missed by all who knew him.

He is survived by his brother Gary and sisters Pam and Norrie.

James’s favourite quote was: “No man is a failure who has friends”.

Chris Cage

Legends Brighton donates £500 to Sussex Beacon campaign

Legends Brighton, one of our city’s premier LGBTQ+ venues, donated £500 to The Sussex Beacon’s Give a Gift to the Beacon campaign last month to help the charity maintain enhanced services during the coronavirus pandemic.

These enhanced services have ensured that The Sussex Beacon could support as many people as possible and address the varying issues of isolation from friends and family, difficulty accessing medical services, increased levels of anxiety and poor mental health that people have faced during both lockdowns.

To donate, visit: https://justgiving.com/campaign/giveagifttothebeacon

Vaccination champions needed

Sussex NHS Commissioners is seeking volunteers to become Vaccination Champions to help the NHS in Sussex raise awareness of the Covid-19 vaccination and dispel myths on the vaccine.

Vaccination Champions will be asked to attend one 2.5-hour session on either the following dates:

- Wednesday, January 13, 11am–1.30pm
- Tuesday, January 19, 5.30–8 pm
- Monday, January 25, 5.30–8 pm

Applications should be submitted by Monday, January 4.

Write to: NHS West Sussex Clinical Commissioning Group, Wicker House, High Street, Worthing BN11 1DJ

Telephone: 0792 024 4988 or 07881 501 356

Email: sxccg.involvement@nhs.net

For more info, visit: www.sussexhealthandcare.uk/get-involved/covid-19-vaccination-champions/

Queer History Buddies scheme

Queer in Brighton has announced 30 volunteers have signed up to offer four phone calls (and a letter and photo) during January to people in our community who could use a friendly queer chinwag.

It’s not a counselling service, it’s about sharing local queer Brighton stories.

Queer in Brighton will be archiving the letters volunteers send out about their queer experiences in Brighton on their digital web archive. They can even post you out a pre-paid envelope, if you fancy sending a letter back.

To sign up, email info@queerinbrighton.co.uk
December’s World AIDS Day (WAD) virtual concert gave us insights into some of the realities of living with HIV/AIDS and the valuable work carried out by Lunch Positive.

Narrated by Alistair Appleton (and signed by Marco Nardi) it brought together the sights and sounds of previous concerts, as well as glimpses of how the choirs are continuing to rehearse during lockdown, to raise money to support the work of Lunch Positive.

Aneesa Chaudhry, MD of Rainbow Chorus, said: “Our hearts beat together and our voices resound as one. I love the passion and depth of emotion that pours from singers across our choirs at WAD. Conducting everyone is an honour. Our message, loud and strong.”

Samuel Cousins, MD of Actually Gay Men’s Chorus, said: “We had to look from a different perspective to put something to mark WAD, it started with a fair bit of head scratching but we got there. The 2020 WAD video stream was a great example of how different groups that represent myriad people across Brighton & Hove really can come together for a great cause, Lunch Positive, and create a joint work against all of the odds. Though we did all miss out on getting together and being physically present in the same space the team did ‘virtually’ manage to produce something accessible to all. This alone makes me so proud to be a part of the wonderful LGBTQ+ community here in Brighton & Hove.”

Joe Paxton, MD of Brighton Gay Men’s Chorus, said: “It was more important than ever for our family of Brighton LGBTQ+ choirs to be able join together in making this video for WAD, raising awareness of HIV/AIDS and money for Lunch Positive. I’m hopeful that next year we can all be under one roof again to share our love of music and perform as a massed choir once more.”

Gary Pargeter, service manager at Lunch Positive, said: “Our sincerest thanks to everyone from the virtual WAD concert. We know that everyone is working in differing ways, and to have the continued support of the WAD concert means the world to us. The concert is the only community WAD fundraising event that Lunch Positive benefits from, and this helps sustain our community support throughout the whole year ahead. Every penny goes directly to providing services and helps people most in need.

“Lunch Positive has been busier than ever, reaching and supporting the most vulnerable, and providing a year-long range of Covid-19 crisis responses, as well as our usual lunch club and in-person services when lockdown has eased. We have supported over 200 people, and there has been an amazing surge of volunteering activity with over 7,000 hours given so far!

“Thanks again to everyone involved and who donated through the WAD concert. Your support, affection and kindness makes a very great difference to hundreds of lives.”

For more info on Lunch Positive, visit: www.lunchpositive.org

If you missed the virtual WAD concert, visit: www.youtube.com/watch?v=D3TqMjzdAFs

Kingsway Care is a modern home-care provider, headquartered in Hove and supporting senior clients across Sussex. We provide a range of high-quality services to enable independent living at home.

These services include:

**HOME CARE**
- Companionship
- Personal Care
- Respite Care
- Emergency Care
- Dementia Care
- Live-In Care
- Palliative Care

**HOME SERVICES**
- Housework & Gardening
- Pet Care
- Maintenance & Repairs
- Health, Beauty & Grooming
- Food Shopping & Meals
- Transport, Excursions & Holidays
- Home Safety & Technology

For more information, please contact us to arrange a free, no obligation home consultation:

Kingsway Care supports LGBTQ+ communities across Sussex, offering a range of high-quality services to enable independent living at home.

www.kingswaycare.com Tel: 01273 077444
New rules to allow gay and bi men in long-term relationships to donate blood

Recommendations from the FAIR (For the Assessment of Individualised Risk) steering group, to enable a more individualised way of assessing safe blood donations, were accepted in full by the Department of Health & Social Care last month, which means men who have sex with men (MSM) in a long-term relationship will be able to give blood from summer 2021.

Led by NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT), FAIR – a collaboration of UK blood services, Public Health England, University of Nottingham and LGBTQ+ / sexual health charities, including Terrence Higgins Trust (THT), National AIDS Trust (NAT) and Stonewall – came together in 2019 with a shared determination to lead the change towards a more individualised risk assessment for donation.

The group’s analysis concluded that changes can be made to the donor health check questionnaire to allow the introduction of new behaviour-based deferrals, which the group says is a fairer way to maintain blood safety. People are asked to complete the health check questionnaire before they donate to assess eligibility and ensure the safety of both donor and patient.

When the changes come into effect in summer 2021, any individual who attends to give blood – regardless of gender or sexuality – will be assessed for eligibility against these sexual behaviour risks and deferred if found to be at a higher risk of infection.

The biggest change will mean anyone who has the same sexual partner for more than three months, will be eligible to donate if there is no known exposure to an STI or use of Prep or PEP. Donors will no longer be asked to declare if they have had sex with another man, making the criteria for blood donation gender neutral and more inclusive. A set of other deferrals will also be introduced for the other higher risk sexual behaviours identified, such as if a person recently had chemsex, and updated for anyone who has had syphilis.

FAIR concluded that this new deferral system will maintain the safe supply of blood in the UK, where there’s a less than one in a million chance of not-detecting a hepatitis B, C and HIV infection in a donation.

Dr Michael Brady, medical director at THT, said: “Our first priority must be to ensure the safety of the blood supply in the UK. We welcome the move to a more individualised risk assessment approach to blood donation. There is certainly more work to do, we will continue to work to ensure that our blood donation service is inclusive, evidence-based and both maximises the numbers who can donate while ensuring our blood supply is safe.”

Nancy Kelley, chief executive of Stonewall, said: “This change represents an important first step towards a donation selection policy entirely based on an individualised assessment of risk. We will continue to work with government to build on this progress and ensure that more people, including LGBTQ+ people, can donate blood safely in the future.”

Deborah Gold, chief executive of NAT, said: “We now need to see action on the endemic health inequalities that lead to the disproportionate impact of HIV on some groups including gay and bisexual men and people from black African communities. This includes government meeting its commitment to end new HIV transmissions by 2030 and implementing the findings of the HIV Commission, which set out how this can be achieved.”

To see the FAIR recommendations in full: www.blood.co.uk/news-and-campaigns/news-and-statements/fair-steering-group/

More info on THT: www.tht.org.uk
More info on NAT: www.nat.org.uk
More info on Stonewall: www.stonewall.org.uk

Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) has announced a new grant is available this winter for organisations supporting vulnerable residents with food, heating, warm clothing and other essentials.

Small grants up to a maximum of £5,000 are available for community and voluntary organisations in the city who can deliver extra support quickly to help vulnerable people and families this winter.

The first application deadline is midnight on Wednesday, January 13.

Cllr Steph Powell, joint chair of the Tourism, Equality, Communities & Culture committee, said: “We appreciate it’s a tight turnaround over a busy time for support organisations in the city, but this extra government funding is specifically for winter hardship support and we need to move quickly.”

“We’ve designed the application process to be as simple as possible, and are very keen to hear from any projects able to help residents this winter.”

To apply: email communitysteam@brighton-hove.gov.uk Please include ‘Application for winter support funding’ in the subject box to request an application form.


Allsorts & Photoworks launch Photography Club

Allsorts Youth Project & Photoworks have launched a free Photography Club for LGBTQ+ 13-19 year olds, which will be led by artist Eva Louisa Jones and Allsorts staff online every Wednesday, 5-6.30pm.

No fancy equipment or experience necessary.

This course runs till March 3 and is the perfect opportunity to be imaginative, experimental and see things through a different lens.

Participants can attend sessions, which explore themes of LGBTQ+ history, pride and documenting what’s important to young people today, as and when they like and each will receive a Bronze Arts Award accreditation.

To get involved, email youth@allsortsyouth.org.uk

www.allsortsyouth.org.uk
Sea Serpents... reassemble!

Brighton & Hove Sea Serpents, our local and inclusive LGBTQ+ rugby club, was delighted to welcome 24 people to a training session last month.

BHSS said: “Great to be back again training and with actual contact for both old and new players alike. An awesome 24 of us turned up on a chilly night to get back to what we love, contact rugby.”

BHSS train every Wednesday from 8pm at Hove Rugby Club. For more info and to get involved, email info@bhssrfc.com or message them on Facebook @bhssrfc

Stonewall FC launch new kit

Stonewall FC, the LGBTQ+ football club, launched their new club kits last month to coincide with Rainbow Laces Day.

Created in collaboration with lead club sponsor adidas, the left sleeve of all shirts includes a newly stitched modern LGBTQ+ tag while the right sleeve displays Kick It Out as a clear symbol of support in the fight against racism, and all forms of discrimination.

The Unity Team kit in particular looks to celebrate and demonstrate solidarity with the trans community, using big and bold colours from the trans flag.

To order, visit: www.stonewallfc.com/unityshirts

BLAGSS update for the New Year

Like many community organisations, BLAGSS, our LGBTQ+ sports society, has faced a period of activities being ’on’ and ’off’ since last March.

A number of groups were able to restart last summer – Running, Tennis, Walking, Dancing, Pétanque, Football, Badminton and Golf, however others, including Croquet, Netball, Tenpin Bowling, Squash and Table Tennis, never saw the light of day.

Activities developed protocols for social distancing and complied with national governing bodies’ guidelines, which varied from sport to sport and were very strict - and rightly so.

The organisation of BLAGSS via its committee met via Zoom throughout the year and an AGM was held online in November with a new committee elected to take things forward – John Moore (chair), Sarah Nancarrow (secretary), Kurt Matthews (treasurer), Dawn Glastonbury (social), Jane MacDonald (membership), Ian Tommins (website), Donna Griss (Get Involved), Viv Woodcock-Downey (publicity).

Some sports are now active and BLAGSS look forward to offering all 16 sports on a weekly basis in spring 2021. BLAGSS’ sports cater to all levels from beginners to those with experience – it’s a great way to get involved and make new friends.

For more info and updates, visit www.BLAGSS.org

DAILY NEWS UPDATES ON www.gscene.com

Smize please wear your mask

Stop Covid

#WeAreBrightonAndHove

Thanks to Tarik Elmoutawakil
Marlborough Productions & New Writing South present new LGBTQ+ lit fest

The Coast is Queer. Brighton & Hove’s festival of LGBTQ+ literature, returns in digital form from February 5-7. Now in its second year, the programme of events brings together writers, performers, academics, activists and readers, for a weekend of in-conversation events, workshops, films and discussions celebrating queer lives and writing. It will also be possible to buy and browse at the festival’s virtual bookshelf, curated by Brighton & Hove independent bookshop City Books.

Confirmed speakers include: Val McDermid (Still Life, Wire In The Blood, Broken Ground), Alan Hollinghurst (The Swimming Pool Library, In The Line of Beauty, The Stranger’s Child), Valerie Mason-John (I Am Still Your Negro, Detox Your Heart), Phyll Opoku (Executive Director, UK Black Pride), Juno Dawson (This Book Is Gay, Margot & Me), Jamie Windust (In Their Shoes), Golnoosh Nour (The Ministry of Guidance), Tanaka Mhishi (Here & Now, This Is How It Happens), and Campbell X (Stud Life) with more guests to be confirmed soon.

The inaugural Coast Is Queer festival was significant for LGBTQ+ literature. Attended by more than 1000 people, with 40 writers over four days in Brighton, the festival was a success with an extensive programme of events.

The Coast is Queer festival is funded by Arts Council England with support of the University of Sussex and the University of Brighton.

For more info, visit: www.coastisqueer.com

Brighton’s Joe Black makes line-up of RuPaul’s Drag Race season 2

The line-up for the highly anticipated season 2 of RuPaul’s Drag Race UK has been announced with Brighton’s Joe Black hoping to bring “all the eyeshadow and wonky eyebrows of the traditional seaside drag, with a bit of haunted glamour” to the show. The new series will see Michelle Visage, Alan Carr and Graham Norton return to the judging panel, alongside celebrity guest judges including Dawn French and Gemma Collins, with more to be announced.

RuPaul said: “Season two will arrive with all the hope, joy, laughter and glitter you’ve come to expect from our brilliant queens. We feel honoured you’ve embraced our little show; our only wish is that we can offer a smile at a time when we can all use it the most.”

The show is due to air on Thursday, January 14 at 7pm on BBC Three.

Miss Jam Tart raises £150 for MindOut with Virtual Christmas Bingo

Miss Jam Tart, the fabulous Bristol-based drag queen, raised £150 for LGBTQ+ mental health charity MindOut with their Virtual Christmas Bingo last month.

Miss Jam Tart said: “I would like to say a massive thank you to everyone that joined in with the Virtual Christmas Bingo – oh what a ball we had! Thanks to every participant we raised a big total of £150. Thanks again, support each other and keep smiling!”

www.mindout.org.uk

Aaron Venness raises £2,160 for THT with 100km Ribbon Run

Aaron Venness raised £2,160 for HIV/sexual health charity Terrence Higgins Trust (THT) with a 100km Ribbon Run around London to coincide with World AIDS Day (WAD) last month.

Well done on raising such a fantastic amount. Tell us a bit about yourself…

I’m a 25-year-old currently living in London, I’ve been HIV+ for five years and undetectable for about four and a half.

What inspired you to do a fundraising challenge for THT?

When I decided I was going to raise money for THT, I didn’t think I’d end up cycling 100km in a ribbon shape around London. For sure, the biggest challenge for me was training. Classic sod’s law meant I was extremely busy with work for the three weeks leading up to my cycle. I ended up waking up on the day: having done only a few 30km rides. Luckily the weather was fantastic, and a friend met me halfway with a flask of coffee and some sweets to keep me going. All in all, I cycled 100.3km in six hours from Walthamstow to Woolwich via Heathrow.

I concluded that the best way to fundraise was to give people an example of the fantastic work the THT do every day. And so I found myself writing a paragraph on my diagnosis story. I was apprehensive about how friends and colleagues would receive it; before this, I’d never spoken about my status in public before. The positive response I received was overwhelming.

Why did you choose for funds to go to THT?

When I was diagnosed with HIV, someone from THT was there ready and waiting if I needed help. While the nurses and doctors at my hospital were fantastic, they didn’t have the time to deliver the level of personal, one-to-one support that THT could.

Now a few years down the line I’ve met a few more people that are living with HIV, and there’s a strong theme in our stories – it’s the fantastic work of THT.

While HIV and AIDS have faded from stories – it’s the fantastic work of THT.

Why is marking WAD so vital?

While HIV and AIDS have faded from stories – it’s the fantastic work of THT.

It gives us a massive opportunity to start conversations, educate and engage with people that don’t know the facts about HIV. If only 10 people learn about HIV and AIDS as a result of WAD then in my mind it’s worth it. It is, of course, a time when we look back and remember those who were lost too soon. But also see how far we’ve come.

For more info on THT, visit: www.tth.org.uk

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For more info on THT, visit: www.tth.org.uk
Faith leaders press for LGBTQ+ conversion therapy ban

More than 400 faith leaders from 35 countries have encouraged bans on LGBTQ+ conversion therapy by signing an open letter calling for the controversial practice to be criminalised.

GLAAD, an organisation which aims to accelerate acceptance for LGBTQ people, defines conversion therapy as any practice which attempts to alter someone’s sexual orientation or gender identity; it has been widely discredited by medical bodies and known to cause trauma in those who are subjected to it. Signatories of the letter include Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, who is a longstanding LGBTQ+ advocate, and former Chief Rabbi of Ireland David Rosen.

The joint statement reads: “We recognise with sadness that certain religious teachings have often, throughout the ages, caused and continue to cause deep pain and offense to those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex.

“We acknowledge, with profound regret, that some of our teachings have created, and continue to create, oppressive systems that fuel intolerance, perpetuate injustice and result in violence. This has led, and continues to lead, to the rejection and alienation of many by their families, their religious groups and cultural communities. We ask for forgiveness from those who live.”

It continues: “We call on all nations to put an end to criminalisation on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity, for violence against LGBTQ+ people to be condemned and for justice to be done on their behalf.

“We call for all attempts to change, suppress or erase a person’s sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression – commonly known as ‘conversion therapy’ – to end, and for these harmful practices to be banned.”

A 2018 government survey found 2% of the UK’s LGBTQ+ community have undergone the practice, with another 5% having been offered it. PM Boris Johnson previously referred to conversion therapy as “abhorrent”, saying it “has no place in civilised society”. However, the ban has yet to be implemented in the UK as it has been in Switzerland and areas of Australia, Canada and the US.
Lunch Positive hosts members’ Xmas lunch

Lunch Positive hosted its annual members’ Christmas Lunch last month in a Covid-secure setting with table service and traditional Christmas food lovingly prepared by the backbone of the HIV lunch club – the volunteers. Despite the pandemic, the Christmas spirit was in full swing with a tombola and plenty of Christmas cheer from the volunteers and service manager Gary Pargeter, who asked members to give a round of applause to thank volunteers for their dedication this year.

For more info on Lunch Positive, visit: www.lunchpositive.org, email friends@lunchpositive.org or call/text Gary on 07846 464384.

£4,400 raised from LGBT Switchboard raffle

LGBT Switchboard announced last month that £4,400 was raised from its Festive Raffle to raise vital funds to continue to support those most vulnerable and isolated in our LGBTQ+ communities. Switchboard said: “Thank you so much to everyone who donated to our raffle. Over 200 of you donated raising an incredible £4,400. We’re so grateful for all of your support, thank you.”

www.switchboard.org.uk

Petition condemns ‘trans hate group’ LGB Alliance

A change.org petition has called for UK media outlets to stop uncritically platforming ‘anti-trans group’ LGB Alliance. The petition, created by Scottish actor, director and LGBTQ+ activist David Paisley, has now amassed over 8,000 signatures, with the aim of reaching 10,000. It reads: “The LGB Alliance are widely thought of as an anti-LGBTQ+ hate group, as such any discussion in the UK media should frame them with respect to how they are perceived by the LGBTQ+ community.”

It urges media platforms to refrain from including comments from the LGB Alliance in articles on LGBTQ+ related topics: “They do not speak for us, and they should not be quoted or asked to comment on issues affecting the LGBTQ+ community without clear and unequivocal reference to their status as a perceived hate group…We reject anti-trans rhetoric & support our fellow community members. Trans rights are human rights.” Paisley also condemned the LGB Alliance after finding evidence of it supporting trans-conversion therapy, which he described as a “form of torture”, adding: “Sexuality and gender are part of who we are as people, therapy that seeks to impose an identity on someone that doesn’t fit who they are isn’t therapeutic, it’s cruel.”

The BBC was recently heavily criticised for including a comment from the LGB Alliance in an article about long waiting times for the NHS’s only gender clinic, which argued young people should not be able to ‘self-diagnose’ gender dysphoria. Ofcom chief executive Melanie Dawes criticised the broadcaster for ‘balancing’ out trans voices with anti-trans groups, saying it was “extremely inappropriate”.

To add your name to the petition, visit: https://www.change.org/p/uk-media-stop-uncritically-platforming-lgb-alliance-hate-group

Breaking up can be difficult...

For a free consultation to discuss your options, please contact Adam Douglas in our Family Law department on 01273 204411 ext 253. Or send him an email at adam@engleharts.co.uk.

For any information on our other services, please contact us at Engleharts Solicitors, Vallance Hall, Hove Street, Hove, East Sussex, BN3 2DE or email angela@engleharts.co.uk.
Brighton & Hove AIDS Partnership hosted online event to mark last month’s World AIDS Day 2020

LGBTQ+ and sexual health organisations/charities and local politicians came together last month to share the effects of Covid-19 on services and what WAD means to them.

To see the full speeches, visit: https://tinyurl.com/WADBH

“WAD is a really important time to reflect on how far we’ve come but also to reflect back on the past” – Ian Green, CEO, Terrence Higgins Trust (THT)

“WAD reminds me of how fortunate I am to benefit from medical treatments from the NHS and the services that we all take for granted” – Edward Romain-Quinn, Frontline AIDS

“WAD is a chance to remember those who didn’t make it and vow anew to eliminate stigma wherever it comes from” – Chris Gull, chair, Brighton Rainbow Fund

“Even though we can’t meet in person, I have a wonderful image of people lighting candles in respectful silence, paying tribute to those we’ve lost” – David Fray, More to Me Than HIV

“I just want to see that we stop the stigma, let people be proud and live their lives. Let’s see an end to this disease” – Cllr Steve Bell, BHCC (Conservative)

“While we remember those we’ve lost, I hope the next year brings reports of even fewer HIV infections” – Alistair Hill, director, Public Health, BHCC

“This year has thrown into sharp focus the gains we have achieved are fragile and need protecting” – Sarah Hand, CEO, AVERT

“Even though we can’t meet in person, I have a wonderful image of people lighting candles in respectful silence, paying tribute to those we’ve lost” – David Fray, More to Me Than HIV

“This year has thrown into sharp focus the gains we have achieved are fragile and need protecting” – Sarah Hand, CEO, AVERT

“There’s no doubt that the pandemic has had a massive impact on HIV services and the wider NHS” – Dr Sonia Raffe, Lawson Unit, Royal Sussex County Hospital

“For the 100,000 people living with HIV in the UK, this winter could bring worries about money and isolation” – Caroline Lucas, MP for Brighton Pavilion (Green)

“WAD is a chance for us to reflect on the achievements of recent years; it’s also a chance for us to consider the challenges that lie ahead” – Peter Kyle, MP for Hove & Portslade (Labour)

“WAD reminds us that HIV has not gone away. While there is better understanding, there is still stigma and there is still discrimination” – Carolyn Ansell, Rainbow Hub manager

“This year has thrown into sharp focus the gains we have achieved are fragile and need protecting” – Sarah Hand, CEO, AVERT

“We need to ensure that those living with HIV are living well, This WAD, central government needs to increase and ring-fence financial support for HIV/sexual health services” – Phelim Mac Cafferty, leader of BHCC (Green)

“On this WAD, I will join you and others across the city to light a candle and to pause to reflect and remember those lives lost to HIV in our city” – Cllr Steph Powell, BHCC (Green)

“If Covid has taught us anything it’s when there is social, political and scientific will, we can achieve vaccines; we can achieve remarkable things” – Lloyd Russell-Moyle, MP for Brighton Kemptown (Labour)

“We asked you as we have always done to remember those we have lost and looking forward to a brighter future” – Aishamonic Namurach, BABME project leader, THT Brighton

“Covid-19 has impacted people with HIV in various ways: exacerbating loneliness and isolation, disconnecting people from friends and support” – Gary Pargeter, Lunch Positive

“I am so proud to be part of such an amazing group of organisations across the city that continue to provide people living with HIV with such amazing care” – Tracey Buckingham, The Sussex Beacon

“WAD reminds us of how fortunate I am to benefit from medical treatments from the NHS and the services that we all take for granted” – Edward Romain-Quinn, Frontline AIDS

“At the start of the pandemic, services quickly adapted to ensure continuity for those most at risk in our community” – Dr Gillian Dean, Martin Fisher Foundation

“The Lawson Unit LEADING HIV CARE FOR BRIGHTON”
IT'S GOING TO BE A LONG NIGHT.
OR: WHEN DO WE WAKE UP

By Craig Hanlon-Smith

The first in a series of provocative comment pieces by Craig Hanlon-Smith and Jason Reid.

So at the time of writing we hurtle towards another final 48 hours that are once again crucial in settling a deal with the European Union ahead of our official departure. How those of us who did not vote to leave (68% in Brighton & Hove) will forever rant at the ‘other’ and call them names, and how said ‘other’ will repeat I am not racist ad nauseam and we will continue to be nowhere. Possibly forever.

In truth we’ve all been hoodwinked and to blame in equal measure on both sides of the EU fence. Although leaving the EU is only part of the challenge. We’re also the country in the Europe with the highest death toll in the coronavirus pandemic and leading the charge through all of it: a band of self-indulgent, elitist and indignant nationalists posing as righteous men. And if any of you who identify as LGBTQ+ elected this band of bothers then look into my eyes and hear my sincerity when I say, you too are an utter moron.

This week Jacob Rees-Mogg accused UNICEF of pulling a political stunt when it announced that, for the first time in its history, it was issuing food parcels to children in the UK. This is social reality denial on the scale of the Chinese government, Vladimir Putin and Adolf Hitler in the mid 1930s all rolled into one. A government that has been Conservative-led now for more than 10 years is accountable. The dismantling of the benefits system, which includes turfing people out of their homes with an unused bedroom and rolling all the benefits into one to make it fairer, just two steps on the road to UNICEF. Ten years in power and child poverty is the worst it has ever been in peacetime, you are utterly responsible. And if you voted for them? The hunger of those children sits upon your dinner plate as you belch through your ignorant indigestion.

“If any of you who identify as LGBTQ+ elected this band of bothers then look into my eyes and hear my sincerity when I say, you too are an utter moron”

Of course this government could not have predicted the pandemic and in many ways has thrown as much money as it can borrow at the problem so that as few of us as possible will struggle. That said, the voices of those not included in these salvation packages are not nearly loud enough yet. Both the furlough and self-employment grant scheme have been fraudulently accessed by up to 35% of those who are ‘benefitting’. We will not know the true extent of inappropriate and sometimes illegal claims nor the impact on our country’s finances until the end of 2021. Yet as recently as October the government refused to extend free school meals to children from low-income families through the school holidays, a policy reversed when their actions were shamed into a U-turn by a solitary 23-year-old footballer named Marcus Rashford, who frankly should be running the country. Five words that should ring in the ear of anyone who elected this government when they walk past a homeless young person: Eat Out To Help Out. I hope your discounted pizza turns your stomach and if it doesn’t then your name is probably Jacob.

None of this should come as a surprise. Our approach to child poverty is tied to the Dickensian arrogance of the British Empire. Remember that? No you don’t, but our so-called glory days have been evoked time and again throughout the Covid challenge and lead up to Brexit by the current government. Glory days when we punched above our weight as a superpower when the truth is, we trampled through the villages of natives in shock and stole their treasure. Have you ever been to the British Museum? There’s nothing British in it.

And the idiots? We the voting populace. Sold a lie that the EU parliament is unelected when we have the opportunity to take part in these elections regularly – we just didn’t bother, turnout often around 30%. Twenty-five per cent of Brighton & Hove residents did not vote at all in the EU referendum, that’s thousands of us. What could you possibly have been doing that was more important than voting in a referendum that will change our lives forever?

And what is the government doing in the dying days of the EU negotiations? Trying to wrestle something of a deal out of a dysfunctional and dying Trump administration. Britain, hitching its worn-out underwear tighter to the US at a time when it is clear they are hurtling towards civil war. Chlorinated bleached chicken will be the least of our worries.

We have prostrated ourselves on the altar of faux freedom in the name of sovereignty, and while the initial financial horrors of Brexit will be blamed on and cloaked by the disintegration of our economy following the pandemic, we’ll live with the after effects of leaving the EU without a deal for decades. Millions will be unemployed; children will continue to go hungry.

LGBTQ+ and voting for the Conservative party? Do your homework stupid.

Have Your Say: Email your thoughts to info@gscene.com or join the Facebook discussion @Gscene.Brighton

“We have prostrated ourselves on the altar of faux freedom in the name of sovereignty.”
On the road to sexual liberation. By Jason Reid

We are living in an enlightened age in which sexual liberation is de rigueur once more. Of course, this should be applauded. Being sex positive is the way forward. Regardless of gender and sexual orientation everyone has a right to be a loud and proud sexual being without feeling shame.

I feel like we’re definitely on the right track, conversations about sex are much more open than they’ve been in recent years, and younger generations give me hope that a sex-positive utopia is within reach, but we have got to keep chipping away at that shame.

For too many years we’ve been indoctrinated into believing that certain types of sexual practices are wrong, or to be totally frank – not to certain people’s priggish tastes; that we should all act within the rigid framework of patriarchal gender roles, to fall in line and be quietly compliant, which is utter bullshit. Judgemental, pious, patronising bullshit.

No one should be sticking their snout in the private life of others; it’s plain weird to be constantly concerned with what people like to do when it comes to their sexual proclivities. If someone wants to take a big old cock, or a dildo, or even a fist up their arse it’s their right to be a loud and proud sexual being; who on earth truly is omnipresent being. Because who said your innermost thoughts and desires. Fuck the shame away!

Many of us – especially the femme-acting gays like myself – routinely got our heads kicked in because we were different and difference was tarred as objectionable from the leading politician in the country all the way down.

“Children who need to be taught traditional moral values are being taught that they have an inalienable right to be gay.” That’s what Thatcher said at the Conservative Party Conference in 1987. Pure wickedness. I believe she knew gay teens were going through hell but didn’t care because she prioritised her own dogmatic beliefs about traditional values over the welfare of young gay people. Was she evil? In my view, the most wicked PM this country has had to endure.

Fortunately I can now look back at my childhood and school years without my heart always sinking to the bottom of my stomach – thanks to good therapy and enlightened friends.

My parents brought me up as a devout Roman Catholic (not their fault); school lessons were peppered with guilt and shame; the teachers were mean – apart from the free-thinking Drama and English teachers; and there was little academia to speak off. Religious education was considered more important than maths (four and three lessons a week, respectively). Couple that with Section 28 and you end up with years of self-hatred and trauma that lingers like a zealous nun with the worst halitosis imaginable hovering above you in the classroom.

Those years are widely considered to be some of the most important of one’s life, and innumerable gay people had them ruined because of society’s obsession with shame.

Thankfully I left my hometown as soon as I could and hotfooted it to London – such a cliché, a fabulous one nonetheless – and never looked back. After quite a few years of hanging around gay bars cruising for cock in the shadows with fellow cisgender males only, I fell into a crowd and sub-scene that opened my eyes to sex positivity; my newfound lesbian, trans and non-binary friends challenged the deep-rooted prejudices that had been hammered into me from an early age. It felt like something had finally been unlocked within me.

I would never profess that I’m now a fully liberated sexual being; who on earth truly is? I think most of us harbour shame that’s been perpetually internalised. It feels like something has finally been released. We are living in an enlightened age in which the masses have lapped up because people didn’t know an alternative to being perpetually sorry for every sexual thought.

As children and teenagers, we were taught to feel guilt and shame constantly and intensively. Decades of this resulted in the collective subconscious being poisoned. Much of what we learn as children stays with us throughout our lives. Unfortunately that’s not a positive for queer people who grew up in Thatcher’s Britain and under her government’s abhorrent Section 28. Shame and fear were purposely fed to the population; gay kids didn’t exist… except we did, and we had to just keep our heads down and get on with it – with no support whatsoever.

“No-one should be sticking their snout in the private life of others; it’s plain weird to be constantly concerned with what people like to do when it comes to their sexual proclivities”

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I would never profess that I’m now a fully liberated sexual being; who on earth truly is? I think most of us harbour shame that’s been brought about by life experiences. Some of us have been lucky and managed to quell it somewhat. That in itself is liberation.

The key point is, wherever you lie on the shame-o-meter, however you’re dealing with those inner demons, try not to judge others by the standards that have been imposed on you by a self-righteous society, or an invisible omnipresent being. Because who said your standards are the right ones? What even is right and normal? Don’t be like Thatcher. Aim to be like Rebecca More.

Mix with people you wouldn’t ordinarily mix with. Learn from them. Open your mind. Share your innermost thoughts and desires. Fuck the shame away!

Have Your Say: Email your response to info@gscene.com or Facebook @Gscene.Brighton
14 Scene

In 2020, LGBT Switchboard turned 45 years old and in September Jacob Bayliss took over the helm as its latest CEO. “I’m passionate about the work that Switchboard does,” says Jacob, “Working with the community that I’m part of. Being able to lead an organisation that has this amazing history. There is a weight of responsibility and it’s a strange time to start”.

Jacob pays homage to the hard work of former CEO Lyndsay Macadam and the rest of the team who managed the organisation through the crisis point early in the pandemic. To celebrate the 45th year they were planning to have a big knees-up, but it was scuppered by Covid restrictions. The team have kept their spirits up and will celebrate in what ways they can. They are currently in the middle of a fundraiser which sits at £37,000. You can donate by going to http://bit.ly/KeepSwitchboardSwitchedOn

What’s in store for Switchboard in 2021?
The first part of 2021 is about recovery and renewal. We connect people with each other; to their peers, to the community, and to services. That has been a challenge in 2020. LGBTQ+ people in Brighton & Hove and further afield who are struggling to find support can come to Switchboard. We’re more than a helpline.

There’s a lot of potential to be tapped. Our Disability Project has been incredible. We learned a lot in our initial response to the pandemic. There are things we could have been doing all along. Shame on us as a society for not seeing that earlier. Lockdown forced us to be more creative in order to be more accessible. Restrictions day to day isn’t new for many people living with disability or who are chronically ill. They’ve needed this for a long time. As evidence, membership of the Disability Project has exploded, with interest in the project coming from all over the world.

Moving to a digital platform doesn’t work for everyone. The Rainbow Café, which supports people affected by dementia or memory loss, has found this particularly challenging. But other services for older people are thriving. Going to allotments and woodlands has been amazing. We’ve been able to do walks, woodcraft, and a winter solstice get together and provide transport for people to come along.

This year has made loss and grief harder and has brought up difficult feelings from past bereavement. Grief Encounters gives people a space to connect with each other. There will be online Grief Encounters in February, which you can self-refer to.

Our other projects continue to be well subscribed including Trans Survivors, Trans Scene, and Trans Survivors. Our other projects continue to be well subscribed including Trans Survivors, Trans Survivors, Trans Scene, and Trans Survivors. Our other projects continue to be well subscribed including Trans Survivors, Trans Survivors, Trans Scene, and Trans Survivors. Our other projects continue to be well subscribed including Trans Survivors, Trans Survivors, Trans Scene, and Trans Survivors.

Who are your role models?
I’ve looked up to people here in Brighton and in Melbourne, particularly trans men who I could see myself in. They were demanding the trans community was resourced. I’ve been really inspired by that. Remember the feeling of seeing someone you felt reflected you at succeeding. Doing well in work, staying alive, etc. Good leadership is providing a consistent sense of opportunity and recognition. Organisations and leaders make space for others. I’ve put on a pedestal and hero worshipped those people. I could have never done what I did without them. They made a massive difference to me. We should be mindful that whatever stage we’re at, there are people looking to us.

What advice would you give to a young LGBTQ+ person?
Explore the things that matter to you. The more you look you’ll see LGBTQ+ people doing amazing things all over the space. The queer history of Charleston has been hidden, but we are exploring that now. We are working on an intergenerational budding project which launches in the spring. Young people can come forward to see what’s out there and what possibilities there are. There shouldn’t be any doors closed.

To find out more and about Switchboard: www.switchboard.org.uk

Switchboard
Connecting you to LGBTQ support

Link and our helpline is still running.

Do you feel visible as a trans person?
I was on panel recently and someone said there were no trans people on the panel. I didn’t have the energy to correct them. However nobody else, who knew otherwise, said anything. Made me laugh but shows the cognitive dissonance people have around what trans is and looks like. Being invisible can be a blessing but can at times be painful too. I assume that people assume that I’m cis and gay. If people google me they’d know differently.

The mere presence of me doesn’t mean we’ve achieved trans equality. One voice in the room, and a relatively privileged one, doesn’t mean we should be changing the conversation. We still need more trans leadership across the sector. Leadership needs to be diverse and come from all perspectives. Some organisations, including ours, are still on a journey to earn the trust of marginalised groups and listen to people. There are some amazing grassroots organisations like QTPOC Narratives and Radical Rhizomes, from whom we can learn rather than duplicate. Everyone brings the lens you see the world through. For queer trans men, there are still a lot of gaps that need addressing. I spoke to a gay man recently who felt services weren’t for him any more as there were communities more in need or more vulnerable. This just isn’t true, and Switchboard is here for the whole LGBTQ+ community. Building bridges between old-school gay men and the wider and diverse community.

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Jacob Bayliss
Rory Finn catches up with LGBT Switchboard’s new chief executive officer
Covid and LGBTQ+

Peter Markham, a writer and correspondent for www.immigrationnews.co.uk, on responses to the effects of Covid-19 on LGBTQ+ people

Grim stories about the dire consequences of Covid-19 on the disabled, on certain ethnic groups and on all those with underlying health issues have rightly been making the front pages for months.

What this pandemic has also done is exacerbate the social and economic disparities already rooted in communities. A report published by the United Nations (UN)¹ has found that LGBTQ+ people make up a group which has become disproportionately affected by these shifts in societies across the globe.

As it tries to tackle the impact of the crisis on the economy, the UK government has now made the decision to end the funding of projects aimed at reducing the bullying of LGBTQ+ children in English schools. It may be a sign of things to come because charities and pressure groups are saying they’ve been experiencing decreased access to policymakers. The fear is that ‘LGBTQ+ issues’ are simply not considered a priority at the moment.

LGBTQ+ people are more inclined to have had or lost jobs in industries where the impact of the pandemic has been felt most, according to the UN report. The retail, leisure, grooming, health and restaurant sectors have been some of the hardest hit. The travel industry, perhaps stereotypically seen as a magnet for some gay men, has been wrecked. That’s led to large numbers of people being laid off in towns and cities such as Crawley and Brighton, places where economic security once seemed bulletproof.

Loss of a monthly pay packet has meant some LGBTQ+ people are being forced to choose between moving into unhealthy, communal living spaces or going back to hostile families and communities.

No matter how strict the lockdowns, they offer just the right conditions for loneliness, stress and confrontation with homophobic, biphobic and transphobic relatives to thrive. This all raises the danger of violence, especially for adolescents and older people, the UN report says.

LGBTQ+ people are being demonised by being “singled out, blamed, abused, incarcerated and stigmatised as vectors of disease during the Covid-19 pandemic,” the report found.

Statements made by religious and political leaders who blame the pandemic on the very existence of LGBTQ+ people have been made in 12 European states as well as Turkey, the United States and other countries.

The UN report also found reason to believe that some governments are using the pandemic as an excuse to bring about regressive legislation, such as increasing penalties for HIV exposure, non-disclosure and transmission. This, it says, just adds to the stigma that those living with HIV can face.

The results of a huge international survey² garnered using LGBTQ+ social media and dating sites were presented in the summer. It was found that more than one in five people taking HIV antivirals said their access to medication had been limited or complicated as a result of the pandemic. Worryingly, 7% of respondents said they would be running out of their meds very soon.

The vulnerability of LGBTQ+ people can be made a lot worse when they are also asylum seekers³ or refugees, seeking indefinite leave to remain in the UK⁴, for example. Many have already escaped persecution but can find themselves facing fresh risks of exploitation and abuse by immigration officers and human traffickers during their journeys.

Overcrowding in immigration centres can lead to increased patterns of violence and discrimination⁵ on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

The UN report has issued recommendations for states around the world to adopt. These include acknowledging and embracing diversity in sexual orientation and gender identity. It was able to flag up some positive examples where countries have been making the right sorts of noises.

Peru and Spain were mentioned because of their approach in giving out published guidance on economic support programmes specifically for LGBTQ+ people, including shelter, health and emotional help.

The report also highlighted Argentina for trying to ensure continuity of shelter for trans people who were also included in emergency income programmes.

South Korea is a good example of a country that’s tried to debunk myths. When coronavirus cases were traced to a gay club in Itaewon, a flood of homophobic sentiment was unleashed. The government made a point of engaging with journalists in an effort to encourage caution and stop personal information leaking into the public domain.

The report called upon countries to use evidence-based solutions involving LGBTQ+ organisations in response to the pandemic. Pennsylvania was used as a positive example.

Its Health Disparity Task Force grasped the need to collect data on sexual orientation and gender identity when studying the coronavirus. This is then being used to ensure that the specific needs of LGBTQ+ people are taken into account when creating policy.

Countries which pride themselves on equality and the legal protection of minority groups would do well to follow Pennsylvania’s lead. The requirements of the LGBTQ+ community should never be swept under the carpet but understood and acted upon, not least as an example to the rest of the world.

Peter Markham is a writer and correspondent for www.immigrationnews.co.uk, which raises awareness about migrant injustices and news around the world.

Links
2: www.immigrationnews.co.uk/another-green-light-given-for-bullying-in-the-uk/
4: https://iasservices.org.uk/claiming-asylum/
5: https://london-immigrationlawyer.co.uk/ indefinite-leave-to-remain/
Scene is enough!’ May she be a standard bearer for those who have to suffer at the hands of cowardly bullies who hide behind anonymised false identities while they vomit their vitriolic and often unsubstantiated ‘point of view’, provoking additional spewing of hatred and attacking from others simply ‘because they can’.

So why do cyberbullies and trolls do it? Well to answer that honestly, you would need to ask them… and we don’t really know who they are as they hardly step up and identify themselves. One of the key reasons that trolls ‘troll’ and cyberbullies ‘bully’ online is because they are anonymous. It has long been recognised that anonymity leads to de-individuation and subsequently all manner of negative behaviour. Just think back to any and all crowd-based disturbance – it is individuals within the crowd that cause the most harm, act in the most violent, antisocial and even criminal ways, simply because they are anonymous, and their individual actions are less detectable.

It is a small number in the grand scheme of things, of individuals who start the ball rolling by trolling and cyberbullies continue in their wake once the poison has been injected into the comments on social media platforms. As with trolls, cyberbullies are anonymous and their actions are kept, albeit very close to the line, within the parameters of what is ‘legal’. In the UK cyberbullying is not, in itself a crime – shocking, but true. There are specific laws that might be breached by trolling someone online, such as the Malicious Communications Act (1988), the Protection from Harassment Act (1997) or the Communications Act (2003) to name but three – but how do you prosecute someone who is anonymous? Who ensures that their actions are as close to illegal as they can get, without crossing that line? Basically, you can’t.

So why are celebrities such as Jesy being targeted? Is it jealousy? Or is it something else?

In answering this question, I can only voice my own view, one that I have talked about for some time. It may be explained by the fact that we now pretty much all have social media and can ‘connect’ with celebrity accounts.
across numerous platforms. Celebrities are now immediately accessible. We feed off their comments and tweets, we see and review their photos as they live their lives in the public sphere and, as such, we feel a far stronger connection with our chosen celebs. For their part they send us ‘blanket statements’ about how much they love us, how much they are thankful for our support of their latest album, movie, TV role, or award. But this is a precarious situation as now we can feel that we ‘own’ our celebrity, that without us they are nothing, that we gave them their status and that we can control their future success or failure.

“One of the key reasons that trolls ‘troll’ and cyberbullies ‘bully’ online is because they are anonymous. It has long been recognised that anonymity leads to de-individuation and subsequently all manner of negative behaviour”

For celebrities such as Jesy, in 2011 the feelings of ownership can be argued to be particularly important. The public had journeyed with Little Mix from being created on The X Factor, as each band member auditioned as a solo artist, through their auditions as a group, to the judges’ houses and finally voting for them to win. Social media accounts were created as part of their existence and platforms were regularly updated with news about their journey; this all added to establish a sense of ownership of the band’s successes – ‘If we don’t vote for them, they will be sent home this week’, and the public developed a need to be connected to them 24-7, expected immediate responses to and likes of comments and tweets, feeling let down if responses are not quick enough. The activity of favourites were compared to fellow band members and the ‘who is your favourite?’ question was raised. Mine, by the way, was always Jesy! A comparator that has always been made between females, and is now on the rise for males too, is about idealised (and outdated) looks, body shape and size – for example: too thin, too fat, too small, too big, too short, too tall, too white, too black, too flat-chested, too busty.

That favouritism of one person over another then offers the opportunity for trolls to make their first insinuations and drip-feeding of poison on to the platform – someone responds to them, it feeds their need to add more negativity and so it begins. Cyberbullies then see an opportunity to really dig in with some nastiness, again, by responding, their negativity and hatefulfulness grows. They positively ‘thrive’ on the defence of their chosen target. They don’t care what you think of them, you don’t know who they are, they could be anyone for all you know. And there is that anonymity again.

So how can you protect yourself from experiencing the psychological harm that comes from persistent pervasive drip-feeding of poison about looks, body shape, personality, talents, or other personal attribute aimed at bringing about maximum hurt?

To take back control...

1. Make it known that you are coming off social media and do so straight away. You do not have to justify the decision, and do not wait around for the bullies to respond. Just close your accounts.

2. Now identify what is causing you the most upset. Is it the words? Are they tapping into your own insecurities? Or is it the intention behind their words that is most upsetting? Is it something else? If you don’t know, speak to close others, family or friends, and ask for their view.

3. Once identified, focus on what impact experiencing the cyberbullying and trolling is having on your mental health. Be honest with yourself and speak to others close to you about how they feel it is impacting you. Remember that they see you from the outside, from your behaviour and responding to them, not from the inside – as you do. Don’t feel judged or guilty, it is simply about identifying what it is that you are finding difficult.

4. Next, address the immediate issue about your mental health. If it is having a detrimental effect on your day-to-day life, speak to your GP. Take someone with you if you feel able to. Having a second ‘voice’ can often be helpful to identify issues that you might forget about, or that you haven’t identified. Your GP needs as much information as possible to help you properly. If you are not impacted on a day-to-day basis, once your mental health is on a stable footing, ask yourself whether you feel able to tackle this without professional help, or whether you should undertake some counselling? Or whether you are willing to work with close others and importantly are your close others able to, although they may desperately want to, support you properly? If no to the latter, seek out a counsellor or seek advice online or over the phone from one of the many mental health charities that exist. MindOut, Mind, NHS mental health and wellbeing support and Young Minds can help in signposting you to appropriate support networks.

5. Recognise that working through the effects of your psychological and emotional trauma is not a quick process. It takes time at all to knock someone down. For chronic attacks this is exaggerated, but it takes a long time for them to have the confidence to stand up again. Be invested in building up your resilience and confidence.

6. Surround yourself with people who mean something to you. Do not isolate yourself – we are social creatures and need to be with others. If you live alone, join a group and get involved in community activities. If you are religious get involved in your faiths’ community projects. I am sure that your volunteering will be most gratefully received, and I believe even permitted under tier three restrictions – but do check! There are ways that you can be active and be sociable that do not involve going to the pub. Which, by the way, is totally out for anyone in tier three anyway.

7. Live your life free from the chains of those who brought you down.

8. Always remember that you are you and only you can be you. It is not for others to tell you who you are, and anyone who wants to do so is simply not worth your concern. Be stronger than them and remove yourself from the equation. Take you back from them and always have the lyrics from Little Mix to hand.
Dear UK government: Why LGBTQ+ youth need anti-bullying provisions

Rachel Badham talks to Dr Ben Colliver about withdrawal of funding for schools

In November 2020, the UK government announced it would be cutting funding for the Homophobic, Biphobic and Transphobic Challenge Fund – an initiative designed to protect LGBTQ+ school students and staff from discrimination and prejudice. Although it was not compulsory, it provided free workshops and training for all UK schools, with the cuts leaving many concerned about the lack of attention the government is giving to the struggles of LGBTQ+ youth.

The announcement was met by immediate backlash from LGBTQ+ organisations, including Stonewall, which asked queer social media users to share their experiences of bullying at school. The responses found many experienced daily harassment at school and suffered from depression and even suicidal thoughts as a result. Some cases of bullying have been even more extreme, with students being physically assaulted and even committing suicide.

Respondents also emphasised the lack of LGBTQ+ topics featured in school curricula, and some even said they were bullied by members of staff for their sexual orientation or gender identity. But despite the sheer volume of LGBTQ+ youth who are subjected to bullying on a daily basis, the government is now turning a blind eye to the issue.

Dr Ben Colliver is a lecturer in criminology at Birmingham City University who specialises in research on gender, hate crimes and issues of inclusion, particularly in regards to the LGBTQ+ community. After his history of working alongside LGBTQ+ students, he was particularly disappointed at the news. Ben, who used to work with METRO London, an LGBTQ+ charity dedicated to providing health and community services, said: “I’ve done work in schools around teacher training and workshops with students... it’s all had such a positive impact so the news is massively disappointing.”

He theorised about why the UK government is neglecting the LGBTQ+ community: “There's a huge amount of things going on at the moment, but I don't think commitment to equality, inclusion and LGBTQ+ awareness has been a top Conservative priority.” He said that, while the government tends to appease the community temporarily, it is not committed to long-term change, with Ben describing the funding as “brilliant” when it was first introduced, but insufficient if only provided for a short amount of time.

During his time working with METRO, he heard about many of the issues LGBTQ+ students faced on a daily basis: “It ranged from passing comments, which are made out of ignorance, to continued harassment and physical violence.” He also found many schools tried to deal with cases such as this by applying the standard anti-bullying framework, which is often insufficient to tackle the level of prejudice to which young LGBTQ+ people are sometimes subjected. While the majority of teachers he came into contact with had dealt with anti-LGBTQ+ bullying, he found there was “no consistent level of awareness”, with many lacking confidence on how to deal with such issues. He said: “Where teachers haven't received training, they don't feel equipped to approach these issues so instead you just have silence.” He added that LGBTQ+ teachers are often left to address bullying, when it should be a shared responsibility.

However, he believes schools do have the potential to positively impact LGBTQ+ youth. Media representation is not always accurate, with it “often relying on stereotypes, so what you have is the reinforcement of a particular version of LGBTQ+ people which is not always positive”. Ben said schools should be a safe space where young people can address these problems and learn about inclusion and acceptance, but they can only be such a place if they receive adequate resources and funding.

In response to the recent budget cuts, he said: “Whoever made the decision should probably talk to schools that have been affected, and talk to people who have experienced bullying for their sexual orientation/gender identity. The government’s decision-making process relies quite heavily on statistics and a cost benefit analysis, but actually people’s stories are really powerful and you can’t quantify the impact that the cuts will have with statistics. Listen to the people who have received training about the way it impacted the way that they work and their confidence levels.”

What is evident is the experiences of young LGBTQ+ people and teachers has been very much ignored in the government’s decision-making process. Without essential funding, the workshops and training, which Ben found to be a lifeline for so many, cannot continue on the same scale. The UK government needs to address the backlash to its decision and understand why so many are dismayed over the cuts. More than ever, LGBTQ+ youth need support and for the government to meet these needs instead of overlooking them.
New beginnings...

When do they start? Sam Adams, the Real Life Coach, on how life-changing events can be just what your future needs.

When did life-changing events start? Sam Adams, the Real Life Coach, on New beginnings...

There was a time in my life when things were

my role is to help people wake the f*ck up. I'm known as The Real Life coach. I deal with new beginning at any point in your life. What we need to realise is you can make a fall off the wagon by mid-February – and don’t last. Research shows that most people previous year.

A lot of us leave our new beginnings, fresh starts, renewals – whatever you want to call them – until January 1, or a few days prior when we start reflecting on what we want to be different in the coming year from the previous year.

Thing is, New Year’s resolutions generally don’t last. Research shows that most people fall off the wagon by mid-February – and what we need to realise is you can make a new beginning at any point in your life.

I’m known as The Real Life coach. I deal with people’s new beginnings all the time, part of my role is to help people wake the f*ck up.

There was a time in my life when things were really tough. I hadn’t wanted to carry on. I just wanted to walk off the face of the earth and stop the pain. Luckily I found a way to pick myself up. And boy, am I glad I did. If 2020 hasn’t been the year you wanted it to be, trust me when I say that you can start again. That you are 20 minutes away from a different kind of feeling, a different kind of emotion. That’s all it takes. You are here for a reason.

A new beginning is something you could choose to do every single day, but most of us don’t. I help my clients wake up every day with a fresh start, checking in with themselves mentally and physically. I encourage them not to carry forward into today the worries and woes of yesterday, the disappointments, the failures. Each day is precious. If the pandemic has taught us anything, it should be that we don’t know what’s around the corner. So let’s make the best of today.

New beginnings are a chance to be better than you were yesterday.

It takes courage to have new beginnings. A lot of people come to me and want to be confident. They want to try something new, but they’re frightened.

How do we get that confidence to begin again? Courage – having the courage to face our fears and lean into something new to start again. Instead of thinking ‘I want to be confident’, say ‘I’m going to be courageous’. And there’s nothing wrong with having made mistakes along the way. In order to be successful in life, you have to experience failure, rejection, hurdles and challenges.

So, when is the best time for a new beginning? The best time is now. One of my favourite quotes about this is from Lao Tzu: “New Beginnings are often disguised as painful endings.”

Just know that you can pick up and start afresh any time. See each day as a fresh start. Sometimes we don’t want a new beginning because we fear the judgement and opinion of others, but they’re not you. They’re not living your life. They’re not feeling your feelings or having your thoughts.

Steps to a fresh start

1. Accept that you might have changed, accept that you may have made a mistake… you’re human, it’s okay.

2. Talk to someone about it – maybe not your friends but someone who will listen. Let it all out, what you want life to be like in glorious technicolour, and be 100% honest.

3. Write out everything that’s spinning around in your head. Unleashing all the inner thoughts to paper gives you clarity.

4. Write out a worst-case scenario – be detailed. You’ll probably find that the worst case isn’t all that bad.

5. I’m big on positive habits and maybe you just need to shake a few up. So look at how you organise your day and make a few changes. Live with it, reflect on it and then tweak and go again.

6. Draw up a plan of this new beginning, it doesn’t have to be drastic. Plan it out, get an accountability buddy and stick to it.

Get Real… Change means not pretending or lying to ourselves. Be positive, say yes to new things, and go do more of what YOU want rather than what you feel obligated to do.

More info

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Pictures courtesy of Nicky Thomas NXPhoto.
A Human Touch

Richard Jeneway on why the physical distancing everyone has had to endure of late is so damaging to the human psyche

We are all anticipating that Covid will be under control soon, with the introduction of a vaccine giving hope that life for many will return to a form of normal and allow much-needed hugging and embracing, as touch deprivation – or ‘skin hunger’ – is a reality for many.

From the moment we are born, humans crave touch; skin to skin. Lack of touch as children impacts on us as we develop in terms of behaviour and attitude to others. Touch produces the feel-good oxytocin in our brains as well as a cocktail of other hormones.

From my own perspective, when it comes to self-distancing I miss that initial handshake, hug or kiss, although I am very aware that some people can feel uncomfortable with this regardless of quarantine. However, there is evidence from various studies that humans need to touch, meet in groups and socialise. Some of our LGBTQ+ community have historically maintained a barrier to avoid rejection and heartbreak, despite in many cases being sexually active. Intimacy and touch need not be sexual but can be gained by finding solace in the use of alcohol and drugs. But there are some remedies we can consider to help overcome skin hunger. For those of us with pets, cuddling and stroking them can be mutually beneficial, although this is not for everyone.

Other remedies that may be of help include self-massage, which can be sexual, for example masturbation, stroking an arm, or even meditation and yoga.

Sound can also help, specifically the sensation of ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response) which is the tingling feeling that you get through certain auditory experiences such as the brushing of hair near the ear, tapping on the table, a whisper and countless others, often subtle and quiet.

Going back a few years to when we were organising and delivering therapy events for the HIV community, I can recall clearly feedback from some having received hands-on massage by a qualified masseur/masseuse or reflexologist that it had a beneficial impact and profoundly for some was the first hands-on body contact for a long time.

On a personal note, as someone with sight-loss, I live in a more tactile world than the sighted. This means to me that absence of touch, especially with friends and family, can be more exaggerated and more intense than perhaps others realise. I am lucky enough to live with a partner and three dogs, which provides me with much tactile need, however I do miss the pre-Covid freedom that we took for granted.

With this new year, hopefully when a sense of a new normality resumes, we can look forward to meeting up in social groups and gatherings for that long-overdue hug.

Culturally and contextually appropriate touch is essential for human development, having a profound impact upon how we function individually and collectively in society.

As someone with sight-loss, I live in a more tactile world than the sighted. This means to me that absence of touch, especially with friends and family, can be more exaggerated and more intense than perhaps others realise.

The science bit

The need for touch is biologically ‘hardwired’ into our nervous system before birth and is the first sensory system to develop in humans; touch is therefore our instinctive language of compassion, which is at the core of human bonding.

Physical touch also stimulates the cranial vagus nerve, which connects to the heart and digestive system. When stimulated, the vagus nerve decreases both heart rate and the ‘stress hormone’ cortisol, while also enabling the release of the ‘happy hormone’ serotonin and the ‘love hormone’ oxytocin.

Touch, therefore, helps reduce stress, decrease the risk of disease, strengthen the immune system, and communicate compassion between individuals.

Conversely, touch deprivation can lead to developmental delay in children as physical stimulation facilitates growth and development. For that reason, touch is considered to be as important to physical development in children as nutrition.

Research has also found that high levels of physical touch received during childhood can lead to lower levels of aggressive behaviour in adulthood; when touch is limited or absent during the formative years, aggressive behaviour in adulthood increases. Consequently, the absence of touch and healthy attachment between child and primary carer is likely to contribute to interpersonal and emotional difficulties in adolescence and beyond.

In the words of Michelangelo (1475-1564): “To touch can be to give life.”

Andi Myles-Wright
CPsychol AFBPsS
British Psychological Society Chartered Psychologist and Associate Fellow in Psychology
TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

Dr Graham Bloor, whose son, Paddy, died after taking GHB, reflects on what the most recent review of the drug means and why it doesn’t go far enough

1. Paddy, I think, would be amused to see what has happened. GHB was just another drug to him; if a little of drug X works then more drug X is better and so, almost three years ago in Brighton, he died. He would have been 24 years old now and no doubt still partying.

The campaign started with a simple article in Gscene back in June 2018. I needed to talk about Paddy and I thought that writing about him would be cathartic. It was nowhere near enough. The response to describing him and our pain when it was so raw, was incredible. Unlike me, Paddy loved being the centre of attention. I wonder what he’d think of what followed? He was the central feature of a Channel 4 documentary, Buzzfeed and various newspaper articles. Even the BBC and Sky News included him. Just as important though, was a Sheffield University drugs awareness video and various projects by university students as part of their nursing, media studies and journalism courses. And it all started with Gscene’s editor James Ledward who sadly passed away last year; thank you so much James.

Through Paddy’s story, I have met wonderful people who truly care about the issues: Patrick Strudwick (journalist), Brian Paddick (retired police officer and member of the House of Lords), and Monty Moncrieff (chief executive of London Friend). Others have shared their personal stories and agonies when a young person dies. It’s heartbreaking and some, years later, have yet to come to terms with it. Please remember this before choosing to take GHB.

So, Paddy’s story is out there and still being talked about. GHB is now a class B drug, there is increased awareness of its dangers and toxicology screening is improving. For me, it’s all too little, too late, but this is tempered by understanding that GHB use is only one part of a much bigger problem and, as such, there is no quick fix.

"Until we recognise GHB’s role in acute emergency medicine, we will not appreciate its insidious effect on people early enough in the drug-use cycle to avoid longer-term problems"

First though, the good news. In response to a request by the home secretary, the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs published a review of GHB on the November 20, 2020. Thankfully, rather than simply blaming users, it focused on the need to recognise the unique dangers of GHB and the need to improve awareness. Also, it specified that coroners now must explain why GHB was not tested for. It’s a start; monitoring systems are in place to improve testing and support. We should now be able to report more accurately just how many deaths in the UK are linked to GHB use.

Less impressive, and as a doctor personally frustrating, is that the message was aimed at sexual and mental health clinics but not A&E departments nor intensive care units.

Clearly the devastating long-term mental, sexual and social effects of GHB abuse were addressed and hopefully support for users will improve. However, until we recognise GHB’s role in acute emergency medicine, we will not appreciate its insidious effect on people early enough in the drug-use cycle to avoid longer-term problems. At first, GHB use was, in the main, unrecognised by most doctors, toxicologists, coroners and politicians. The horse has already bolted for some but there are many who remain at risk. A&E workload is an early indicator of future morbidity and it is for these patients that advice and support will best reduce future morbidity and hopefully mortality.

Looking at wider issues, GHB is mainly but not uniquely an LGBT+ problem. Yes, the Reynhard Sinaga multiple rapes were predominantly, although not exclusively, of gay men. However, the black-cab rapist John Worboys attacked young women. Murders such as those in the Stephen Port case have, to date, been limited to gay men, however.

It seems to me that there is a wider problem relating to safety and reasons for taking drugs in the first place. Recreational drugs should be decriminalised and, from that, quality controlled and advice for harm reduction provided at source. (While we have classification, of course GHB should be included and I believe increased to class A.)

Behaviour can change. We’ve had to accept social distancing in response to Covid-19 so why not raise awareness of the risk of drinks being spiked? Keep an eye on your drinks at all times, and don’t accept a drink unless you’ve seen it being poured. Likewise, if you must use recreational drugs, then take them as safely as you can with full knowledge of the risks. With GHB, have a “designated driver”. Some will be old enough to remember LSD parties where one person stayed sober to help with a bad trip. Better still, avoid GHB altogether. There are other, safer euphorics out there. We’re never going to totally prevent drug deaths but with understanding of risk comes harm reduction.

I haven’t talked about the long-term effects of GHB abuse but they are multiple and frightening. GHB addiction is incredibly damaging, difficult to treat and withdrawal needs medical supervision. Paddy never got that far but I think he would have.

Finally, a personal plea. If someone taking G starts snoring, don’t ignore it. It is a medical emergency; call for an ambulance. That person is losing his airway and has respiratory depression. He is choking and without urgent treatment, oxygen delivery to his brain will stop and brain damage, cardiac arrest and death will inevitably follow. This was Paddy’s final story.

Dry January anyone? Whatever you decide, be safe.

Love, Graham
From Top to Bottom

Rory Finn speaks to a former chemsex partygoer and a health worker about their reflections on the allure of drugs and sex and why so many gay men are drawn to this lifestyle.

What is the attraction of chemsex?
Whole swathes of gay people experience loneliness. In a time when we’re meant to be more connected than ever, finding that connection is hard. Drugs with sex creates a perception of intimacy.

There is also a camaraderie about it. That you’re part of a sub-group with a common aim and flouting convention. It attracts people with a hedonistic streak, who like to push boundaries, and people who are trying to find more intense ways of finding sexual pleasure.

In the gay scene we have always done things differently, and outside the norm of expected behaviour. We’ve always had cruising and cottaging. Anything new and exciting is going to be jumped on.

This is like a new club, the new cool place to be, but it feels safer as it’s done in private, in people’s homes. Whereas they might have gone to cruising in the past, now they can be in someone’s home.

I think the people doing it have very low self-esteem and low respect for themselves and others. It attracts people with addictive personalities. Some people would class sex as their addiction.

It comes from a place of loneliness first. You look online and see PnP and HnH, it’s a shorthand; ‘party and play’ and ‘high and horny’. It cuts out the crap as you know what you’re walking into, a room of naked people and you know the score. Although it has to be said, this is not true of some of the young lads there for the first time. It’s code for the perceived intimacy and pleasures to be had.

But that intimacy is false. G is supposed to loosen your inhibitions. But how inhibited do you want me to be if I’m already turning up to a sex party? It’s an illusion for people who feel unable to be themselves sober.

People talk about f***ing for hours and hours on drugs, but I would question what intimacy they are really achieving as it’s chemically induced.

Does chemsex feel different to sober sex?
Sober sex is more real, and you can perform properly! There is more of a real connection with people sober than when under the influence of chems. You could be at a chillout and say there are three or four men there, but these are people you wouldn’t touch with a barge pole if you were sober. Chems skews your idea of what you want and who you are attracted to. At a party, half the people there are sitting on their phone scrolling through Grindr waiting for the next big thing to walk through the door. It’s self-gratification but with a lack of self-respect.

You’ll see all kinds of people, ordinary and lonely people. The age range is vast: guys in their twenties to fifties. People out of long-term relationships who are struggling with adapting to the way people meet now. You used to meet people in clubs and have more of a social interaction. But now it’s more app-based. And even more so with Covid. If you are managing a sex ‘addiction’ anyway, this is just an added opportunity.

How do people get involved in the first place?
Perhaps you’re at a party and a pipe [for Tina/crystal meth] is going around. If you’ve had a [cannabis] joint already, or in the past, then why not give it a try? As they say, when in Rome. People might be offering G with a bit of cola – it tastes disgusting so needs to be mixed.

There is an immediate sensation of a loosening, a fuzziness, a sense of relaxation. With Tina there can be an intimacy of blowbacks – where you are inhaling and exhaling to and from another person’s mouth.

If you continue finding yourself in these situations, then you need to take control. By this I mean dosing yourself rather than accepting premixed from someone else. You don’t know what people are putting in their glasses. It’s really easy to overdose with 1ml/2ml, so it’s wise to take some control. Ask to see the drug being added if possible. You can have the false belief that other people are looking after you, that someone is being mum. And someone is, but they could be evil mum.

What are the psychological factors?
For whatever reason gay men have always done it. We’ve never really looked after ourselves or our peers. I don’t know if...
Every three months becomes once a month, to be in the same room. People you wouldn’t ordinarily put somewhere and people will think, why are you an older guy who has drugs will walk in necessarily feel welcome at. For example, access to spaces you otherwise wouldn’t. So that’s a potent driver. It can give you ugly, no one wants me. Grindr, and there’s no messages, we think ‘I’m – from guys wanting to party. If we turn on there are going to be a lot of hits – messages. If you’ve got HnH or PnP on your profile Is all the sex you’re having chemsex related? people find it really difficult to answer that. When was the last time you had sober sex? A lot of the time. But you need to ask yourself: when was the last time you had sober sex? A lot of the time. It doesn’t impinge on any other aspect of their lives.

“What is your best and worst experience with chemsex?”

So that’s a potent driver. It can give you access to spaces you otherwise wouldn’t necessarily feel welcome at. For example, an older guy who has drugs will walk in somewhere and people will think, why are you here? Then they realise, oh it’s because he has drugs. People you wouldn’t ordinarily put together will be in the same room.

Every three months becomes once a month, becomes every weekend, then Monday you’re calling in sick to work. People turning to it more when they’re stressed. Stress will exacerbate drug use. Plus being in a room full of naked people is freeing and exciting.

Can you return to sober sex?

There is a way out but you have to ask for help. There is support out there, which is quick to access. The sexual health clinic, Clinic M, and Terrence Higgins Trust (THT) are spot on about providing support. Recognising the problem is the issue: not everyone’s rock bottom is the same. It could be ‘Oh Christ I had sex with that guy last night’ to ‘Oh shit I’ve lost my job’ or ‘I’m going to lose my house’. It could be being diagnosed with an STI. There is a state of mind that doesn’t really care anymore. If you don’t care about yourself, you’re not caring about other people. There is that kamikaze attitude to life. If you’re feeling vulnerable and lonely, and not giving a shit about life, then death is not a deterrent. Men troubled with drug problems do not believe in they are worth anything.

So you’re not going to hear it when someone tries to help you. You have to ask for it first. Otherwise you can provide information as much as you like, but they might be beyond making informed choices. People are disconnected from the harms. It falls on deaf ears – ‘this might kill you’. You could say the same to a smoker.

Do you think legislation will help?

It is already illegal. I don’t know what else could be done. I don’t think legislation or decriminalisation would make much difference specifically to chemsex. People will continue to do it. Harm prevention support is already there. Which of course needs funding.

G specifically is a different thing. The murders and rapes that have happened could have been made more difficult if it was harder to obtain.

What support is there for people?

THT Brighton has a project called Face to Face, which supports people affected by chemsex. Typically four to eight sessions long. Anyone can self-refer but there is little to be gained in seeing someone who is actively using. A bit of abstinence of at least six weeks is needed. Otherwise you are just talking in circles. Consciously you know what you need to be doing but unconsciously you’re nowhere near it.

What happens in those session depends on the individual but a lot of self-reflection is involved. What is your best and worst experience, what percentage is good vs bad? Have you found yourself doing yosomething you wouldn’t ordinarily do? Have you found yourself in a situation you’d rather not be in? Have you lost work, friends, lovers? How are your come downs? What frightens you about sober sex? When was the last time you had sober sex?

If you are not sure, there are lots of resources online. Talk to someone at a sexual health clinic when you go for your screening.

THT Chemsex Awareness Training

THT will be running a new Chemsex Awareness Training Course from January covering:

• What chemsex is

• Breakdown of the different drugs that are used during chemsex

• Findings from chemsex survey carried out by THT, BuzzFeed and Channel 4

• The impact of chemsex on individuals

• Guidance around support that can be offered to people involved in chemsex

The training is free, and will be delivered interactively via Zoom.

For more information and to book a place, email brightontraining@tht.org.uk

Online resources, services & further reading:

• www.gmfa.org.uk/Pages/Category/safer-chems

• www.fridaymonday.org.uk

• www.tht.org.uk

• www.brightonsexualhealth.com/service/clinic-m/
A H(app)y Ending?

Between lockdowns and health fears, the pandemic has had a major impact on the habits of people using dating apps – and on the nature of the apps themselves. Jaq Bayles reports

There’s an app for everything, and for some things there are many apps: case in point – if a dating app was looking for a hook-up with attractive similar, shared interests, it wouldn’t have far to go.

While you might be forgiven for thinking a global pandemic that confined much of the world’s population to their homes for months on end would put paid to prospects for a new swipe-right romance, lockdowns appear to have had led to a surge in dating app usage.

A flurry of new apps coming at dating from a different angle have hit smartphones in recent months, while the stalwarts have – to embrace the word du jour when it comes to the pandemic approach – pivoted their approach to reflect the constraints of pandemic restrictions as well as the adjusted requirements of users.

Some of the big names have logged a rise in video dates, with younger-generation users who have grown up under the influence of social media reportedly seeking fulfilling online experiences rather than only real-life meet-ups.

And updates to recently launched free apps are acting more along social media lines, including Fiorry, released under a year ago “to provide a safe space for a gender diverse community where people can find love and friendship”. Squarely focusing on trans and non-binary users, the app has attracted some 100,000 regular users, around 40% of them trans.

Founder and CEO Kirill M, who developed the app in response to his trans woman friend’s lament that there were no appropriate dating apps in existence for the trans community, says: “We were worried users would be 90% cis men. Some trans people want to meet cis people but some want to avoid them.”

The app also taps into the awareness that some people only want their profiles to be visible to users in specific age and/or gender groups, and they may not want to disclose certain information, such as their location. While such features are currently paid for, Kirill is working up to making them free in the future.

“Squarely focusing on trans and non-binary users, the app has attracted some 100,000 regular users, around 40% of them trans”

Also, the app doesn’t have a swiping mechanism, instead working more like social media, with messaging at its heart.

As part of its commitment to the trans community, the app’s creators have pledged that once it reaches “the milestone of 15,000 trans users who use the platform in a single day, we will sponsor five of them. Each sponsored user will then receive $5,000 from Fiorry, which they can spend at their convenience toward their personal transition goals”.

The team is also “cracking down on harassing behaviour and filtering out fake profiles”, while security is an ongoing area of improvement.

Security is also on the mind of serial app designer David Minns, whose self-confessed niche offerings include Dinky One (small penis dating), 20 (age gap dating) and Bald Dating (bald person dating) and he has now added So GAY!, “a serious dating site for gay, bisexual men and transgender folk”.

David says that “So GAY! has been named to turn a negative slur into a positive message” after he realised through a chat-based app he designed that the term was favoured as an insult by teenagers. “I thought it was something that could be embraced. I would hope it would filter through and start to undo some of [the insistence on using the term as an insult].” David believes: “Some of the existing gay apps have had awful privacy policies or are lacking security. For example, adding users’ private images into publicly accessible folders or storing GPS locations so accurately that you can reverse-engineer a user’s location. So GAY! has a strong focus on
Confidence appears to have been a key driver when it comes to the new ways in which people have been using dating apps. David points to research showing that the number of people using dating apps has increased since lockdown, but the way in which they're using them has also had to radically change. He points out that hook-up apps are very visual, often requiring both a photo and a precise GPS location to fulfil the remit that people may want to “meet someone now who’s less than an hour away”. But a number of apps released in the recent time frame have been leaning towards promoting more video messaging. “There’s been quite a trend in the industry of one-to-many video”, but he says more people are likely to favour one to one video. Big brands like Match have added one-to-one video – but even then “you’ve got to be a very confident person to fire up a video to someone you don’t know – text gives you time to think about it.”

As to whether this trend will continue once restrictions are lifted, he says it could flip either way. “Will people become extra liberal because they’ve been detached for so long or will there be more of the same kind of nervousness about it? I don’t know if we will end up with a polarised situation.”

“The app offers tips on how to maintain a healthy relationship, as well as quizzes, conversations and games, and a series of pieces on LGBTQ+ relationships specifically has been commissioned”

But he does see the increase in use continuing. “In the UK since lockdown the number of people using dating apps has really increased.” With people “confined indoors, general internet access went up because there was no way to socialise with anybody in a bar or going out. Way more people will be converted to online.”

But once you’ve found that special someone, how do you maintain a healthy partnership? That’s an area being addressed by Paired, a relationship education app co-founded by Kevin Shanahan who brought in the expertise of Brighton-based Dr Jacqui Gabb, professor of intimacy & sociology at The Open University, as chief relationships officer for the couples app. Launched in October 2020, its aim is to be completely inclusive, working for people across the spectrum of sexuality – and it recently won the Google Play Awards personal growth category.

“When I agreed to do this I said it had to be fully inclusive,” says Jacqui, who is also the author of the Enduring Love study. She insisted there could be no judgement on areas such as marital status, or the way people conduct their relationships and should make no assumptions around issues such as cohabitation or religiosity. “We are very attentive to the fact there are a lot of types of relationship,” she adds.

The app offers tips on how to maintain a healthy relationship, as well as quizzes, conversations and games, and a series of pieces on LGBTQ+ relationships specifically has been commissioned.

“There may be differences between heterosexual and LGBTQ+ relationships, but there are also a lot of similarities,” says Jacqui. The app is at the point where it wants to talk directly to specific groups of people, trying to be attentive to issues coming up. It might be, for example, ascertaining whether monogamy is taken for granted or needs to be discussed, or how people negotiate power where there’s no gender difference. “We know homophobia is out there so we are dealing with some of those things and their impact.”

She adds that around 40% of relationships don’t work, for which reason many people may be coming to a new relationship in their 50s, and points out that in the UK after the age of 16 no one gets any kind of relationship education, while in the States most of that happens through the church, which leaves a lot of people turning to Google for answers to relationship questions.

But she refers to Paired as “relationship care, not therapy – think of it as a preventative measure. How do you stop people becoming miserable and unhappy?” She recommends doing “daily things, regular things that will instil changes in relationship behaviour – dailyness is core in terms of relationship care”. She’s mindful that this may sound “really boring” but asks: “How often a day are you actively doing something for your relationship? Everyday gestures like bringing a person a cup of tea, or taking the dog out when it’s raining show your partner that you are in this together.”

But she makes the point that the app “is not saying everyone should stay together – it’s mindful that domestic violence has gone through the roof.”
Since launch the two issues of the zine have had more than 6,000 views in 58 countries, and Harry is particularly enamoured of the fact that he can reach people in their own homes. “I wanted it to be free so, regardless of finance, people could have a slice of queer art to enjoy at home,” he says, adding: “I wanted it to be fun, honest, tender, entertaining, and not restricted to a type of genre.”

To that end, among the aforementioned content is Harry’s own account of being five-years sober, reflecting his philosophy that “sobriety has been such a helpful thing for me and could be helpful for others – it felt like that was a nice way of offering all of that.”

And clearly he isn’t alone in those thoughts – the third and fourth issues of You Otter Know are being put together with some support from the Arts Council, so 2021 will see a continuation of the project, although there is no release date as yet.

“I’m being flexible in working with my collaborators. I like the idea of just dropping it when it feels finished – I find it quite exciting to just be, like, ‘Tadaah!’”

To continue with a magical metaphor, the zine work has conjured out of the hat something of a springboard for Harry’s creative processes. “With the new work I started to ponder in my head what would I make next. Not what do I want to do but what do I need? What would be a tonic? So I have started asking those questions.

“I was planning to look at a new show this summer, but how do you get around some of the new challenges, artistically and practically? I’ve been taking a look over the stories of how people are doing so far – it’s a different world to make work in and it’s important to talk to others.

“I’ve been very lucky to have the support of pals around me as well as a project. We’ve all been going through the same thing as to what the future looks like. It’s important to talk and share thoughts and feelings and not keep them bottled up. Even if you might not be able to

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Otterly thoughtful

Making good on his promise to deliver a free slice of queer art to people’s homes, Harry Clayton-Wright looks back on his lockdown-born zine project and ahead to its continuation as well as a different world of performance. By Jaq Bayles

Before the pandemic struck, Harry Clayton-Wright’s 2020 looked like it was going to be a whirlwind of touring around the UK and Australia with his theatre show Sex Education, which won both a Brighton Fringe Award (2017) and the Melbourne Fringe Award in Edinburgh (2019).

Instead, he found himself moving from the Brighton base he had set up to make touring the south of England more accessible back to his mum’s house in Blackpool as the country was plunged into its first lockdown of 2020.

“I didn’t think at the start of the year that I’d be making digital zines,” muses Harry from his northern home on a cold late-November morning, alluding to his lockdown-conceived project, You Otter Know. “I was on tour, they shut down theatres and cancelled all of the work for the rest of the year. I was meant to be in Australia in the autumn.”

But rather than dwell on what should have been, he started asking: “What could I deliver safely, how can I work as an artist?”

The answer? “Knowing that the safest way to create and present work would be to operate digitally, I’ve moved my practice from hallowed theatre stages to crafting zines and releasing them online (all from my childhood bedroom). Reaching thousands of people in over 50 countries. Working with artists across Zooms and Google Docs in three continents. Assembling a digital variety show between the pages…”

Harry has “always loved zines, vintage erotica”, so this collaboration with Polari Press was the perfect foil for that, taking inspiration from the graphic design of retro erotica from the 70s, 80s and 90s.

“It’s meant to look like those magazines you might find in a bush or a call box, but also it looks really beautiful,” says Harry of the adults-only delve into art, humour, glossy photo spreads, illustrations, poetry, new writing and important life lessons.

And it all comes with a big helping of input from some of Harry’s artistic friends, among them queer Australian songwriter Brendan Maclean, writer, comedian, performance artist and theatre maker Krishna Istha and cabaret artist Symoné.

“It was me just asking my friends, all people I have worked with and whose work I love. I sent a message to a few friends saying ‘hey I’ve got this idea, would you be up for it?’ A lot of them said yes and it’s been a really lovely process.”
achieve something you want at the moment in terms of staging something, those ideas are still really important,” Harry stresses.

“Art is always such an important thing for people and when it’s time to come together and share, that’s when performers will be ready to go. I understand how hard it is and wish I could give everyone a huge, distanced hug.”

It seems impossible for this creatively fluid artiste to exude anything other than an aura of optimism, to which end he winds up on a positive note about how the pandemic has actually created a space for people to have important and meaningful conversations, to contemplate and reflect on events that may not otherwise have seen such wide focus – Black Lives Matter being the obvious subject.

“We need to take the things we have learned this year and not go back to the old ways,” he says. “This was so never in our playbook of how we thought we would have to live.

“This year has been really tricky so you have to be proud of yourself for getting through it.”

more info

http://hcw.horse
@HClaytonWright
www.instagram.com/hclaytonwright


Continuing Brighton links

You Otter Know was commissioned by Marlborough Productions (MP), which has supported Harry’s projects since 2017.

MP is a leading UK producer of queer-led, intersectional performance, parties and radical community gatherings. Since 2018 MP has produced the flagship national touring projects New Queers on the Block and Brownton Abbey bringing contemporary LGBTQ+ culture to communities across the UK.

MP is renowned for its commitment to developing LGBTQ+ artistic talent from early career through to international significance and has played a developmental role in the careers of theatre artists including Travis Alabanza, Lucy McCormick, Rachael Young and Emma Frankland.

MP is a member of Live Art UK, the national network of Live Art promoters.
**REVIEW: Rainbow Chorus**

Brian Butler reviews *Stocking Up (Just in Case...) For Christmas*, last month’s much-needed double dose of festive cheer from the LGBTQ+ mixed choir

They say that in space no-one can hear you scream – and listening to the Rainbow Chorus’ (RC) Christmas offering, it was also true I could sing as loud as I liked and no-one could hear.

*Stocking Up (Just In Case) For Christmas* is an engaging mixture of old and new material under the direction of the inimitable Aneesa Chaudhry. RC members gathered at a social distance and with masks in St George’s Church, and also via Zoom in their individual living rooms to provide a lively programme, which is available for you to stream.

Opening the concert, RC chair Bev Morgan emphasised how difficult a year it has been – and co-chair Lindsey Stevenson highlighted the mental health issues many have experienced in isolation.

There was a rousing opener with the African Shosholoza, with accompanying drummers providing a good dance beat to kick us off. Leonard Cohen’s *Hallelujah* showed the group at their uplifting and inclusive best, and their diction was all the more remarkable as the church-based singers all wore matching rainbow masks.

A brief sortie in Queen’s Park produced the Elvis evergreen *Can’t Help Falling In Love With You*, overcoming technical difficulties and producing pleasing harmonies.

*May It Be* Now and Africa both showed great energy; the usual RC enthusiasm still shining through when they’re not in the room with you.

Some old choir favourites were served up – *Bohemian Rhapsody* and the musical theatre hit *Rhythm of Life* – but there were also some emotional highs courtesy of *Somewhere Only We Know*, *This Is Me* and *One Day Like This*.

White Christmas and *Santa Claus Is Coming To Town* sent us out into the night – figuratively speaking – and it made me think how great it will be when all our LGBTQ+ singing groups can bring us real-life joy again. Great accompaniment was provided throughout by the high-octane playing of Mojca Monte Amati.


The Rainbow Chorus supports HIV lunch club Lunch Positive.

[www.rainbowchorus.org.uk](http://www.rainbowchorus.org.uk)

[www.lunchpositive.org](http://www.lunchpositive.org)
The joy of listening to live music is only surpassed by the joy of producing it. And in this Spirit of Christmas concert, the wonderful Actually Gay Men’s Chorus have the broadest smiles on their faces – revealing their happiness to be singing in front of us, a live audience, in this most horrible of lockdown years.

Temporarily away from their home in Hove, the group were at the acoustically amazing St Mary’s Church in Kemptown.

With a socially distanced and masked audience, they managed to fill the space with the most glorious of sounds for an all-too-short 70-minute programme of festive favourites and a few newbies.

Samuel Cousins leads this chorus with enthusiasm and dedication; his programme choice was impeccable. Starting with a stunning falsetto solo from Ian Hollands, in Once In Royal David’s City, the choir seemed to grow into the vast space with some wonderful harmonies and great variety of light and shade.

They gave us 15 songs, plus two rousing encores that had the audience on their feet. The tender and haunting Bethlehem by Schoenberg suddenly erupts into a gloriously broad sound, followed surprisingly by Rex Admirabilis – a short interlude from, believe it or not, The Sound of Music!

Pianist Simon Gray gave us a delightfully jazz rhythm cool version of Good King Wenceslas, and the chorus sang to the church’s echoing rafters in O Come, All Ye Faithful which under other circumstances we would have been able to join in with.

The imitation chimes of the Ukrainian Bell Carol followed. Garcia photographer and chorus member Jack Lynn read his own poem, debunking the commercial hoo-ha of the season and cutting to the central theme of love of family and friends.

The group’s regular O Holy Night was led by a magnificent solo from Cyrus Dean, who gave a spine-tingling performance.

It was a stirring, joyful, uplifting antidote – almost as good as a vaccine.

The concert raised funds for The Sussex Beacon; it’s hoped a filmed version will be online soon – watch this space. And it’s not too late to give to the Beacon even if you didn’t get to this magical night of music.

www.sussexbeacon.org.uk

www.actuallygmc.org

All pics copyright Nick Ford Photography: www.nickfordphotography.co.uk
clubs and gigs, as well as big names like Aswad, The Au Pairs, Buzzcocks, The Clash, Misty in Roots, The Specials, Gang of Four, Steel Pulse, Tom Robinson Band and X-Ray Spex. The result was a movement which raised the consciousness of a generation.

Rock Against Racism: Militant Entertainment 1976-82 will capture the excitement of the moment and the thirst for change, setting RAR’s activities within the social and political context of the time. It will showcase the punky RAR aesthetic through posters, photography, badges, stickers, leaflets, letters from young fans across the world, as well as striking graphics from the legendary RAR fanzine, Temporary Hoarding, which has articles and interviews ranging from abortion rights to anti-colonial struggle in Zimbabwe: a platform for discussing multiple forms of oppression.

The exhibition will include documentation of the movement from photographers including Henry Grant, Red Saunders, Virginia Turbett and Val Wilmer, and material about associated campaigns including the Anti-Nazi League, Rock Against Sexism, Asian Youth and Gay Rights movements.

Bass Culture will present filmed interviews from key figures including musicians and activists, commenting on their experiences of the time, and the importance of RAR. Visitors are invited to record their own memories and draw parallels to collective movements today. A programme of learning, participation and live events will accompany the show.

Larry Achiampong will present two newly commissioned works: a sound piece heard within the exhibition, featuring the voice of Ghanaian author Ama Ata Aidoo speaking powerfully about colonialism and racial injustice, and a flag, What I Hear I Keep, to fly from the Pavilion’s flagpole.

Both works form part of the artist’s ongoing multi-site project Relic Traveller, which addresses issues around migration, displacement and nationhood through sound, film, performance and objects. Combining material that includes lost testimonies,
pop-culture and stories of fallen empire, 
Relic Traveller methodically traces an Afro-
centric narrative for the future, built on the 
dismantling of colonialism.

Achiampong says: “I’m very excited to be 
making new artworks that consider important 
histories which are often forgotten or erased. 
This is an appropriate moment to ponder the 
symbolic imperatives of Sound and Music, not 
just from a diaspora-based perspective, but 
also, the rooted relationship with the African 
continent.”

Rock Against Racism: Militant Entertainment 
1976-82 is organised by Rock Against 
Racism – Research ‘n’ Archive Project 
(RAR-RAP) and De La Warr Pavilion. RAR-
RAP includes Andy Dark, Debbie Golt, Ruth 
Gregory, Wayne Minter, Kate Webb, Lucy 
Whitman and Jo Wreford.

Rock Against Racism: Militant 
Entertainment 1976-82 @ De La Warr 
Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea TN40 1DP, Saturday, 
Tickets: www.dlwp.com
Alex Klineberg shines a light on the work of the Brighton-based artist whose first book, The Drawing Stone, focuses on the materiality of his studio practice, with photographic images exploring close-up details of surface textures and artworks in-situ.

James William Murray is a Brighton-based artist who received an MA in photography from the University of Brighton in 2015 and whose work has been exhibited in the UK and internationally.

He co-founded the Niagara Falls Projects in 2017, renovating a semi-derelict garage and adjoining workshops. The space is now used to showcase contemporary art. The project is sustained by affordable artist editions and artworks. Take a visit to the studio in Hanover and invest in some artworks by up and coming artists. You never know, one day it might be worth an awful lot.

The Drawing Stone, his first book, has just been published. It contains images of his art and an essay on Queer Formalism by Bryony Bodimeade.

“"The Drawing Stone is a small edition book made during a break from the artist’s day-to-day studio practice during the lockdown across England in spring 2020. It was conceived as a means of providing a tactile experience of the work in lieu of exhibitions, which were postponed due to the pandemic. The work focuses on the materiality of Murray’s studio practice, with photographic images exploring close up details of surface textures and artworks in-situ. It contains an essay by the artist and writer Bryony Bodimeade on touch, desire, and material intimacy with reference to the use of graphite and brass throughout the body of artwork depicted in the book."

He was artist-in-residence at the Towner Gallery in Eastbourne. He'll be jetting off in 2021 to take up an artist’s residency at RULE Gallery, Marfa Texas, USA. His work is represented by Stephane Simoens Contemporary Fine Art in Belgium.

You can see and purchase his work on his website, including striking sculptures and works on paper and collage.

www.jameswilliammurray.com
King Jamsheed
Alex Klineberg catches up with the Brighton-based musician to chat about his new album, lockdown, live gigs and... Druidry!

Secret Winter is your debut album. Give us a sense of your musical background.
I've lived my whole life immersed in music and theatre as a singer and a piano player. While other people always had favourite bands and singers, I always struggled to find artists that really spoke to me. A love for alternative and sub-pop genres came quite late in life, so like most self-aware queer people, I've had to work hard to push away from the mainstream.

The album is very atmospheric and dramatic. I can hear Björk and Kate Bush influences. Would that be a fair interpretation?
That's a massive compliment and I'll take it! It's probably because those particular artists have spent a lifetime creating genres of their own, famously. Kate Bush, Björk, Woodkid, John Grant, Sufjan Stevens (that's a dinner party). My creative process and reasons for writing are constantly changing, so the style evolves constantly too. Secret Winter is intended as an epic, a journey, through a frozen forest. We meet characters along the path, including ourselves, who guide us and push us and show us new things. I try to make music that has a purpose and a journey. That's the music I love and it falls somewhere between music-theatre, art-pop and opera, maybe.

The orchestral sound is so rich on Winter Is Coming. How did you create that kind of sound on your own?
I'm principally a pianist but most of the album is synth and digital orchestration. At the time, that's all I had access to because I wrote the album while I was trapped on a ship off the coast of Chile. When the pandemic struck in March 2020, all the ports in the world suddenly closed down, leaving us stranded out at sea for about five weeks. It was a terrifying experience but I was lucky enough to have my own cabin, so I spent the time in total isolation writing this album and trying to stay sane while passengers were literally dying right down the hall. With no internet access, I just used the instrument libraries I had on my little hard drive, plus my travel mic, and made my album without knowing if I'd make it home alive. It was crazy.

How has lockdown affected your creativity?
Like most composers and freelancers, lockdown is kind of how we operate normally. I shut everything out and turn everything off and get into the flow state. I'm pretty disciplined and keep a 9-to-5 week but early mornings is when I get a lot of song ideas down on paper. I'm also a music arranger for various publishers, so mornings are for score work. Then every day around 11am, I work on a new piano piece. I've just signed with the contemporary classical label Collaborative Records to release a solo piano album next year. So trauma aside, I'd say lockdown is pretty good for creativity.

You clearly draw from a wide array of influences. Do you consider yourself to be spiritual?
I was brought up in a fantastically broad-minded household in London. My background is Parsi, same as Freddie Mercury (we share a lot of traits actually, he can come to the dinner party) but religion was never pushed on me at home, just offered as knowledge. I went to a Christian Science school but it just doesn't have the sticking power of full-fat Catholicism, so organised religion kinda slid off me like Teflon. But seven years ago my boyfriend introduced me to Druidry. It's a gentle path of learning that helps me to be fully creative, deeply understand nature and access a source of profound wisdom. Since childhood, I've believed that the only thing worth worshipping is the sun. It's a basic Zoroastrian principle that everything comes from it and ultimately goes to it. This fits with Druidry for me, as it's all about how we care for the world we've been given. Vote Green!

It's unfortunate there will be no live gigs this year. Do you have any plans to perform live in 2021?
A lot of my music is not really gigging material, so I'll be putting in hours on a second piano album with Collaborative Records next year and developing my monthly singles into larger song collections. But I hope to develop Secret Winter and its through-story into an immersive stage show one day.

Secret Winter by King Jamsheed is out now on all streaming and download platforms. For their monthly single release, follow King Jamsheed on Spotify or any streaming platform.

more info
@kingjamsheed
@kingjamsheed_official
www.kingjamsheed.com
There are many gifted writers out there, but unless you submit a work of genre fiction that’s likely to be stocked by Tesco, getting published ranges from difficult to impossible. Indie publishers like Inkandescent take chances in a risk-averse industry. They offer a great service to the arts, giving a platform to writers who are unlikely to be offered contracts by the major publishing houses.

What inspired you to start Inkandescent?
There was no grand plan. My partner, Nathan Evans, is a director of film and theatre, and a poet. I’m a writer of fiction and a photographer. We’d both grown quite jaded about the art and publishing worlds. Nathan was about to direct his first feature film when the funding fell through. I’d had rejections up to the back teeth. Book shops were full of classics, celebrity biographies, prize-winners and paperbacks. Mainstream publishing seemed to have become all about quantity and not quality. Shift as much stock as possible and forget the duty of care towards the public.

In 2015 we’d had enough. It was time for a creative and spiritual cleanse. We wanted to make one piece of work that didn’t require the permission of a gatekeeper. No agents or publishers or producers. No bowing and scraping. We won an Arts Council grant to make a book of our own – Threads, a poetry and photography collaboration. This was cathartic and joyful and didn’t abide by any of the rules of sales and marketing.

After an extremely steep learning curve, we didn’t want all that knowledge to go to waste. We decided to publish more books and build a platform to champion the under-represented ideas, subjects and voices of others. Inkandescent was born.

Your tagline is ‘By outsiders for outsiders’. Would you say mainstream publishers are too risk averse?
They certainly were when we started out. We just didn’t make the kind of work that publishers and producers could make mega-bucks from. We were too queer, too working-class, not working-class enough. It seemed that you had to be both an Oxbridge graduate and the daughter or son of somebody before you could get over the drawbridge. The 2020 independent report Rethinking Diversity in Publishing from University of London, Spread the Word and The Bookseller, focused on how cultural production has been disadvantaging people of colour but it confirmed many of our wider suspicions. Not only were mainstream publishers risk averse, they have also been lazy. Basically, it was easy for them to publish the mates they went to school with and not bother looking further afield.

I’m thrilled to see things changing. Of the big corporates, Penguin is making all the right noises with its initiative to find under-represented voices. And Picador has been making some bold choices in publishing writers like Garth Greenwell. However, it remains to be seen whether these trends will stick or if they are just paying lip service to demands for diversity and inclusion. Though, we’re here now and we’re not going away.

Your latest and biggest publication is called Mainstream. What can we expect?
It will be published next summer in partnership with Unbound. It’s an anthology of stories from the edges, bringing together 30 authors from the margins to occupy centre-page, half established names like Paul McVeigh, Neil Bartlett, Keith Jarrett, Juliet Jacques, Kerry Hudson and Philip Ridley, and...
How can people support Inkandescent?
Check out our books. We are nothing without new readers. Join our mailing list – www.inkandescent.co.uk/sign-up – so that we can keep you abreast of the work we are doing. Watch our little film about Mainstream and support us by pledging for a book: www.unbound.com/books/mainstream. Follow us on our socials:
- @InkandescentUK
- @inkandescentuk
- @InkandescentPublishing
- www.inkandescent.co.uk

Tell us about some of the other books you’ve published.
Our focus has been on marginalised voices. After Threads, our first books included Autofellatio, a memoir from singer/songwriter (and childhood friend of Morrissey) James Maker; Bartholomew Bennett’s The Pale Ones, a début novella and weird tale of the unexpected; Polly Wiseman’s Femme Fatale, which imagines a meeting in a hotel room between Andy Warhol muse Nico and that artist’s would-be assassin Valerie Solanas; and more recently my own novella The Pharmacist, a tale of queer chemsex and gentrification. Our most recent acquisition is Address Book, a collection of interconnected short stories by former Costa shortlistee, Neil Bartlett. We are over the moon to be working with queer literary royalty.

Is indie publishing a difficult market to be competing in?
The competition for indies remains the machine that’s set up for the big mainstream publishers. Many indies start off like us, running a business from the kitchen table – no marketing budget, no team, your distribution set-up is the Post Office and you do everything in-house; there’s no capital to pay book cover designers, editors and proof-readers. It’s very difficult to make ourselves heard above the booming voices of the publishing establishment.

However, within the arena of indie publishing there is a sense that we’re all in it together.
Scene

Turn Back the Pages

Gscene has been published every month for over 27 years, and is a rich chronicle of the history of our LGBTQ+ communities, in and around Brighton & Hove. Chris Gull raids the archives...

January 2006

Brighton Cares was a hardship fund giving grants to people affected by HIV/AIDS. It started in 1990 and through the 1990s raised funds by putting on events, such as an annual show at the Dome, involving a 30 piece orchestra and 200 performers. Smaller events also raised funds, including The World AIDS Day Ball. December 2005 was the last one. The charity was closed later in 2006, its work becoming less necessary with the advent of combination therapies.

January 2011

Regular readers of these archive pieces will know that through most of 2010 there were rumblings around what we call old old Pride, the charity version that eventually went into voluntary liquidation with debts of £200,000, and not having raised funds for the local charities for several years. James Ledward wrote a number of forceful editorials during this time. Here’s what he wrote in January 2011. Some context - the coalition Tory/Lib Dem government was voted in during 2010, the global economic crisis of 2007/8 still affected most developed countries, and the response in the UK was “austerity measures”, cutting public spending. The model going forward eventually led to the current organisers taking over in 2013, and delivering very nearly a million pounds for distribution for local good causes, principally through the Brighton Rainbow Fund.

GSCENE COMMENT

The charity who currently run Pride in Brighton & Hove has failed the LGBT voluntary sector and breached their charitable objectives by not giving grants to LGBT organisations for the last two years. The question everyone should be addressing is where the charitable aspect of Pride’s activities is. In the present economic climate, which sees the future of all our LGBT organisations at risk, everyone should be addressing the needs of our community groups. The Council has a simple role to play. They give landlords consent for the use of Preston Park. They should do that on the basis of who they feel is best placed to deliver a safe, diverse Pride that has the support of the majority of the LGBT community. Three major LGBT community organisations who ran the main attractions on Preston Park this year have made it clear they have found working with the present organisers of Pride and their production company impossible and do not intend to work with them next year. They have developed in partnership with two commercial organisations who have ten years of experience in delivering safe Brighton Prides a new bid for community consultation and in doing so have negotiated a substantial financial package that will GUARANTEE ringfenced funds to LGBT organisations next year. These community groups are showing leadership and the Council and senior officers have a responsibility to take what they are saying seriously.

The Rainbow Fund Gives Its First Grants to Local Groups

The charity who currently run Pride in Brighton & Hove has failed the LGBT voluntary sector and breached their charitable objectives by not giving grants to LGBT organisations for the last two years. The question everyone should be addressing is where the charitable aspect of Pride’s activities is. In the present economic climate, which sees the future of all our LGBT organisations at risk, everyone should be addressing the needs of our community groups. The Council has a simple role to play. They give landlords consent for the use of Preston Park. They should do that on the basis of who they feel is best placed to deliver a safe, diverse Pride that has the support of the majority of the LGBT community. Three major LGBT community organisations who ran the main attractions on Preston Park this year have made it clear they have found working with the present organisers of Pride and their production company impossible and do not intend to work with them next year. They have developed in partnership with two commercial organisations who have ten years of experience in delivering safe Brighton Prides a new bid for community consultation and in doing so have negotiated a substantial financial package that will GUARANTEE ringfenced funds to LGBT organisations next year. These community groups are showing leadership and the Council and senior officers have a responsibility to take what they are saying seriously.
make grants to every group who applied except one. I would like to thank the Sussex Community Foundation for their help in independently accessing the applications and providing such fantastic support to the process. I would also like to thank all the LGBT businesses who are fundraising for us and supporting the aims and objectives of the Rainbow Fund.”

The two major pieces of research carried out through the first decade of the century, Count Me In, and Count Me In Too, still have resonance all these years later. Among the recommendations were a signposting service to direct people to appropriate LGBTQ+ services, which came to fruition with the start of The Rainbow Hub on St James’s Street three years ago. Come Me In Too also recommended the creation of an LGBTQ+ community centre, and The Ledward Centre will be opening its doors in the first half of 2021.

**FINAL MEETING FOR COUNT ME IN TOO**

The award-winning Count Me In Too research project, which has been researching local LGBT lives over the past five years, came to an end in December 2010 when its workplan and funding finished. In late November 2010, a group of academics, activists, LGBT community members and practitioners who connected with the project gathered for a final meeting to reflect on what the project did, and what it achieved. Led by researchers at the Universities of Brighton and Sussex and Spectrum, Count Me In Too has produced 12 practitioner-orientated research reports, and shared findings more widely through its website exhibitions and events, and community summaries of reports, reporting on data collated from 812 questionnaires and 69 people’s contributions to focus groups in 2006. These brought to the notice of service planners and providers the experiences and views of LGBT people who live, work and socialise in Brighton & Hove, highlighting the various ways in which LGBT people can be marginalised. Local LGBT people and service providers engaged with this process through over 80 meetings convened by the project over five years, and the project also contributed local consultation and policy processes. This collaboration has been a vehicle through which Spectrum has carried out its remit to facilitate multi-agency working to meet the needs of local LGBT people, to share evidence about needs and views of local LGBT people and to ensure inclusion of LGBT issues in local service provision, policies and procedures.

A spokesperson for the project said: “The evaluation meeting recognised that Count Me In Too took a novel approach to influencing service provision and strategic planning, reflecting the opportunities that arose when statutory services embraced the drive for ‘equalities’ and ‘evidence-based practice’, where statistics were required to make a case for the initiatives we sought. It’s tricky to measure success against the project’s objectives of the Rainbow Fund.”

Ten years ago Gscene was 17… now we’re 27. See who you can spot among the revellers.

**GSCENE 17TH BIRTHDAY@RED PARTY**

Gscene celebrated its 17th Birthday with a reception at Oceana Night Club last month during the annual Red Party.

**January 2016**

**GSCENE SANTA VISITS RAINBOW FAMILIES**

James Ledward, of course, paid a visit to the Rainbow Families Christmas Party. The annual Christmas Party attracted hundreds of parents, babies and children for games, face painting, cakes, sweeties and dancing. Santa gave a chocolate Santa to all the children who queued eagerly to tell him what they wanted for Christmas.

**TRANS CAN SPORT**

A new project will deliver free fitness sessions to trans people in Brighton & Hove during 2016. Trans Can Sport will support people who feel their transgender identity creates barriers for them to access fitness by providing a series of group sessions for participants at all levels of experience and fitness. Recent local research has found high levels of non-participation in physical activity among the trans community. The Brighton & Hove Trans Needs Assessment found that trans people are less likely to report good physical health. The same research found that 83% of respondents do not access gyms or participate in organised sport. The reasons cited included feeling self-conscious, uncomfortable and unsafe, not being able to access a suitable changing area due to gender, issuing stances with cliques. Other reasons included finding the environment too unfriendly. Crucially many said they were not able to afford getting involved.

**TRANS CAN SPORT - A NEW SPORTS INITIATIVE FOR TRANS PEOPLE**

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Trans people face extra pressure to stay very fit for homophobia and bullying. Doing too to simply overcome men is unfathomable given the barriers faced by transgender people. The Trans Needs Assessment also found that anxiety is experienced by nearly 70% of trans people. Exercise has been proven to reduce anxiety and boost self-esteem, which is also a problem area for trans people.
SHORT SHARP SHOCKS (BFI Blu-ray). This is a bizarre two-disc collection of eight strange, startling and occasionally baffling shorts dating from the 1940s to the ‘80s. Highlights include weird fiction writer Algernon Blackwood telling a couple of stories, though without a script he sometimes gets a bit lost, which just adds to the films’ curiosity value. It’s a bit like a horror version of stand-up. Blackwood is a great performer nevertheless and the two films he narrates are diverting. I didn’t quite understand Death Was a Passenger but I think it seems to say that WW2 might have been a harrowing experience for its lead character, but at least he gets a date with a fake nun. The Lake is the only one that is unnerving with its story of the vengeful ghost of a murderer, though it’s slightly let down by its two leads (though the dog is excellent). The best in the collection is, without doubt, Portrait of a Matador. It may have been Lockdown Madness but it’s probably the most entertaining film I’ve seen this year. Technically, it’s awful but its charismatic yet terrible central performance, its clueless direction and its ludicrous plot come together to produce a hysterically funny yet charming example of low-budget English film making. Extras include an extended interview with ’70s exploitation expert/practitioner David McGillivray.
Riva Lehrer Golem Girl: A Memoir (£20, published by Virago). Lordy hear this book roar! Lehrer’s personal memoir on growing up differently abled in a world that’s not built for her is astonishing. Seriously impressive piece of writing and made me laugh out loud as much as it sent me off for a cup of tea to settle my upset. Pulling no punches in prose or manners, Lehrer examines her passion and the way life has served her an interesting hand to play and the triumphant ways she chooses not to play the game, but devise her own game, own rules and ultimately win on her own terms. I was challenged by the book but utterly charmed by the unrelenting honesty of the author. The vividly told, gloriously illustrated memoir of an artist born with disabilities who searches for freedom and connection in a society afraid of strange bodies. She joins a group of artists who are building Disability Culture. Emboldened, Lehrer paints their portraits, inventing an intimate process that transforms the way she sees herself, others, and the world. Each portrait story begins to change the myths she’s been told her whole life about her body, her sexuality, and other measures of normal. Illustrated with the author’s magnificent portraits, this memoir invites us to stretch ourselves toward a world where bodies flow between all possible forms of what it is to be human.

Rebecca Zahabi The Game Weavers (£9.99, published by ZunTold). Zahabi’s debut YA novel set in a future right-wing Britain of intolerant rigid heteronormativity looks at what happens when a ‘sports’ hero lauded for his celebrated skills at ‘Twine’ has a dangerous queer encounter which leaves them exposed. Twine is a magical game where competitors creative unique creatures from their fingertips, weaving them with material threads and then battling them against each other. Zahabi’s prose brings this idea to life, along with the world of the fans, pressures of competition and expectations of the people who are invested in the game for more than just competition. At its heart this is a coming of age love story, mixed in with struggles to accept sexuality and yearnings denied. It’s an interesting look at sport and what happens when you’re a winner but different to all the others and also wraps up family dynamics between the main three protagonists, two of them brothers, as they struggle with their own flawed expectations and come to some understanding and acceptance of who, and what, they are. Good fun, thumping narrative tensions, with the game played out constantly in the background and a surprisingly tender examination of new young queer relationships in a fantasy sci-fi setting.

Amelia Marriette Walking into Alchemy (£11.50, published by Merco Books). Worn out after wrestling with redundancy, leaving her with frayed and ravaged mental health, playwright and curator Marriette has a chance meeting with Lucy, who leads her into a new world of walking and connecting with the simple natural rhythms around her. This local exploring leads to finding an inner balance and allows her to reconnect with her life, passion and desires and ultimately find love. This rather sweet, but nonetheless powerful non-fiction book explores how walking has connected her to the world in a vivid, passionate way, improved deeper mental health and inspired creativity. It’s also a fresh, reflective guide to change. Written in an engaging chatty style, and drawing on examples of composers like Hoist and Britten, who marched the lands and found motivation. The new couple move to Europe and walk the same 13-mile trail through the woods and mountains of Austria, each week, for a year. Stopping, being still, learning, connecting and exploring nature while allowing a rejuvenation of spirit and love to work its magic. Perhaps this is the book we all need after the virus has left us bruised and learning that the things we most need give us the things we most need and desire.

Magnus Hastings Rainbow Revolution (£30, published by Chronicle Books). Hastings has shot drag royalty, and with this new book he’s back with his simple white box background canvas to capture the wide diversity of the American queer world. Rainbow Revolution has over 300 photographs, took two years to complete and captures all sorts of famous LGBTQ+ folk in delightfully witty poses. With plenty of vibrant in-your-face political and sensually saucy pictures, all of them carefully framed by his white box. You’ll be seeing these photos everywhere, it’s a great quality coffee table book for the fashionista in your life.

Jake Hall et al The Art of Drag (£18.99, published by Nobrow Ltd). This lusciously illustrated guide staves at the history of the phenomenon that is drag, from ancient theatre to the queens of RuPaul’s Drag Race via Paris Is Burning to Pose and from Lady Bunny to Victoria Sin. This book reads drag. With chic illustrations from a host of superb creatives, it examines the intersections of fashion, theatre, sexuality and politics – all blending to create the show-stopping entertainment millions witness today. Journalist Hall delves deep into the ancient beginnings of drag, to the present day and beyond. Vibrant drawings – along with a ‘Swiss binding’, which allows the double page drawings to lay flat – enhance the rich history from Kabuki theatre to Shakespeare, the revolutionary Stonewall riots to the thrilling New York ballroom scene, along with fascinating glimpses into the future of drag from The Vixen, Crystal Rasmussen & others. The book informs but above all, looks fierce. Worth getting just for the images – superb!
**Classical Notes**

**Reviews**

1. Barry Douglas Schubert Works for Solo Piano: Volume 5

(Chandos CHAN20157). In the fifth volume of Barry Douglas’ survey of Schubert piano works, he presents us with two Sonatas, both composed in the final five years of Schubert’s (1797-1828) short life. The *D major Sonata*, Op. 53, is emphatic and energetic from the very beginning, and Douglas plays the opening movement with a lively swagger. The slow movement brings a sense of calm, and here Douglas sensitively brings out the lyrical quality of the song-like theme. As the movement ranges through many obscure harmonies, Douglas maintains momentum and the forward trajectory, and the movement’s conclusion, when Schubert expertly combines his two themes, has a wonderfully cathartic completeness as a result. Giving the *Scherzo* a jaunty bounce, Douglas then gives the unexpectedly light finale a delicate light touch. The *A minor Sonata*, Op. post. 143 opens somberly, with a funereal theme, first stated quietly, then more angrily repeated, and a sense of drama continues in the frequent soft/loud contrasts. Douglas provides suitable weighty emphasis, while achieving the necessary contrast with some subtle delicacy in the quieter moments. At the time of composing this, Schubert was depressed, following the onset of syphilis, and brutal treatment for its symptoms. So, unlike other Schubert works where a sense of serenity shines through despite everything, this movement never escapes from a weight of despair. The second movement is calmer, before the finale sweeps away any residual calm with immediately racing triplets that barely let up. Douglas whips up the pressure throughout, leading up to the thundering climax. To finish, there are two delightful Liszt transcriptions of Schubert songs. In *Liebesbotschaft* moves the song melody around within the texture, contrasting with the rippling ‘murmuring brook’ accompaniment, and Douglas brings out the lyricism of the melody throughout. Liszt’s treatment of *Ständchen* is mostly faithful to Schubert’s song, with a few repositionings of the melody and decorative effects in the final verse’. Douglas gives the melody a slightly halting rubato which gives it a very effective soloistic, singing quality.

2. Asako Ogawa JS Bach 6 Partitas (First Hand Records FHR92). London-based harpsichordist Asako Ogawa has already a recording of Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* under her belt, and now she’s turned her attention to the 6 Partitas BWV 825-830. These six suites are among the last of the keyboard suites he composed, and the most technically demanding. Yet despite being 40 at the time, they were the first of his compositions to be published. They stand as a showcase for technical brilliance, yet the variety and character in the different movements, as well as the overall style of each partita, requires a great range of mood and touch. Some of you may have heard András Schiff performing the *Partitas* on piano at Glyndebourne in the 2019 Brighton Festival in an intensely captivating performance. On harpsichord however, they are so much lighter, and the dance forms shine through more. Ogawa is incredibly precise and nimble, taking the faster movements at a great pace. She adds subtle yet delightful ornamentation on some repeats, making the *Menuet in No. 1* really dance. She makes use of the lute stop (where a strip of leather is placed against the strings, creating a muted sound) sparingly, such as in the repeat in *No. 1’s Sarabande*, and creating almost a dulcimer effect in *No. 5’s Minuett*. *No. 6* is perhaps the most adventurous of the set, and there is a wonderfully free sense of mystery in the dramatic opening *Toccata*, with a beautifully flowing central fugue. There is more subtle ornamentation in the *Allemande’s* repeats, and the *Corrente* has driving energy, with a blistering flourish to the rapid arpeggios. The final angular *Gigue* would be a challenge to dance to, but here it finishes off this impressive two CD set with great spirit.

3. Blossom Street & Hilary Campbell The Masses: Arnold Rosner (Convivium CRC053). American composer Arnold Rosner (1945-2013) was new to me, and I’ve greatly enjoyed discovering his two choral masses on a disc from *Blossom Street*, a chamber choir of young singers directed by Hilary Campbell and founded in York but now based in London. Rosner was very much drawn to Renaissance and early Baroque polyphony, and this is clear in the two masses here. However, his harmonic language is fascinating and, within the construct of a mass setting, he manages to create some incredibly striking and dramatic moments. So his *Missa L’homme armé*, Op. 50 has the French secular song as its basis — as with many Renaissance masses, the tune is used as a ‘cantus firmus’, a sort of slow-moving spine, about which the other voices move, often using elements of the same tune. Things start out relatively conventionally in the *Kyrie*, although the harmonies become increasingly chromatic. In the bouncy *Hosanna* the repeated ‘ecceus’ becomes rather aggressive, and it is here that the harmonies are at their wildest. Even the *Agnus Dei* is pretty full-blooded, although with a calmer conclusion. The *Missa In nomine*, Op. 62 also uses a cantus firmus, this time the *Gloria tibi trinitas* plainchant. Its *Kyrie* is weightier, and the *Gloria* begins quietly, but launches into a lively *Laudamus te*, almost jazzy, and reminiscent of Poulenc in places. The *Hosanna* in the *Sanctus* is joyfully lively and less harsh than in the previous mass, the *Benedictus* is beautifully plaintive, and the *Agnus Dei* has dark harmonic moments, before a pretty insistent, almost demanding ‘grant us peace’ to end. Between the two masses is *Peace, My Heart* from *9 Tagore Madrigals*, Op. 37. A setting of *The Gardener* by Bengali author Rabindranath Tagore, it is lighter in texture, with lilting rhythms and contrasting groupings of voices. *Blossom Street* are highly impressive here in what is often very challenging music, and they achieve great clarity of tone and precision in the tuning and harmonies, as well as rich energy in this frequently dramatic and fascinating choral music. Rosner wrote symphonies, operas and other orchestral and chamber music, and on the basis of this, he is definitely worth greater exploration.

More info

For more reviews, comment and events, visit:

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ART MATTERS
BY ENZO MARRA

This month, with the unpredictability of the current situation, I’m going to concentrate on profiling local artists you may not know about. I’m going to begin this new phase with a painter whose works will grab your attention and demand you explore their oeuvre further.

Rhys Trussler is a very individual painter whose subject matter is distinct and authentic to his own painted world. Having studied at Winchester School of Art and having been part of the Turps Studio Painting Programme, he is very much a local now and has been settled here for years. A recipient of the study exchange at the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in Vancouver, the Willow Tree Award at Winchester School of Art and the Eston Fund Prize. His works are very much deserving of such accolades.

His subject matter esoteric and deep felt, exploring an array of symbols and scenarios that have been years developed in each consecutive image he has painted into being. An authentic artist who does not pander to passing fashions and fads, who depicts what he needs to, exactly how he needs to, without softening what is presented to us once the paint has been left to dry and is as complete as it is willing to be.

The recurring imagery of the cardboard box headed figure, seen mode seance, in darkened corners, staring blankly in television light, in spaces that could but do not yet exist. The cat as man, as horror figure, as dark entity, as observer, as participant, suited and light, in spaces that could but do not yet exist. The cat as man, as mode seance, in darkened corners, staring blankly in television

Dezron Douglas & Brandee Younger Force Majeure
(International Anthem). Faced with lockdown in New York in March 2020, bassist Dezron Douglas and harpist Brandee Younger found that all of their gigs had been cancelled and their income slashed. The couple decided to host live-stream performances from their Harlem home, during which they would perform classic tunes for friends and family to watch online, in return for some much-needed donations. Such was their success that a record company sent them a microphone, and a record was born. The natural acoustic of their living room makes for an intimate set of performances, with material covering all of their gigs had been cancelled

KEITH JARRETT Budapest Concert (ECM). Recorded during American pianist Keith Jarrett’s European tour, this double album documents his performance at the Béla Bartók National Concert Hall in Budapest in July 2016. Jarrett’s family roots reach back to Hungary, so in some ways this was a musical homecoming for him. Latterly, his improvisations have taken the form of suite-like structures comprised of independent movements, each one a marvel of spontaneity and effect.

thing about this live set is that Jarrett is unlikely to play in public again, suffering two major strokes in early 2018 that left him with little strength in his left hand. For such an important musician, it is a likely sad end to a glorious career.
Last year I was so lucky to work with a team of like-minded people to create the More to Me Than HIV project. Our plans kept changing and developing as we faced the challenge of creating the project in the face of Covid-19.

But as we carried on, more restrictions came into play which meant we had to postpone the photo exhibition planned at Jubilee Library. However, we re-planned the event and ended up with a fantastic online exhibition, created by our talented team member, David Fray.

At the very beginning we knew it would be a hard sell, asking people living with HIV+ diagnoses to submit their portraits along with two other images that showed another side of who they are. In the end 21 people sent in their images and helped make a powerful statement, which was: living with an HIV+ diagnosis is nothing to be ashamed of.

“Much of the HIV+ fear and stigma comes from misinformation and ideas from the past, which is why the team behind the More to Me Than HIV project have been so passionate in changing the narrative of what it means to live with an HIV+ diagnosis in 2021 and beyond”

However, we also heard back from a lot of people living with HIV+ who said as much as they applauded the project, there was no way they could ‘come out’ about their status. This ranged from what people at work may think, to fears of being rejected from family to others who see their HIV+ status as something very private and for no one else to know about.

The main word that accompanied many of their statements was stigma, the fear of what others would think of them.

This is something I and most of the team behind the More to Me Than HIV project can very much relate too, from having first-hand experience of HIV stigma ourselves.

Much of the HIV+ fear and stigma comes from misinformation and ideas from the past, which is why the team behind the More to Me Than HIV project have been so passionate in changing the narrative of what it means to live with an HIV+ diagnosis in 2021 and beyond.

Of course, living with HIV will bring up a host of issues, but stigma should not be one of them.

The More to Me Than HIV project had a brilliant response from many people at its launch on World AIDS Day 2020. For more info on how to get involved, visit www.moretomethanhiv.life and together we can build on this project and encourage more people to shake off the shackles of stigma.
Craig’s Thoughts

Sometimes you’re not invited. And that’s life

By Craig Hanlon-Smith @craigscontinuum

The intention of inclusion for all is an honest one. Having grown up with a feeling of exclusion from mainstream society, I understand the heartfelt simplicity of its opposite. In education the path of exclusion rarely ends well. If a young person behaves in such a way that the solution is seen to be an exclusion, how is that a problem ever resolved? Surely it’s better to navigate an improvement in behaviour from within. To understand consequence and recovery, we will all have to navigate our way through together, rarely if ever, in isolation. And so include, always, everyone, every time. Not so fast.

Remember when we used to go to bars. Gay bars? And do you remember when there were people from the gay scene in them? Granted at the moment bars would just love to be in a position to have people in them and I appreciate the business sentiment there. For a time, gay was an all-encompassing term that included anyone who turned up and we just got on with it. Gay men were queers too and those of an age will remember the Outrage Queer as Fuck campaign of the early 1990s, later made famous by Jason Donovan suing The Face magazine for reporting on a campaign poster that may have included his image. The judgement in his favour smacked of homophobia and almost brought down a magazine that couldn’t afford the financial decision awarded to La Donovan. Remember they were reporting on a campaign, not questioning Mr Donovan’s heterosexual nature. But win he did, because there’s nothing more damaging than being called a queer. Or perhaps even gay, not that anyone is gay these days.

“There was a time when a brave venue or two produced signage to discourage the welcome of a stag or hen party, but these were thought not to be inclusive and surely equality means all pile in anytime, right?”

The scene formerly known as gay changed significantly in the Millennium age. I blame mid-90s Channel 4 extravaganza Queer As Folk. Damn Russell T Davies and the production team for making those bars look so much fun. The eclectic nights out with gay boys and girls, drag queens and gender benders amid chrome stairways and dancing neon. Manchester’s gay strip of bars, which was largely invented over-night in between two long established gay pubs by a couple of business peeps with a lorra lorra cash became the go-to mecca on a weekend night out for everyone. My hetrometer of a brother and his mates used to always love a night out down Canal Street ‘because we don’t get any bother there from dick-heads’.

Groups of lads were followed by groups of girls and Brighton had its own challenges as a destination for stag and hen weekend. The boys would come into the bars for a dare and the girls armed with their massive inflatable willies screaming at the excitement of close proximity with a homo. A recipe for hell. If you identified as gay that is. There was a time when a brave venue or two produced signage to discourage the welcome of a stag or hen party, but these were thought not to be inclusive and surely equality means all pile in anytime, right?

No. Not really. Certainly in a place of employment, equal opportunities does not mean treating everyone the same. Some have to be given more time, more encouragement, more support or direction to ensure the opportunity is equal. It may seem to some that all of those spaces and systems created for ‘the other’ are unfair or an imbalance. Sometimes we need to make a special space for ‘the other’ that is exclusive to them or at the very least leans to a bias for a particular clientele. It’s okay to want to be with your kind and not harassed by a gaggle of drunk people dressed in pretend wedding attire with flashing pens, deep boppers on their heads.

Before closing its doors in London to the next luxury apartment developer, the owners of the XXL brand appeared to earn the ire of some for specifying their dress code to not include any feminity in the attire, particularly heels. I love nothing more than squeezing myself into a high-cut brief, fishnets and six-inch heels for a flamboyant night out (no shirt – obvs), but if that’s not the deal at XXL, that is okay. Jeans and trainers it is. The club has a flavour, an edge and it wants to protect its (extremely successful) brand. And that’s okay. If you’re offended by the ‘no-heels’ dress code – babe, you need to get out more. (No cruelty intended I know we can’t technically go out anywhere much).

There isn’t really a gay club in Brighton anymore to speak of. There isn’t really a ‘mainstream club’ for the LGBTQ+ community, not that this is a homogenous group in itself, although we do somewhat unsuccessfully try to make it so. Club Revenge at the weekend had become a throng of young straight women, all clearly inspired by Little Mix but with slightly better make-up with an insatiable desire to have a night out in a ‘gay-club’. In the weeks before lockdown, I used to walk past that queue late on a Friday and Saturday night and think – they’re all going to be so disappointed when they get into this gay club. There aren’t any gays in it.

There are times when I want to hang out with my gay boys. I refuse to apologise for that. There are times when I don’t care who I’m hanging out with because there are times when Me, Myself and I have different needs and desires that can sometimes be satisfied and sometimes not. Wanting some exclusivity with my brothers isn’t about excluding others. It is about a shared experience, a shorthand of understanding and appreciation. At times it is an absolute necessity.

If that offends you. When we’re allowed. Get out more.
Hello from the other side

When I wrote my last column I was safely in isolation, much as I have been since March. In October I attended just one social event...and came away with Covid-19. Honestly, I’d have preferred a goody bag.

My last column compared the plague of Covid-19 with the spread of AIDS in the 1980s, and the similarities continue. We humans don’t like to admit we have fallen prey to contagion, this ignorance and secrecy only serves to help the virus spread. No wonder disease flies through a town faster than a toupee in a hurricane. For months I’d lived in a fool’s paradise, where the only actual Covid positive person I knew was the cousin of my aunt’s friend. The minute my partner declared my sorry status on Facebook, a torrent of private messages told me I was not alone. I heartily wish to relinquish my membership of this private club. I don’t know what long-term damage this thing has left me with, but at least I’m not dead.

“Well, this miserable old lesbian sitting tapping her keyboard would like to ask you ‘people of the future’, did Christmas work out well, or did we see grandma for Christmas Day only to bury her at New Year?”

Christmas and New Year always make me a tad tearful, this year, however, I’m also fearful. I miss those I have lost more keenly. The dying year seems to be a metaphor, we’re all dying all the time... some of us really quickly. A new year signifies new life. However, due to the birth of baby Jesus being plonked in to replace pagan winter celebrations, New Year occurs at the cruelest, most inappropriate time, meteorologically anyway. Maybe that’s why the magic feelings of rebirth elude me so. New Year should be springtime, January is a time to feast, reflect and hunker down.

And so we look to 2021, the future. You will have gathered that, unlike news pieces, the ‘opinion’ columns in this wonderful magazine are something of a time capsule, written roughly a month before publication. To put it in perspective, that annoying man on the Asda advert is still in a Santa hat; Donald Trump has admitted defeat in the US election although he should have won “by really a lot”; Joe Biden has broken his foot playing with his dog, but the mere fact he has a dog and therefore a soul is enough to give me hope.

Well, this miserable old lesbian sitting tapping her keyboard would like to ask you ‘people of the future’, did Christmas work out well, or did we see grandma for Christmas Day only to bury her at New Year? How’s that vaccination programme going? Is Brexit making supermarket shelves look like Poland under martial law? Oh tell me Brighton’s in tier one! Tell me pubs and theatres are filling up like a gay man’s eyes watching Beaches... Tell me Tiny Tim didn’t die.

Whatever the future holds, let’s hope it’s kinder. Tell me that at least.

Right here, right now

I’ve never been one for making New Year’s resolutions, putting unnecessary pressure on myself only to be solely disappointed when I break the promise of whatever I said I would or would not do.

For a long time I’ve taken my cue from how I feel on any given day and embrace the challenge. This really came into the fore for many of us last year as the unpredictability of our lives were thrown up in the air due to Covid-19.

“I found that doing something so simple really had a big impact not only on my mental health but on my fitness as well”

Thinking back to last year, a few unexpected life changes did come up which I continue to embrace this year.

During the first lockdown, when it was all a bit of a novelty to only have one hour outside to have exercise, I really took to going for a walk. I’m lucky that I have a woodland on the doorstep of my flat so took full advantage of that and rediscovered just how much I enjoyed taking a walk for no other reason than that it was nice to do so.

Once lockdown was lifted, my work encouraged us to walk to work if we could and avoid public transport.

Again I found that doing something so simple really had a big impact not only on my mental health but on my fitness as well.

With my headphones on listening to my tunes, I really got into my journey into work and really began to understand the phrase, “stop and smell the roses”. To be honest, I didn’t smell any roses, as for some reason roses smell really vile to my nose, but I was really able to appreciate many things that I would have missed sitting on the bus.

Be it the change in the seasons as things warmed up, to the different types of dogs or cats who I would lock eye contact with along the way. Walking also took me on different routes to work, allowing me to really appreciate just how quirky Brighton can be.

Giving myself more time to get to work meant getting up earlier and during the summer months that was no problem, plus giving myself extra time just to be with myself inside my own head gave me some brilliant moments to mull things over, think about ideas or sometimes just think of nothing; all of which really had a positive change to my thinking and health.

Now, I would like to say that as autumn gave way to winter I just wrapped up and marched on in much the same way. Well I did on the way to work, but after a long shift and a dark night what I really wanted to do was get home and lose myself in some outrageous plot, to my tunes, I really got into... Again I found that doing something so simple really had a big impact not only on my mental health but on my fitness as well.

So until spring arrives I’ll keep up my morning walks, plan things for the day ahead and make a note of all the good things I have right here, right now.
I'm terrified of things to come, paralysed I cannot run, tell me what the future holds, tell me baby” sing Steps on their latest release. Froth and frippery yes but also a bit of a banger and also a very good question from Claire et al.

What approaches this year? What glories abound? What wonders appear on the horizon? God knows...

"Another thing that will be nice to do is to be able to choose to stay in rather than having to. Yes, let’s pop out for a spontaneous drink but also, no, I’m not going to go out, I’m choosing to stay at home and watch some telly”

This is the time of year that you’ll find so many of those Ten Steps To Being A New You in 2021, or Change Your Life In 2021, or You’re So Rubbish You Must Sort Yourself Out in 2021 articles telling you what you should or shouldn’t be doing and how to achieve greatness in the upcoming months. All you need to do, they say, is drink your own weight in water every day, waft burning feathers under your nose and learn to speak Esperanto, and the world will be yours. And take up pilates, naturally.

They are all nonsense and merely a page-filling exercise as nothing really happens in January and you have to fill newspaper and magazine space somehow. There may be fewer of them this year as Brexit hits and all the journalists start writing about how we’re having to eat dust and drink cat’s milk to get by, but there will still be some.

It’s only natural for us all to think about what’s in store when we hit a new year. But as this is my column I will ponder: What would Jon like to happen this year?

First, I’d like to go to a pub with my mates and not have to think about anything else other than chatting and drinking. I think that’s quite universal at the moment. I would like to go on holiday as I didn’t last year because of quarantining and stuff. I’d like to eat out occasionally without massive planning beforehand. I’d like to go on a date or two. Or three. Start that part of my life up again.

I’d like the Brighton Gay Men’s Chorus to start rehearsing properly again so we can put on a show and then have a massive after-show party. I’ve really missed performing this year. I love being on stage singing, acting, the whole kaboosh. The stage is one of the places where I feel most comfortable and can be myself. Not being able to put any shows on this year has been tough and I can’t wait for us to start up again.

Another thing that will be nice to do is to be able to choose to stay in rather than having to. Yes, let’s pop out for a spontaneous drink but also, no, I’m not going to go out, I’m choosing to stay at home and watch some telly. Not being forced to stay in with the doors closed… that’ll be nice. Oh and hugs. So missed hugging people. Not strangers, obviously. People I know and like. Just to be clear!

"If I’ve learnt anything it’s that nothing is certain, but I hope that this year it doesn’t take a pandemic for positive change to happen"

I doubt anyone is the same any more. We’ve lost people and careers all over the space of six months. There are countless indie films that’ll try to change your life by telling us that life has become an endless monotonous rat race, we scare ourselves by watching zombie films about virus outbreaks and baulk at the thought that everything we once knew has gone. But it’s actually happened. Perhaps not quite so extreme, but last year brought up deeper issues about how our lives are run as a whole than if we were able to go to the pub or to a party. I’ve really missed performing this year. I love being on stage again so we can put on a show and then have a massive after-show party.

I don’t like change as a rule but we’ve had no choice. I’ve reconnected with people who I swore were my enemy. I’ve done more for people even though my own problems were many over the past year than I ever thought I could, simply because I felt like a jerk for not being the friend or family that I could have been the whole time.

If I’ve learnt anything it’s that nothing is certain, but I hope that this year it doesn’t take a pandemic for positive change to happen. Personally I’d rather have an important epiphany about my life sat in a pub over too many shots of tequila, than sitting in front of Netflix at home. I won’t buy a diary, just in case.
Happy New Year
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tiny nuclear reactors so will save the world.
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diseases that medical science can’t cure, even with new viruses
Our physical health will no doubt be better; there will be few
diseases that medical science can’t cure, even with new viruses
 pandemics. In many ways the technology of Star Trek; which
seemed bizarre 30 or so years ago, will be commonplace. Most of the
world’s population will have their DNA sequenced. There may even
be holographic doctors, there are already operations carried out by
robots. Tomorrow’s world is here already. What’s more, it’s predicted
given the rate of technological progress. Moon base Artemis
will be established in a few years and men (and women) will be
walking on Mars. Sadly, it is unlikely that we will meet any Vulcans or
speak Klingon, but there may well be phasers already set to ‘stun’.
Space travel will be available, at a price, and not uncommon by
about 2040, if Richard Branson and Elon Musk have their way. We
will possibly find ‘intelligent’ life on other planets – there isn’t much
here on Earth anymore. It is unlikely that any of us will be around to
meet any of ET’s friends; it’s my one big regret. Neither will Captain
American be around to save us – that is a pity. Nor will Spiderman or
even Superman; they would be worth meeting.

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world’s population will have their DNA sequenced. There may even
be holographic doctors, there are already operations carried out by
robots. Tomorrow’s world is here already. What’s more, it’s predicted
that there will be no more poverty, but that’s pure fantasy.
We don’t need to start stockpiling loo rolls; the world isn’t going
to end on January 1, 2030, even if we don’t meet the forecast climate
change catastrophe. The Americans are planning on building lots of
tiny nuclear reactors so will save the world.
But let’s face it, the future is unknowable, all these prophesies may
seem incredible but if science and human endeavour has taught us
anything, then anything is possible, eventually. So yes there is a lot
to be optimistic about, you know the sun’ll come out tomorrow, but
your bottom dollar that tomorrow there’ll be sun.
Happy New Year

Ivy, fiercely glamorous with her raven hair piled high, moped and menthol
cigarettes, had met Elena Ceausescu in Manila in 1975 and apparently
cought the eye of her husband, Nicolae. They had a torrid fling until Ivy
discovered his taste for caviar and champagne outweighed his commitment
to the socialist cause. She’d left him one night, putting off into the
Manila night, she told us, after he’d spent an hour making love to her
and looking at his own reflection in the mirror next to the bed. “I didn’t
mind a bit of vanity,” she said, “but he could have had the good manners
to conceal it, like Elvis did.” A few years later, while swimming the Danube
for charity, she’d received a telegram from the Ceausescus, congratulating
her on the swimming and inviting her to dinner. When Ivy arrived the
Romanian secret police, The Securitate, were waiting for her and she was
bundled off to prison. That would have been the end of her, had she not
been a personal friend of Mrs Brezhneva, wife of the Soviet premier, who
was following the swim with interest being a keen ice swimmer herself.
When Ivy didn’t arrive the Russians launched a search team, but by the
time they’d heard what had happened Ivy was gone.

Escaping from Sighisoara prison aided by the prison cook, swathing herself
in lard, hiding in a barrel and swimming down the Târnava Mare river at
night, Ivy made it across the border to Odessa and the relative freedom
of the Soviet Union. “Jealousy is a daemon,” she told me. “Elena was no
beauty, envy was the tribute her mediocrity paid to genius, jaundiced by
knowing I’d turned Noonoo’s head, plain women always are.” I nodded off
at this point, sitting in front of Ivy’s warm coal fire, stuffed full of Madeira
cake and schooners of white port. She woke with me with the deftly landed
vowel so long and wistful, “that was a lush swim”, and started to talk.

I drove across Transylvania a few years ago and stopped off to visit the
daughter of the cook. Her mother had received regular cards from Ivy
every year since their meeting and after the revolution Ivy had arranged
for a ready supply of reading glasses, knitting needles and haemorrhoid
ointments to be sent her way. There was photo of Ivy and her mother on
the mantel, arms linked, the pair of them grinning in Berlin. Along the
bottom Ivy had written: “Daria, be exquisite and never explain.”
Identity is so much more than that, and I was in a relationship with at the time. I often felt my identity was defined by whoever doesn't define you. As a pansexual woman, I realise that bisexuality/pansexuality is real and valid, and it's possible to not label yourself. It was also a time to unwind really helps to de-stress. Finally, I've learnt one or two things about the art of self-care. Something I found so beneficial over the past year is exercise. It's such a cliché, but it makes so much difference to your overall health and wellbeing. Plus, eating three balanced meals a day greatly improved my energy levels and mood.

One of the most important things I've learnt is to remember you can't control the decisions other people make, but you can control your decisions and try to make the best of any situation. Fighting someone's choices is more often than not a waste of energy – focus on yourself instead.

Something I've tried to apply to my life recently is to remember you can't control the decisions other people make, but you can control your decisions and try to make the best of any situation. Fighting someone's choices is more often than not a waste of energy – focus on yourself instead.

Identity is so much more than that, and I will no longer define myself based on other people's expectations of me.

With regards to interpersonal relationships, you should never let anyone dictate how you choose to present yourself. It's fine to look bad when I had lipstick on, but you are the only one who decides how to present yourself. I fully intend to add to my lipstick collection this year.

Perhaps one of the most important things I've learnt at university is to never mix drinks. Especially not Pimm's and prosecco. Not to mention all those nights out proved to me that life's too short to pretend you don't like cheesy pop music. Go listen to ABBA.

2021 will be the first year I'm entering without being in education, but that's not to say I didn't get a lot of valuable experience from my school. First things first – school probably won't be the best days of your life. It gets better though, promise! When I feel down, I just remind myself I'll never have to do maths again in my life. University taught me not to be afraid of change. I was terrified to leave home, but moving to Brighton turned out to be one of the best decisions I've made. University was also the first time in my life I lived with friends, and although this was fun at times, it made me realise the importance of taking time for yourself and not feeling pressured to socialise 24/7.

One of the most pivotal moments in my life so far was realising my sexuality, but during the long period of questioning, I found it's okay to not know who you are. I spent ages struggling to label my sexual identity, but it's fine to not label yourself. It was also a huge relief when, after years of internalised biphobia, I realised that bisexuality/pansexuality is real and valid, and it's possible to love more than one gender.

However, who you're in a relationship with doesn't define you. As a pansexual woman, I often felt my identity was defined by whoever I was in a relationship with at the time. Identity is so much more than that, and I

Most crucial things I have learnt are those about dealing with emotional distress. A common response to feeling low is being told somebody has it worse than you, but we wouldn't tell someone it's not okay to be happy because somebody out there is happier than you. It's fine to feel low sometimes. There is no shame in taking medication for your mental health. It's a bit of a cliché, but if you were physically ill then there would be no stigma around taking medication. Your mental health is just as important, so if you feel it would be beneficial to you, don't criticise yourself for taking it, and don't feel afraid to talk about how you feel.

If you are feeling overwhelmed, it's okay for your solutions to your distress to only be short term. Little things that can help alleviate your pain in the moment can help you get through the most difficult times until you can begin to solve the bigger issue.

Finally, I've learnt one or two things about the art of self-care. Something I found so beneficial over the past year is exercise. It's such a cliché, but it makes so much difference to your overall health and wellbeing. Plus, eating three balanced meals a day greatly improved my energy levels and mood.

I am a self-confessed coffee addict, but for those who struggle with anxiety like myself, it's good to cut down on the caffeine – it definitely helps reduce those nervous jitters. Another way to minimise anxiety is to have down time; I enjoy working, but at the same time I found that stopping work at the same time I found that stopping work at a reasonable time in the evening and taking time to unwind really helps to de-stress.

I think one of the most important things anyone can learn, particularly those struggling with their sexuality, identity or their mental health, is that there is no need to prove that you are 'enough'. We are told that we have to do extraordinary things to prove ourselves worthy of having a space in the world, but I am slowly beginning to believe that just existing makes you enough. And once you know that, things don't seem so bad.
New Year, New Stew

Well Happy New Year to all our readers and best wishes for a happy and peaceful 2021! Over Christmas we have taken a bit of a break from the allotment although at the beginning of December, which seems such a long time ago, we planted some more broad beans and a selection of brassicas provided by the Cornish Cabbage company, who are very reliable and reasonable to boot – other suppliers are available. We have been feasting on our cabbages, kale and potatoes, which have done us proud this year.

We also have a bumper crop of Jerusalem artichokes on the way – you have been warned – which are good for putting in stews and soups over the winter months.

As you may remember we went to France for ‘les vacances’ so as there’s not much happening visually at the allotment here are some pictures to brighten up a dull January day.

We also said goodbye to our little cottage in Normandie so here’s a couple of photos from the garden there, including my favourite red and gold dahlia.
LGBTQ+ Services

- **Allsorts Youth Project**
  Drop-in for LGBT or unsure young people under 26
  Tues 5:30–8:30pm: 01273 722111 or email info@allsortsyouth.org.uk. www.allsortsyouth.org.uk

- **Brighton & Hove Police**
  Report all homophobic, biphobic or transphobic incidents to: 24/7 assistance Police on 101 (emergencies 999)
  Report online at: www.sussex.police.uk
  LGBT team (not 24/7) email: LGBT@sussex.pnn.police.uk
  • LGBT Officer PC James Breeds: Tel: 101 ext 358168
  James.breeds@sussex.pnn.police.uk

- **Brighton & Hove LGBT Safety Forum**
  Independent LGBT forum working within the communities to address and improve safety and access issues in Brighton & Hove.
  For more info: 01273 675445 or admin@lgbt-help.com or www.lgbt-help.com

- **Brighton & Hove LGBT Switchboard**
  • LGBT Older People’s Project
  • LGBT Health Improvement and Engagement Project
  • LGBTQ+ Disabilities Project
  • Rainbow Café: support for LGBT + people with Dementia
  • Volunteering opportunities 01273 234 009

- **Rainbow Families**
  Support group for lesbian and/or gay parents
  07951 082013 or info@rainbowfamilies.org.uk
  www.rainbowfamilies.org.uk

- **Rainbow Hub**
  Information, contact, help and guidance to services for LGBT+ communities in Brighton, Hove and Sussex at Rainbow Hub drop in LGBT+: one-stop shop: 93 St James Street, BN2 1TP. 01273 675445 or visit www.therainbowhubbrighton.com

- **Some People**
  Social/support group for LGBT or questioning aged 14-19, Tue 5.30–7.30pm, Hasdings.
  Call/text Catherine Connolly 07977 325057 or email somepeople@eastsussex.gov.uk

- **TAGS – The Arun Gay Society**
  Social Group welcome all in East & West Sussex Areas.
  Call/Text 07598 513171. More info: www.tagsonline.org.uk

- **Victim Support**
  Practical, emotional support for victims of crime
  08453 899 528

- **The Village MCC**
  Christian church serving the LGBTQ community.

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HIV Prevention, Care & Treatment Services

- **AVERT**
  Sussex HIV & AIDS info service 01403 210202 or confidential@avert.org

- **Brighton & Hove CAB HIV Project**
  Money, benefits, employment, housing, info, advocacy.
  Appointments: Tue-Thur 9am-4pm, Wed 9am-12.30pm.
  Brighton & Hove Citizens Advice Bureau, Brighton Town Hall.
  01273 733390 and 020 300 6120 or www.brightonhocab.org.uk

- **Clinic M**
  Free confidential testing & treatment for STIs including HIV, plus Hep A & B vaccinations.
  Claude Nicol Centre, Sussex County Hospital, on Weds from 5-8pm.
  01273 664 721 or www.brightonsexualhealth.com

- **Lawson Unit**
  Medical advice, treatment for HIV+, specialist clinics, diet & welfare advice, drug trials. 01273 664 722

- **Martin Fisher Foundation**

- **Substance Misuse Service**
  Pavilions Partnership. Info, advice, appointments & referrals 01273 731 900. Drop-in: Richmond House, Richmond Rd, Brighton, Mon-Wed & Fri 10am-4pm, Thur 10am-7pm, Sat 10am-1pm, The Drive, House 01273 680714 Mon & Wed 10am-12pm & 1pm-3pm, Tue & Thu 10am-4pm. Info & advice only (no assessments), Fri 10am-12pm & 1pm-3pm.
  • Gary Smith (LGBT+ Support) 07884 476634 or email gsmith@pavilions.org.uk
  www.pavilions.org.uk/services/treatment-recovery-options/

- **Sussex Beacon**
  24 hour nursing & medical care, day care
  01273 694222 or www.sussexbeacon.org.uk

- **Terrence Higgins Trust services**
  For more info about these free services go to the THT office, 61 Ship St, Brighton, Mon–Fri, 10am–5pm
  01273 764200 or info@brighton@tht.org.uk
  • Venue Outreach: info on HIV, sexual health, personal safety, safer drug/alcohol use, free condoms/lubricant for men who have sex with men.
  • The Bushes Outreach Service @ Dukes Mound: advice, support, info on HIV & sexual health, and free condoms & lube
  • Netreach (online/mobile app outreach in Brighton & Hove): info/advice on HIV/sexual/local services.
  THT Brighton Outreach workers online on Grindr, Scruff, & Squirt

- **Condem Male**: discreet, confidential service posts free condoms/lube/sexual health info to men who have sex with men without access to East Sussex commercial gay scene
  • Positive Voices: volunteers who go to organisations to talk about personal experiences of living with HIV
  • Fastest (HIV testing): walk-in, (no appointment) rapid HIV testing service open to MSM (Men who have sex with Men). Anyone from the African community, male and female sex workers and anyone who identifies as Trans or non-binary. We now offer rapid 15 minutes results for HIV/Syphilis: Mon 10am-8pm, Tues–Fri 10am-5pm, Thurs 10am–8pm (STI testing available)
  • Sauna Fastest at The Brighton Sauna (HIV testing): walk-in, (no appointment) rapid HIV testing service for men who have sex with men, results in 20 minutes: Wed–6–8pm (STI testing available)
  • Face2Face: confidential info & advice on sexual health & HIV for men who have sex with men, up to 6 one hour appointments
  • Specialist Training: wide range of courses for groups/individuals, specific courses to suit needs
  • Counselling: from qualified counsellors for up to 12 sessions for people living with/affected by HIV
  • What Next? Thurs eve, 6 week peer support group work programme for newly diagnosed HIV+ gay men
  • HIV Support Services: info, support & practical advice for people living with/affected by HIV
  • HIV Welfare Rights Advice: find out about benefits or benefit changes. Advice line: Tue–Thur 1.30–
  2.30pm. 1–2–1 appts for advice & workshops on key benefits

- **Terence Higgins Eastbourne**
  • Web support & info on HIV, sexual health & local services via netreach and www.myhiv.org.uk
  • Free condom postal service contact Grace Coughlan on 07848086590 or grace.coughlan@tth.org.uk

- **Sexual Health Worthing**
  Free confidential tests & treatment for STIs incl HIV; Hep vaccinations, Worthing-based 0845 111345645

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National Helplines

- **National LGBT Domestic Abuse Helpline** at www.galop.org.uk and 0800 999 5428

- **Switchboard**
  0300 330 0630

- **Positiveline (Eddie Summan Trust)**
  Mon–Fri 11am–10pm, Sat & Sun 4–10pm 0800 1696806

- **Mainliners**
  02075 825226

- **National AIDS Helpline**
  08005 761723

- **National Drugs Helpline**
  0800 766000

- **THT AIDS Treatment phoneline** 08459 470047

- **THT direct** 0845 1221200