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The Bears Are Back In Town!

Brighton Bear Weekend is to bring furry fun and fundraising for the Brighton Rainbow Fund back to the city for four days from Thursday, July 22 – Sunday, July 25

Having virtually celebrated their 10th anniversary last summer, including some fantastic tea dances and the Mr Brighton Bear 2020 competition, the Brighton Bear Weekend (BBW) team has announced that this year’s four day event will return… for real!

Running from Thursday, July 22 – Sunday, July 25, BBW 2021 will kick off with the fabulous and ever so slightly competitive BBW Quiz. Other activities will include the legendary Garden Party and of course the incredibly popular Mr Brighton Bear competition.

If you’ve attended BBW before, you’ll know it’s always great fun. Most of those partaking in the frivolities tend to be bears, cubs and even the stray otter or two, but everyone who is a friend of the community is welcome. The event always attracts furry (and not so furry) men and their friends from around the world.

Proceeds raised from the entire weekend (including profits from the sale of exclusive BBW merchandise) go to the Brighton Rainbow Fund, a charity which in turn channels funds to a range of local charities benefiting the LGBTQ+ community.

Graham Munday, chair of BBW organising committee, said: “We’re thrilled to be back, staging another live BBW. This year the emphasis will be on getting people out, having some fun in the sun, supporting each other, our venues, and the talent.

“Many people have lost friends, families and jobs, so whatever we do will be respectful of that. Likewise, some of our favourite bars have sadly disappeared during the pandemic, and those that have made it through need our support more than ever. We look forward to welcoming everyone to what we hope will be a wonderful, safe, celebratory BBW!”

As you can imagine, staging big events like this takes some doing. Everyone involved is a volunteer and the guys are keen to hear from anyone keen to donate some of their time to help make the weekend a huge success. You’ll be working with a crowd of people who are fun, sociable, hard-working and committed. Find out more by visiting www.brightonbearweekend.com/volunteer/.

For more details and updates:
- graham@brightonbearweekend.com
- www.brightonbearweekend.com

BBW is proud to support the Brighton Rainbow Fund, which provides needs-fed, grant-based funding to Brighton & Hove-based LGBTQ+ volunteer-run groups, providing frontline services. Recent recipients of grants include the Rainbow Hub, Rainbow Families, Peer Action and Brighton LGBT Switchboard. For more info, visit: www.rainbow-fund.org
Trans Pride Brighton & Hove to take place online this year

Organisers of Trans Pride Brighton & Hove have announced it will not hold an in-person event this year, but will instead hold an event online on Saturday, July 17, 2021.

In a statement, Trans Pride Brighton & Hove said: “It is with sadness that the volunteer-led committee has to announce the cancellation of our in-person Trans Pride event for this year. We are in agreement that unless everybody is fully vaccinated we cannot risk the health and wellbeing of our trans, nonbinary and intersex communities.

“We have decided to host a Trans Pride Online livestream, following on from the success of last year, with added improvements. This will be held on the same date - Saturday, July 17, 2021.

“We appreciate your understanding and look forward to a time where Trans Pride can return, better than ever.

“Stay tuned for more info about Trans Pride Online in the coming weeks!”

For more info, visit www.transpridebrighton.org or follow on Twitter @TPrideBrighton or Facebook @TransPrideBrighton.

Isle of Wight Pride cancelled

The trustees of Isle of Wight Pride have decided, following careful consideration and consultation with key volunteers and leading sponsor, not to proceed with its Parade and Pride event that had been proposed for Saturday, July 17, 2021.

In a statement, Isle of Wight Pride said: “The major considerations have been concerns that the final milestone date in mid-June will be met, leaving less than one month before the actual day of Pride. The same applies to dates in May; still maintaining a number of restrictions would not enable volunteers adequate time for the preparation of the day to take place effectively.

“As a charity we also must consider the risk to us of investing money in planning for an event which might not be able to take place and that this could result in significant debt and perhaps loss of the charity and the event itself in future years.

“We also need to put the safety and wellbeing of our communities the wider public and our valued volunteers first. This decision is not one we have taken lightly as we had big plans, including returning to the beach. It is a huge disappointment to us all.

“We have also considered how the crisis may have impacted many of our local sponsors, some of whom rely heavily on tourism. This will make fundraising to pay for the activities exceedingly difficult.

“It is our intention as the roadmap out of lockdown meets it targets and the way ahead is confirmed, we will seek to hold several community engagement activities and small events around the Island. We also hope to have a presence at other events as they take place. We will build on these during the year and use to rebuild our volunteer network and plan properly for our return, all being well with the world with a Pride on July 16, 2022.

“Stay healthy, keep safe and remember #Lovewins.”

For more info on Isle of Wight Pride, visit: www.iwpride.org

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DAILY NEWS UPDATES:
www.scenemag.co.uk
Resound celebrates 10 years and seeks new musical director

Founded in 2011 by a breakaway group of singers from one of Brighton’s larger gay men’s choirs, the boys of Resound decided to form a small group where they could develop their vocal talents with a challenging repertoire of songs. Led by their musical director Stefan Holmstrom, the group went from strength to strength, performing at numerous charity events including the annual World AIDS Day concert, sell-out Fringe events and an annual Christmas show with sister choir The Rebelles.

“Ten out of ten yet again for these two talented choirs adding to Brighton’s rich choral family.” - Gscene, December 2018.

The Covid pandemic has caused a pause in their activities and changes in many people’s lives. Sadly, Stefan has decided that after 10 years of dedicated work it is now time for him to step down from the position of musical director. Stefan’s good humour and passion has enabled each member of the choir to give the best performance that they can and to achieve the ambitions set out in 2011. His self-effacing and generous leadership has allowed Resound to be acknowledged by many as one of Brighton & Hove’s top performing choirs. Stefan’s talents will be well missed and his replacement will have big shoes to fill.

“Imagination is what Stefan always brings to his wonderfully varied offerings…” - Gscene, December 2019.

Resound is now recruiting for a new musical director, one who will lead them into the next decade and who will build on Stefan’s legacy.

To celebrate Resound’s 10-year anniversary, the group will be staging a concert at Christmas 2021 singing its most popular songs from its 10-year repertoire.

Visit www.resoundmalevoices.org for more information on: applying for the position of musical director, future concerts and performances and joining as a member of Resound.

Brighton Gay Men’s Chorus presents The Boys in the Chorus

Brighton Gay Men’s Chorus is to present The Boys in the Chorus – a show of solos and duets under the direction of Joe Paxton on Saturday, June 26 as part of the Brighton Fringe. During these Covid times, when the Chorus cannot rehearse or perform together, selected members will showcase their favourite songs in the beautiful surroundings of St. Nicholas’ Church, Brighton. The Chorus boys will give a matinee and evening performance lasting one-hour. Tickets £10.

To book, visit: www.brightonfringe.org/whats-on/brighton-gay-mens-chorus-presents-the-boys-from-the-chorus-147962

New podcast celebrates queer musicians

In the Key of Q, a new podcast series every Tuesday, features music and conversation with queer musicians from around the world.

Presented and produced by London-based Dan Hall, the show aims to celebrate queer musicians, their lives and their music.

Wuhryn Dumas, who featured on April 27, was born in Atlanta, Georgia and makes beautifully positive music. His style is a blend of funkadelic pop, R&B, house, jazz and soul. His first six-track EP, Glitter On Fire, was released in 2020 after 2018’s premier single, Chemistry.

Topics covered in the episode include the power of androgynous identity; the unfortunate absence of joy in urban music and hip hop, growing up black and queer in Atlanta, Georgia (yes the dolls and wearing shirts for wigs!); toxic masculinity within the traditions of the barbershop; the masks many wear in life and the magic of Prince and Michael Jackson.

Wuhryn can be found on Spotify, Apple, SoundCloud, Twitter, Instagram and at his online home: www.wuhryndumas.com

Presenter and producer of the podcast, Dan Hall, said: “Today there are plenty of artists out there singing songs about sex and love between men. This podcast aims to celebrate those musicians and raise the profile of their music so we can feel connected, heard and not alone.”

Tune in on Tuesday, May 4 for is British DJ, Jsky.

To tune in, visit: www.inthekeyofq.com
Fundraiser launched for Transforming Sexuality & Gender Scholarship

University of Brighton’s Centre for Transforming Sexuality and Gender (CTSG), which brings together academics and PhD students from across disciplines who work on sexuality and gender research, has launched a fundraising campaign for its Transforming Sexuality & Gender Scholarship, which aims to promote gender diversity in higher education (HE) and society.

Master of Science degree offering ideal training for a student who wishes to go on to do a PhD – combined with individual mentoring by CTSG staff and a dedicated CTSG PhD student mentor.

The CTSG Scholarship is open to postgraduate applicants who situate their research topic within the CTSG research themes and can demonstrate a commitment to social change, trans rights and vision for the future of transforming sexualities and gender inclusion and diversity in HE and society.

Caleb Hayes is the current CTSG scholarship student. He did a degree in Criminology before applying to the Social Research Methods programme to pursue his research interest in is the experiences of transgender individuals with domestic violence or abuse.

The course is demanding but Caleb has taken part in Centre activities aimed at the postgraduate community as well as contributed as a research assistant on a CTSG research project on the need for LGBTI+ digital youth work during the pandemic.

Caleb said: “I hope for my academic work to contribute towards polices or initiatives aiming to support trans people. For example, working with domestic violence support services or LGBTQ+ charities in the future to create domestic violence support specifically for transgender people.”

For more info and to donate, visit: https://springboard.brighton.ac.uk/p/CTSG-scholarship/?ref=234664

Donations to The Clare Project in memory of Julia Trangmar

Earlier this year, Julia Trangmar passed away from Covid-19. Many may remember Julia from her huge contributions to community organising, supporting the work of The Clare Project and popping up the bar at The Marlborough. She also spent many years dedicated to family, friends and colleagues - many of whom she met through her love for music, food and laughter.

In her memory, family and friends have requested donations be made to The Clare Project, which will ring-fence funds to do something Julia would have loved and continue to support the transgender, non-binary, intersex and gender-variant communities. Julia gave many years of her life to The Clare Project, supporting members in the same way she needed to be when embarking on her journey. She then selflessly used this experience to share support and guidance with others in a similar position.

The Clare Project has lots of lovely ideas of things to do already, including applying for a tree/bench to be placed in Dorset Gardens for community members to enjoy, trips, and her favourite – a good community get together!

To make a donation, visit: https://gofund.me/165db0a8

Trans Can Sport activities for May

Trans Can Sport, which provides safe and friendly fitness and leisure activities for trans folk in Brighton & Hove, has announced a series of online activities this month.

Trans Can Circuits with Liz on Friday, May 7 and Friday, May 14 from 6 - 6.30pm. Liz’s workout aims at functional fitness targeting the muscles used by the body when it needs to move fast, jump far and fight. It’s a hardcore bodyweight workout utilising seven exercise combinations developing a hardcore burn.

Trans Can Fight with Marquita on Tuesday, May 4 and Tuesday, May 11 from 6 - 6.30pm. Marquita has designed this 30-minute boxing/kickboxing inspired session to increase cardiovascular fitness, muscle tone and promote fat burning, while releasing stress and learning self-defence techniques.

Trans Can Meditation with Josetta on Thursday, May 27 and Thursday, June 3 from 6 - 6.30pm. Mindfulness is all about being aware of what is happening, in the moment, without judgement, and is a wonderful form of meditation, with a focus on compassion and kindness. In this session, Josetta will guide you through some mindfulness meditation techniques to learn how to be in the present moment.

All levels of skill and fitness are welcome at these sessions, but you must be 18 or over. Trans participants will be offered spaces first, with remaining spaces being offered to allies attending with a trans participant closer to the date. These sessions are only available to individuals who live in the UK due to restrictions to Public Liability Insurance.

These sessions are free. However, if you’re able to make a donation to Trans Can Sport, £5 per session is suggested. To book, send an email to transcansport@gmail.com

For more info, visit: www.transcansport.co.uk
Sussex Beacon announces ‘Complete Comedy Night’

After a difficult year, the Sussex Beacon has announced something to cheer us all up – the Complete Comedy Night with comedy, meal and drink for £25 at the Grand Brighton on Friday, September 17 from 6.30pm.

Returning to MC the event will be James Redmond, who’s known for touring comedy clubs across the country and for his roles in Hollyoaks and Casualty.

Joining James on stage will be:

• Headliner Angela Barnes who embarked on her life-long dream to be a comedian after working in health and social care. Within just a couple of years she had won the BBC New Comedy Award in 2011 and has now gone on to star in Mock The Week and BBC Radio 4 series You Can’t Take It With You and The News Quiz.

• Mark Simmons: One of the country’s rising stars. Mark is a master of the one liner who has taken the step from stage to screen in recent years, appearing on shows like Mock The Week.

• Apologetic Eton and Oxford alumnus Ivo Graham, who started stand-up in 2009 at the age of 18 and later became the youngest ever winner of the prestigious So You Think You’re Funny Award for new acts at the Edinburgh Fringe. He has since become a regular fixture in the clubs and theatres of the UK circuit, with a gauche charm and crafty, self-aware wit.

There will be two great meal choices on the night, plus your choice of wine, beer or soft drink. Simply select your preferred option when purchasing your tickets.

Seating on the night will be in tables of six. If you have fewer than six in your party you may be asked to share a table. If you have a group of more than six then email fundraising@sussexbeacon.org.uk and the organisers will try to accommodate you.

For tickets, and more info on how the night will adhere to Covid rules, visit: www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/complete-night-out-comedymeal-drink-for-25-tickets-147833789845

Rainbow Lottery launches to support LGBTQ+ causes

The Rainbow Lottery, a chance to scoop a £25,000 jackpot and help LGBTQ+ good causes, is now available live online, with the first draw taking place on Saturday, June 12, with 60p from every £1 ticket going to LGBTQ+ charities and good causes.

It’s free for good causes to register for the Rainbow Lottery, with more than 50 already registered, including Allsorts Youth Project.

Players have a 50 to one chance of winning one of the weekly prizes, which range from the £25,000 jackpot to three extra tickets.

To buy tickets or register as a good cause, visit: www.rainbowlottery.co.uk

Allsorts and MindOut publish new resource

Allsorts Youth Project and LGBTQ+ mental health charity MindOut have collaborated on a new resource – the LGBTQ+ Intergenerational Q&A, which is a collection of Q&As shared between 50+ and 11-25 year old LGBTQ+ people.

This resource is part of Allsorts Youth Project and MindOut’s Intergenerational Project.

Emily and Dan raise £965 for Allsorts

Emily and Dan ran the South Downs Way last month to raise funds for Allsorts Youth Project.

Running 33 miles per day (!) for three days straight (and still smiling at the end of it), they raised an incredible £965.

Allsorts said: “We could not be more impressed. Huge thank you to everyone who supported their campaign as well!”

For more info on Allsorts, visit: www.allsortsyouth.org.uk

THT Brighton reopens its doors!

THT Brighton is open Monday to Friday, 10am to 5pm. Book your appointment by calling 01273 764200. If you call outside office hours, leave a message and someone will get back to you.

For full details, visit: https://bit.ly/3rSQ0KI

After four long months, Terrence Higgins Trust (THT) Brighton, which is based on Ship Street in the Lanes, has reopened its doors, offering quick and free HIV and STI tests carried out by the friendly team.

You’ll get your HIV result within moments and THT Brighton also offers advice & information, free condoms and lube, plus referrals to other services.
The Charity Commission has confirmed that anti-trans group LGB Alliance (LGBA) will be entered on to the Register of Charities after applying to become a charity in March 2020.

In a release, the Charity Commission said: “The test of charity status is set out in law. A charity is an organisation with exclusively charitable purposes for the public benefit, that is subject to the jurisdiction of the High Court of England and Wales. If it meets these legal tests, it will be entered on the charity register.

“It is not the Commission’s role to make value judgements about the aims or ideas put forward by any organisation. Instead, its role is to decide whether an organisation’s purposes fall within the legal definition of charity.”

The Charity Commission has acknowledged a number of objections to the registration of LGBA as a charity, saying it “carefully considered these as part of making its decision. In handling this application, the Commission has had regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty”.

LGBA was founded in 2019 in opposition to LGBTQ+ rights charity Stonewall’s policies on transgender issues. Only last month, Scottish Liberal Democrats MP, Jamie Stone, publicly criticised LGBA after the group sent him an email arguing trans conversion therapy should not be criminalised. Stone shared a segment of the email on Twitter, where the controversial group said sexual orientation and gender identity should be considered separately when discussing the possibility of a national ban on conversion therapy.

The full decision, explaining the grounds for registering the organisation as a charity, and the objections that were considered, can be found at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/lgb-alliance/lgb-alliance-full-decision. LGBA has faced criticism since it was established in 2019 in opposition to trans inclusive policies laid out by Stonewall, and has been branded a hate group by Pride In London and the Labour Campaign for Trans Rights. LGBTQ+ rights lawyer and director of the Good Law Project, Jo Maugham, condemned the Charity Commission’s decision, saying: “The consequence of this Panglossian stance on the activities of a hate group is that your taxes will now be used to subsidise transphobia.”

LGBTQ+ groups respond

The decision by The Charity Commission sparked a backlash among LGBTQ+ activists and advocacy organisations.

Stonewall said it is “unsettling to see an organisation founded to oppose our work towards trans rights has been granted status as a registered charity”. Trans rights group, Mermaids, referred to the Charity Commission’s decision as a “deeply disturbing…reckless and damaging act of betrayal”, and encouraged trans people and allies to submit complaints to the board.

The LGBT Foundation said in response to the Charity Commission’s decision to register LGBA. “We are shocked that the Charity Commission has registered the self-styled LGBA as we do not believe that any organisation which actively targets and campaigns against trans communities should be granted charitable status.”

Scene magazine response

We are encouraging our readers to both sign this petition against LGBA being awarded charity status and also asking you to write to the Charity Commission letting it know as an LGBTQ+ person why you think this decision is wrong and harmful to our fight for true and fully inclusive equality in the UK.

Sign the Petition: https://www.change.org/p/charity-commission-stop-anti-trans-group-the-lgb-alliance-gaining-charity-status

Tell the Charity Commission about your concerns. To complain about the decision to include LGBA as a registered charity visit: https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-charity. You’ll need its charity number as a reference: it’s 1194148.

Our trans, non-binary and gender queer communities are under attack as never before, each day seems to bring some new outrage and push back, but we are a wide, strong, experienced, talented, diverse community; we are resilient and will continue to fight for equality for all. Unless all are equal, none are truly equal. We are staunch allies, we remember our true history, and how TNB communities have always been at the forefront of our battles and struggles for change.

We are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, questioning, queer, non-binary, intersex, gender queer and a host of other things, but we are a community with things in common. We are stronger together and we recognise divisive, twisted rhetoric when we see it. LGBA is a sophisticated con trick, a sharply dressed, deeply unpleasant group of people who do not have LGBTQ+ communities’ best interests at heart.
Study finds one-quarter of LGBTQ+ youth have experienced homelessness

A study by LGBTQ+ homelessness charity akt, which surveyed 161 young queer people, found 24% had experienced homelessness at some point during the past five years, with a further 21% saying they were homeless for longer than six months.

It found two-thirds of respondents would like to see more individualised, face-to-face support services which support wellbeing and mental health. The report concluded that LGBTQ+ people need “more specialised services, such as those for trans and non-binary and young people of colour is also important for LGBTQ+ young people”.

UK’s first LGBTQ+ retirement village to open this summer

The first LGBTQ+ inclusive retirement village in the UK is due to open this summer in London after receiving £5.7million in funding from London Mayor Sadiq Khan. The project is being managed by Tonic Housing, which was first set up in 2014 to address issues of loneliness and isolation among older LGBTQ+ people and provide specific housing for those who need it. The funding has been used to purchase 19 one and two-bedroom homes in Vauxhall, which will make up the village.

Cabaret stars raise over £2,000 for ‘Peyton’s wheels’

Cabaret Wheelette saw a plethora of the scene’s top performers come together online last month to raise funds to improve Peyton’s mobility and quality of life. A total of £2,372 was raised before and during the event and if you haven’t donated yet, you can do so by visiting https://gofund.me/6ce207d3

Sussex Freemasons donate £25,000 to buy new van for Sussex Beacon

Sussex Freemasons have supported the Sussex Beacon, raising £25,000 for the charity to purchase a replacement van outright, which will be used to expedite deliveries, pick-ups, stock moving and other Sussex Beacon business across Brighton and beyond.

During the Covid-19 crisis, the Sussex Beacon has been taking on additional care and healthcare duties around the community. With the road map out of Covid already being deployed, the need for a replacement van was inevitable. The Sussex Freemasons’ funding means the Beacon can continue to make collections as well as having an enhanced presence in the community.

Sussex Freemasons is proud to have the support of such a variety of incredible groups across Sussex and Brighton. The Sussex Freemasons have long been a supporter of our work and of improving the lives of those living with HIV in the local area. Their direct financial support in supplying our retail team with a new van means our shops have the opportunity to make more home deliveries and donation pickups, alongside the many other uses for this vehicle. We are hugely grateful to the Sussex Masons and all of their contributing lodges for this effort and support.”

For more info on the Sussex Beacon: www.sussexbeacon.org.uk
UK Black Pride announces digital festival

Celebrated singer/songwriter Alan Bonner will be bringing his unique twist on the ABBA classics to The Brunswick in Hove as part of the Brighton Fringe on June 25 & 26.

The show, The Way Old Friends Do, will see Bonner sing a selection of favourites, including Chiquitita, The Day Before You Came and The Winner Takes It All, as well as some lesser-known but carefully chosen ABBA classics.

Bonner will be joined by a five-piece band of acclaimed Brighton musicians: Ross Devlin on guitar, Ben Jones (of Alice Russell fame) on piano, Robin Squirrel on cello and multi-award-winning singer Paul Diello on collaborative vocals.

Together, they perform lovingly reworked ABBA ear candy with a lush, theatrical soundscape and distinctive arrangements and instrumentation.

“I’ve been an ABBA superfan since I was five years old. Their music was like an emotional sugar rush then and it still is now,” says Bonner. “They are master songwriters, mixing sweetness with melancholy and delivering it through perfect pop songs.”

The show supports Bonner’s 2020 ABBA album, The Way Old Friends Do, and follows a string of well-received albums of Bonner’s own music that have won him tens across Europe and the USA.

To book, visit: www.brightonfringe.org.uk/whats-on/the-way-old-friends-do-a-musical-celebration-of-abba-144099/

UK Black Pride announces digital festival

UK Black Pride is returning for its 16th year by hosting a three-day long digital festival with the theme Love and Rage from July 2 – 4.

Co-founder and executive director, Phyll Opoku-Gyimah, released a statement to explain the theme, saying: “We’ve seen first-hand over the past year our communities’ persistent commitment to each other; the ways we show up, in communities; our ongoing commitment to our LGBTQ+ friends.

Our communities continue to be overlooked and undervalued, tokenised and discarded. From constant gaslighting to this country’s steadfast refusal to address and redress structural and institutional racism, we have a lot to be mad about.

“We can’t wait to celebrate and rage with you. Let us show what is possible when we show up in our fury, committed to loving each other and changing the world.”

For more info, visit: www.ukblackpride.org.uk

Brighton & Hove to mark IDAHOBIT on Monday, May 17

International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia & Biphobia (IDAHOBIT) was created in 2004 to draw the attention to the violence and discrimination experienced by LGBTQ+ and other people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities or expressions, and sex characteristics.

The date of May 17 was specifically chosen to commemorate the World Health Organisation’s decision in 1990 to declassify homosexuality as a mental disorder. IDAHOBIT in May 17 is now celebrated in more than 130 countries, including 37 where same-sex acts are illegal. Thousands of initiatives, big and small, are reported throughout the planet.

IDAHOBIT LOUD & PROUD Health Walk on Monday, May 17 at 12pm. Meet on the beach between Palace Pier and the Kiss Statue for Brighton & Hove City Council LGBTQ+ Workers Forum’s LOUD & PROUD LGBTQ+ health walk from the Pier to The Level to show presence and share LGBTQ+ peer space. Organisers say: “We are still unable to hold static community events, but we can walk in small groups. Everyone is welcome to join, dress up loud and proud and bring a flag. We want the city to know we are here and queer. Please observe social distancing, wear a mask and observe relevant Covid restrictions.”

Stretch & Flex: IDAHOBIT Session on Wednesday, May 19 at 1pm.

As part of IDAHOBIT week, there is also an online Stretch & Flex session being offered to LGBTQ+ communities, which is free to anyone who is shielding or is unable to access outdoor space. Run by Elle, a qualified personal trainer, GP referral exercise specialist and studio instructor, this will be held over Zoom and is 40 minutes of low-impact mobility, balance and core-based exercises suitable for all; only a mat or towel is needed. All people who identify as LGBTQ+ welcome.

Any questions, email Elle on prowessfit@hotmail.co.uk or email the LGBTQ+ Workers’ Forum - LGBTQWorkersForum@brighton-hove.gov.uk - for the link to join this free and fun session.

For more info on IDAHOBIT, visit: https://may17.org/
UN urges UK to ban conversion therapy

In an address to UK MPs on April 15, UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Dr Ahmed Shaheed, urged the government to ban LGBTQ+ conversion therapy, describing the practice as “chilling”. According to ITV News, Shaheed told MPs: “International human rights law is clear that the right to freedom of religion or belief does not limit the state’s obligation to protect life, dignity, health and equality of LGBTQ+ persons.”

He said: “The testimonies of survivors of conversion practices are chilling,” adding: “LGBTQ+ persons are assailed with physical and emotional abuse that have haunting consequences.”

The UK government is currently debating a national ban on conversion therapy, with March 28 marking 1,000 days since it first promised to do so.

However, religious groups including the Evangelical Alliance have raised concerns about its implications for ‘religious freedom.’

In response, Shaheed insisted: “Banning such discredited, ineffective, and unsafe practices that misguided try to change or suppress people’s sexual orientation and gender is not a violation of the right to freedom of religion or belief under international law” due to the harmful nature of the practice.

Morrisons Foundation awards the Sussex Beacon £21,500

The Morrisons Foundation, which supports charities making a positive difference in local communities across England, Scotland and Wales, has awarded the Sussex Beacon £21,500 to modernise the charity’s kitchen area.

The Sussex Beacon supports hundreds of people each year – serving over 10,000 meals last year. This help means the Sussex Beacon can continue to do that in an enhanced environment and keep costs down on necessary improvements and ensure money goes to where it’s most needed – patient care.

Mark, fundraising manager, said: “We are over the moon to receive this extremely generous offer of support from the Morrisons Foundation. Our kitchen has been in need of some TLC for a while now and with the support of the foundation we will be able to continue to offer free meals for our patients, which totalled over 10,000 last year.

“We would especially like to thank our local Brighton Community Champion Louise Coffey for her kind support in this bid. We would also like to thank Morrisons St James’ Street store as they have donated vouchers, put out tins and continually showed support for our service users.”

For more info on Sussex Beacon: www.sussexbeacon.org.uk

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East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service launches LGBTQ+ career event

East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service (ESFRS) is hosting an online session for people who identify as LGBTQ+ and are interested in learning about a career as a firefighter.

ESFRS said: “We will be opening for recruitment this summer and we want you to consider a career with us. Come along to find out more from our local firefighters and our LGBTQ+ staff network about working for ESFRS.

“We are also hosting an online session which anyone can join, however we also recognise through our workforce data that people who identify as women, LGBTQ+ and ethnic minorities are underrepresented in our service in the firefighter role. For that reason we are running sessions where these groups can find out more about the role and hear from our staff networks.”

To sign up for the Being a firefighter – Is it for you? LGBTQ+ career event on Monday, May 18 from 7 – 8pm visit www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/being-a-firefighter-is-it-for-you-lgbt-career-event-tickets-151642507823

For the other session dates visit www.esfrs.org/about-us/inclusion-diversity/our-commitment-to-positive-action/

Visit the ESFRS Firefighter Recruitment page www.esfrs.org/about-us/careers/wholesale-firefighter-recruitment/ for more information about the recruitment process.

The standards for successful application are the same for everyone.

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Kent sees surge in anti-LGBTQ+ hate crime

A new report from KentOnline has found the county is experiencing high levels of anti-LGBTQ+ hate crime, with 1,686 incidents being investigated by Kent Police during the past three years, 366 of which took place in Medway. Between 2019 and 2020, investigated crimes rose from 533 to 546, with several queer people living in Kent sharing their experiences of anti-LGBTQ+ abuse.

Shea Coffey, a 46-year-old trans woman living in Medway, said: “Hostility has definitely grown in the last few years.” She explained that “almost everyone” in the trans community has experienced “verbal harassment,” and said she knows some who are too afraid to leave their homes. She said hiding her identity through fear of abuse has worsened her mental health.

Trans and non-binary Kent resident Graysen Hall also shared their experience, saying they had been verbally assaulted on multiple occasions, and adding: “If I feel like I have to justify my existence to someone – that’s not fair on me or any non-binary trans person.” Twenty-eight-year-old Benjamin Carr, the director of Kent Pride, said he no longer holds hands with his partner in public “because the aggravation isn’t worth it.” The Pride organisation recently held a meeting to address the rising number of hate crimes and has contacted police to raise awareness of its concerns.

To see the full report, visit: www.kentonline.co.uk/kent/news/we-no-longer-hold-hands-in-public-because-the-aggro-isnt-w-246278/
If They Don’t Like You, Listen

By Craig Hanlon-Smith

We find ourselves at the beginning of an unravelling story around ministerial conduct which so far looks to potentially discredit two Prime Ministers. Both from within the past 10 years and one of them current and sitting. The reason this matters and we should all care about it is because such behaviours are a covert demonstration that those involved absolutely do not care about you. During a pandemic in which over 125,000 people have died, and 4.5 million people infected (in the UK alone), there are stories circulating about the funding of renovations to the Prime Ministerial residence in Downing Street. Current suggestions imply potential illegality.

“Prime Ministerial residence in Downing Street. There is no doubt it seems to us that politically we are moving backwards. The behaviours of those in government is now seemingly not dissimilar to a half-baked seedy plot twist in a cheap political thriller.”

I have recently taken part in the project #ProudPortraits, which is an LGBTQ+ photographic and personal pride project for an online and physical exhibition in London during Pride Month, June 2021. Over a hundred people have been photographed and shared their personal pride message. Over a hundred people from all denominations of the land we call LGBTQ+ and more. Confident, assured and calm visibility and story sharing. A show of strength, solidarity and of the lived experience of life within these communities.

There is no doubt it seems to us that politically we are moving backwards. The behaviours of those in government is now seemingly not dissimilar to a half-baked seedy plot twist in a cheap political thriller. Those voices are normalised when the voting population does not or cannot challenge them. Those behaviours may even be deliberately ignored as the common mainstream voter weighs up what is more important to them. A loveable rogue in government who speaks to me, or a kind, measured human rights lawyer who is nice to queers. It is an uncomfortable equation, but we understand it.

Those voters feel listened to and have responded in kind. We must listen too if we are to understand why we are where we are, and how to truly, effectively and personally make a real difference. Be proud. Listen and learn.
I was constantly chasing that next high so I didn’t care about bills, rent and money owed to people - all I cared about was the next thrill. And it got to a point when I said to myself: STOP! What the hell am I doing? I have nieces and nephews that I want to be here for, and I want to be alive in 10 years time.”

We both agreed that the very last person that should be on the receiving end of finger-waging rage is the addict, because this achieves diddly squat. Addicts should be understood and looked after; instead such ire should be directed at those who can impact real change, and are responsible for the wellbeing of people and mental health services.

“Drugs make you horny and inhibitions go out the window - then it’s a sex-fest and you want more, more, more.”

People will always take drugs. That’s a fact. It’s a tale as old as time. My personal opinion is that drugs should be legalised, or at least decriminalised. In 2001 Portugal decriminalised the personal possession of all drugs, and since then HIV and drug-related deaths have decreased significantly. The UK should be looking to places like this, and in the meantime investing much more in specialist mental health services, putting people first.

I do wonder if LGBTQ+ people are more prone to partaking in chemsex because we enjoy visceral sexual encounters and delay orgasm. There’s been a lot said about chemsex within the LGBTQ+ community over the past decade.

Now we all know that the topic of drugs is a contentious one at the best of times, so add strangers and risky sex into the mix and the danger level increases significantly.

However, regardless of the risks, both short and long term, many LGBTQ+ people turn to chemsex as a form of escapism and release; a disconnection from reality that can last for hours or even days on end.

From what I’ve witnessed over the years there are people who can quite easily enjoy dabbling in chemsex from time to time and then put the lid back on the box at the end of the weekend and saunter off to work with no bother, then there’s those that can’t ever seem to keep the lid from popping back up like a demented Jack-in-the-box; the need to keep going is too strong, which in time, sadly, often spills over and has a detrimental effect on personal life, relationships and work.

An addictive personality will latch on to almost anything that satisfies cravings - alcohol, sex, drugs, shopping, food, whatever - I should know because I have one. But I’ve never got into chemsex. Which is probably for the best.
mixed-gendered school in my intermediate I transferred from an all-boys school to a smaller spheres. appreciated the positive changes within those rebellion. So, I stopped being blind-sighted and different and I held my empowerment through freedom, but that wasn’t fair. My journey was backlash. I remember feeling jealous of their having ownership of their identity without trends in the corridors. I watched younger years gender identity and androgyny were massive was being celebrated. Conversations around years of education was immense. Self-expression celebrated. The impact I noticed during my final happening and anyone seen as different was not lack of understanding. Conversations were not bullying LGBTQ+ and transphobic homophobic, biphobic funded programmes to prevent and tackle to prevent and tackle to the statute of what was initially presented efforts of various campaigns, funds, communities and society that was slowly shifting this contemporary acceptance. Friends had told me that they didn’t want to be categorised anymore, or if they had to... correctly at least. The influx in conversation regarding inclusivity, diversity, gender identity etc over the past five-plus years has been incredible. Everyone was learning to delegate all cultural/identity niches with conscious respect. Terms and phrases have become outdated and offensive, so conversations began to be specific with its agenda; being appropriate concerning topics and representation. Reinforcing this, having these programmes and familiarising this to students is enough to spark change. There is a reasonable basis that the reluctance to continue this fund will have a detrimental effect on LGBTQ+ youth. Neglecting this fundamental support means neglecting vulnerable children who need our support. And thus, abandoning this in general inquiry into how vulnerable LGBTQ+ youth are means abandoning our LGBTQ+ youth. I do not recall any discussion in school or support regarding LGBTQ+ identity and history. So creating a safe space for conversation, familiarising identity as something you shouldn’t be ashamed of, will help students to not suffer in silence – as I did. Progression has been made and it warned me to see this, so it shouldn’t be suspended.

I remember a teacher saying, “how would I know? You seem like a happy young boy”, but that was far from the truth. How could I blame them? Let us not forget that some teachers would have completed their training during Section 28. Unequipped and unbothered. Schools must have access to the correct support to focus on their duty to keep students safe – free from unwarranted resistance toward these programmes from parents, student bodies and governors. I did not get to see the full extent of this programme, but my school experience would have been a different story. Ultimately, without programmes and anti-bullying funding, I risked my education due to my absence. This alone should serve as a case to extend the fund. Without it, during my years of schooling, it felt like my right to education had been dismissed. Action is needed to stop LGBTQ+ bullying. LGBTQ+ students have disproportionately bad mental health; personally, primarily due to my school experience. Let’s not disregard anyone’s mental health and let’s call this out.

Why was this fund seen as so adversarial? There is an apologetic uselessness in not mandating legislation which some have said to be culturally influential. What message does this send to our youth? The government is propelling backwards on its primary promise of LGBTQ+ support. Although the government hasn’t directly slapped on any sanctions, it does feel like a slap in the face. I would have thought that the government would have wanted to take all necessary measures to protect its youth – especially after returning to school following the pandemic.

“Neglecting this fundamental support means neglecting vulnerable children who need our support”

People have been speaking out, but they are not being heard. These initiatives are not constituting any escalation or change. It is unacceptable to not consider this to be of major concern. LGBTQ+ youth are experiencing bullying everyday. There have been considerable efforts to change this in the past five years. These efforts have come from the LGBTQ+ community and no doubt these programmes have made a positive change. But equality and eradication of discrimination have not been delivered. This is why we cannot liquidate programmes like this. I want LGBTQ+ youth to have a safer education than I did. The cumulative change to the safety of children and adolescents should not be trivialised (as you take away a safety net, the safety of children and adolescents should not be trivialised (as you take away a safety net, the safety of children and adolescents should not be trivialised (as you take away a safety net, the safety of children and adolescents should not be trivialised (as you take away a safety net, the safety of children and adolescents should not be trivialised (as you take away a safety net, the safety of children and adolescents should not be trivialised (as you take away a safety net...

The Government Equalities Office had quietly removed. To simply cut the programme will allow reservation for bullying. School can be challenging for any student. However, many young LGBTQ+ students suffer a distressing amount of bullying during their education.

I think discontinuing this fund will encourage the perception that LGBTQ+ bullying has either stopped or is not worth funding. It sets the precedent of reclassifying the severity of LGBTQ+ bullying and relaxation of demand for equality. This issue means a lot to me. During my education, there seemed to be a complete lack of understanding. Conversations were not happening and anyone seen as different was not celebrated. The impact I noticed during my final years of education was immense. Self-expression was being celebrated. Conversations around gender identity and androgyny were massive trends in the corridors. I watched younger years having ownership of their identity without backlash. I remember feeling jealous of their freedom, but that wasn’t fair. My journey was different and I held my empowerment through rebellion. So, I stopped being blind-sighted and appreciated the positive changes within those smaller spheres.

I transferred from an all-boys school to a mixed-gendered school in my intermediate years. I was astounded to observe the contrast in cultures, especially the freedom of expression in this school. Initially, I thought it must be the flexibility of non-uniform, being a mixed-gendered school, but liberation seemed to be progressing year by year. I can now discern it was the efforts of various campaigns, funds, communities and society that was slowly shifting this contemporary acceptance.

By Jack Groves
It’s no secret that our community is disproportionately affected by mental health issues, with 2021 research finding young queer people in particular are increasingly struggling to maintain their mental wellbeing during the pandemic. However, Brighton & Hove is home to a multitude of organisations set up with LGBTQ+ wellbeing in mind, and aim to be a source of support for anyone in need during these trying times and beyond. Our mental health heroes are all local LGBTQ+ advocacy workers who have dedicated their lives to providing essential assistance for our local community so that we can all live happier, healthier lives. And we for one think they all deserve a round of applause!
“Honestly? I often say I have the job of my dreams! As a counsellor, I focus on each individual and aim to work together to come up with aims that are personal to them. In the ’90s I started to volunteer for the **London Lighthouse**, supporting people living with HIV, before retraining as a counsellor and moving to Brighton. I had always wanted to support people in the LGBTQ+ community, as I am myself part of this community, and working in the field of HIV granted me this opportunity in my favourite city. Our **Living Well** and counselling service will continue to support people living with HIV through these difficult times and help them out of the pandemic, and we are about to start work on a year-long research project in partnership with **Brighton University** for **Living Well with HIV**, which will be the region’s first partnership on mental health and HIV.”

🔗 For more info on Terrence Higgins Trust, visit: [www.tht.org.uk](http://www.tht.org.uk)
Alysa Friedrich, MindOut

“MindOut serves and responds to local Brighton & Hove LGBTQ+ communities by providing counselling, peer support groups, peer mentoring, befriending and personalised advocacy services. In my role as the training development coordinator, I support a team of trainers to design, sell and deliver bespoke LGBTQ+ inclusion training to local and international training clients. It is an honour to do this work, as providing LGBTQ+ specific training to clients can assist them in creating safer workplaces and implementing more inclusive services. We are still finding out about the effects of the pandemic on LGBTQ+ mental health; our primary aim will continue to be as responsive as possible to emerging mental health needs. We are also excited to be offering a number of bursaries for black and trans/QTIPoC counsellors to undertake training in partnership with the University of Brighton.”

For more info on MindOut, visit: www.mindout.org.uk
“MindOut aims to provide a space for LGBTQ+ communities to receive mental health and wellbeing support in a space where their gender and sexual identities are understood. As the fundraising assistant, I enjoy building relationships with our supporters and donors and being active on social media in raising awareness of mental health challenges, LGBTQ+ communities, and identities. I love how my work is rooted within activism because I’ve always wanted to contribute towards positive changes that are close to my heart. We plan to continue its mission of providing vital mental health and wellbeing support, and we’ve started to embark on our anti-racism journey, and in the future, we hope to deliver on our goals to become an anti-racist organisation and dismantle white supremacy within the charity sector.”

👏 For more info on MindOut, visit: www.mindout.org.uk
“The Sussex Beacon provides care and support for people living with the challenges of HIV, and I’ve been fortunate enough to work here for a number of years. Being part of an organisation that supports people when they are potentially at their most vulnerable and being a ‘Beacon’ of hope for so many people who have lived through so many different challenges in their lives is such a privilege for me. As an organisation, we recognise the importance of listening to the needs of the service users and the local community. We will continue to develop both inpatient and outpatient services that support the changing needs of people living with HIV.”

For more info on Sussex Beacon, visit: www.sussexbeacon.org.uk
Bill Puddicombe, Sussex Beacon

“We aim to be a place of trust and safety for people living with HIV. Many of our service users have experienced discrimination and stigmatisation in the community. I have been working in the voluntary sector for most of my life and I have always found it enjoyable and challenging in equal measures. Our fundraising and events are wonderful – it is the only place I have worked where I have both been to a drag show and jumped out of an aeroplane as part of the job! We are intent on ‘future-proofing’ the Sussex Beacon, ensuring that we are here for the long term – but along with that we are continually listening and learning how to adapt our services. As the lives of people living with HIV change, so we will be sure to change with them.”

😊 For more info on the Sussex Beacon, visit: www.sussexbeacon.org.uk
“Switchboard’s Rainbow Café project supports LGBTQ+ persons affected by dementia or memory difficulties and their caregivers, and I am privileged to be part of the incredible work it does with and for the LGBTQ+ community following my personal experiences of being a caregiver for my mum, who lived with Alzheimer’s disease. The Rainbow Café project will resume its social events from the end of April and will be extending these into West Sussex too, and is due to begin a programme in the coming months where LGBTQ+ persons living with dementia can support one another.”

For more info on Switchboard, visit: www.switchboard.org.uk
“Set up in 1975, Switchboard has been listening to and informing LGBTQ+ people in Brighton & Hove and beyond. Originally a helpline, we have developed additional services and now offer support for LGBTQ+ people looking for a sense of community. I’m extremely passionate and proud of my work as Switchboard’s trans and non-binary link coordinator – I run the service in a bespoke way to fit around people’s needs. I’m dedicated to ensuring people from the trans and non-binary community get the support they need to live a fulfilled life, and the link has been going from strength to strength in the past year. The service is looking forward to being able to reopen in-person and will continue to offer support for a variety of issues, from anxiety and depression to language and cultural barriers, as well as navigating transitioning.”

😊 For more info on Switchboard, visit: www.switchboard.org.uk
AJ Mundane was taught that tarot cards were the devil’s work, but the Cardiff-based mental health support worker has found that the ancient interpretive tool can play a powerful role in aiding people's wellbeing and self-understanding.

After some five years of studying the tarot, he is currently in the process of creating his own deck of cards to help people better analyse and understand their feelings, having first had to teach himself how to draw and attended two courses run by Lindsay Mack, a tutor who is on a mission to “rewild” tarot. Her *Tarot for the Wild Soul* is described as “a radical reinterpretation of the tarot as a tool for presence and evolution, one that can assist us in differentiating the noise of our mind from the truth of our soul”. AJ says: “Lindsay’s course provided a jumping off point for me to start formulating my own ideas, because of her radical undoing of traditional tarot teachings.

“I was brought up in an orthodox religious cult; a very religious environment. A load of trauma came with that. When you’re forced to see the world through a particular lens it can be so detrimental to mental health. I was taught that tarot cards were demonic and would bring chaos and destruction, but I have found the opposite.”

He explains that, for centuries, people have been conditioned to look at tarot as a predictive tool, but his focus is to use it as a way of analysing feelings to gain acceptance of them.

“When used solely for prediction tarot intensifies our anxieties because we are constantly screening for threat – we are conditioned for flight or flight, but there’s not a function for that any more. People come to the tarot because they are trying to predict what will come next. If you use it more as a tool for analysis of your own feelings you can get acceptance of that. It’s less of a predictive tool and more of a tool for surrender.

“[It’s about saying] this is what’s here, how do I feel about that? Can I just bow to that moment, even if that feeling is wanting to know more?” But traditional cards mainly do not reflect current society, which is what led AJ to want to create an entirely new style, throwing away the classic depictions of gender, patriarchy and white supremacy. Over time, through working on the courses and with other people, he started to see patterns that “defy the traditional interpretation of the cards”.

He gives an example of one card he’s reworked and how a modern, mindful interpretation can operate: “If we were to take the *Three of Swords*, that’s quite a striking image. It’s a known card that has quite a bit of an old-school tattoo design – a heart with three swords plunged into it. In traditional teachings it means heartbreak, but when working with the *Three of Swords* it’s about air – the element – and that’s dealing with anything to do with thought processes.

“This card would show up in my life but it would never show up for me as heartbreak, so that said there had to be a more universal message. Because it’s air, we are dealing with the mind and how we allow our thoughts to pierce the mind to a certain extent. We go through a certain trauma or traumatic incident and create a mental story that lives in the mind and does not allow us to release the emotion that came with the story initially.

“The invitation that’s being given [by the cards] is to allow yourself to let go of something you are hanging on to so a stillness can be found. That’s a very mindful thing to do. It’s a much more broad human experience than just ‘you are heartbroken right now’. That may be the case, but it’s more because you are hanging on to that story. The card is trying to point you to the transientness of emotions. So, if you let go of that story can you find stillness?”

In his interpretation of that particular card, the heart is replaced by clouds and rain, and swords are depicted falling from a brain.

AJ has a particular focus on wanting to help those in the LGBTQ+ community. “I have lots of LGBTQ+ experience as was reading for all my friends, all manner of genders and sexuality. But the cards can be quite heteronormative and gendered and I know a lot of people who are interested but don’t resonate with traditional readings.”

When ready, he hopes his deck will be released with coloured pencils, as one of the goals is to get people to colour it in, turning the gender-neutral characters he has created into whatever they like.
they want. It's his way of trying to overthrow the accepted white supremacy represented by the cards. "The traditional Emperor is an old white guy on a throne – it speaks to the time it was invented. All that needs to go. It might have been the visual representation at the time, but not now. We all have a right to power and regency. It's the birth of you. I'm trying to offer a reclamation of that."

"It's serious mental health work. There's trauma work in it. If you are coming to ritualistic theory there's a genuine want to understand yourself. It's not a gimmick – it's a journey that I have gone through myself and would like to share and facilitate."

AJ has "been in contact with the tarot since I was about 18 but it was a guilty relationship". He says it took his last long-term relationship to change that as he still carried religious guilt and "had very heteronormative values" due to the "insidious" nature of organised religions that condemn the act of homosexuality, "but they tell you god [still] has plans for you, all genders, sexuality, colours". That relationship was the first time he had pursued a non-heteronormative route.

"It's serious mental health work. There's trauma work in it. If you are coming to ritualistic theory there's a genuine want to understand yourself"

As to the origins of wanting to create his own deck, it was quite a journey. He had tried to embark on the project with two friends at different times, but both times it fell through. However, the calling was strong.

“I do communicate with the spirit, the divine,” he says, adding that such a communication can also be seen as akin to a Jungian place of collective consciousness. “One day I was out walking the dog, bummed out that the project had fallen through, and I had this message to do it myself.

“You can kind of argue with the spirit and I was like: ‘But I can’t fucking draw’. This was only about two months ago but for it to have happened so quickly…” The theme that goes with the deck is Mystical Self Help, and AJ says he is “mid-journey” at the moment.

“I have drawn 14 cards and have five more designs. They come to me in waves. Every time I try to push it doesn’t work."

But he has set himself a goal to complete his deck by the end of the year – that’s 78 cards in all. No mean undertaking for someone who, just a few months ago, didn’t believe he had the artistic ability to go it alone.

Follow AJ Mundane @ajmundane
Eating disorders are never far from the news. In April we heard the sad news of the death of Nikki Grahame, who died from anorexia. Last autumn the release of season four of The Crown reignited the discussion with the portrayal of Diana, Princess of Wales.

The assumption is that eating disorders only affect women, but it's thought a quarter of sufferers are male and research shows LGBTQ+ people are more likely to be affected. Beat, the national eating disorders charity, says “anyone can develop an eating disorder, regardless of their age, gender, or ethnic or cultural background”, but signs can be dismissed due to misconceptions about who is likely to have one.

Beat describes eating disorders as serious mental illnesses which manifest as disordered eating behaviour as a way to cope with difficult situations or feelings. The way a person treats food may make them feel more able to cope or be in control, even if they're not conscious of it.

Ed, a trans man, opened up about his experiences of living with eating disorders. He can trace his struggles to when he was 11, but on reflection the signs were there at an even earlier age. And he continues to live with them. Now aged 42, he has learnt ways of managing them as best he can, but they’re still there, and “seriously” get in his way when he’s trying to get stuff done.

How did you come to realise you had an eating disorder?

Realising I had an eating disorder was a difficult thing because it came with a lot of judgement built in. When I started to read about them I didn’t think what I was doing qualified as disordered. I didn’t think it was serious or that I was ill enough.

My eating disorder developed slowly. Even as a kid, in the first year at primary school, I always ‘felt fat’, ashamed of people seeing my arms and legs and thought I was too fat to do sport. I was also sometimes unconsciously comfort eating. In high school I started gaining weight as I was regularly binge eating, then something switched and I started eating much less than I should and losing weight.

It wasn’t until I was in sixth form that I started to feel the ‘food situation’, as I was calling it, was a problem. I didn’t think I could call it an eating disorder, that was somehow showing off, but it had a few things in common. I was finding practically every decision I was making was somehow related to food, body shape and the eating disorder, and I wanted to solve it to free up my mind for thoughts other than ‘when do I next eat?’, or ‘how can I avoid eating?’.

By the time I started realising the problem, it had completely taken over. It took me several more years to feel confident enough to call it an eating disorder. Even today, I feel a bit guilty using that term; a voice in the back of my mind says I just need to try harder, have more self-control. It says I don’t have a disorder, I’m just undisciplined.

The difference between an eating disorder and not an eating disorder is, does how you eat and how you think about food negatively impact your life? Is it getting in the way of you doing the things you want to do? Is it damaging your body?

My problems with food have been very sneaky, and they have shifted form and attack plans again and again. When I first got into exercise I found it a really good counter to the eating disorder, and a good way to feel less anxious about food and weight. But gradually exercise became compulsive. It became ‘you’re not allowed to eat unless you’ve exercised’.

Have you sought and received help for it?

I have, several times since teenage. I’ve had counselling, hypnotherapy and CBT, and joined different support groups. I still go to Beat’s online drop-in groups. I’m now 42, still have an eating disorder, but I manage it much, much better than I used to.

What’s been the most useful treatment?

What really clicked for me might do nothing for someone else. I hated having to tell anyone I had a problem with food and it was awful at first trying to talk about it and manage the shame. Talking helped me understand it was a problem I needed to learn to manage; an illness that grew in my mind, separate from who I am. The more I could see it that way, the less it felt like a personality flaw.

Different things work for me at different times. I’ve got a mental toolbox I go to when stress levels are going up and I feel at risk of the disorder building up too much. For example, when the urge to binge eat grows, I try to figure out what the real problem is, because it always comes when something is wrong. If you find you’re cutting things out and eating less, the ‘eat less’ voice gets out of control fast, so draw a line early. Making a daily list of what I’m going to eat quiets the eating disorder voice and helps relieve anxiety around food.

Sometimes it takes giving a technique a go a few times before it has clicked into place, so I keep going back, trying things again, seeing what I can get out of them.

For more information about eating disorders and where to get help if you think you need support, visit: www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk
THE IMPORTANCE OF LGBTQ+ EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

Trans woman and champion of diversity and inclusion Sophie Cook recently wrote on her website about the importance of LGBTQ+ education. Here we publish the original article and she expands on why this is such a pressing subject.

"Those of us that grew up before and during the days of Section 28, when knowledge of LGBTQ+ identities was either lacking or expressly forbidden, carry the scars of having our identities invalidated.

“We were demonised, dehumanised and othed. Our mental health suffered due to the isolation and absence of support. Many of us struggled with depression, self-harm or suicidal thoughts, and sometimes actions. We will carry that pain and those scars with us to the grave.

"We must take the opportunity to ensure that future generations do not face this prejudice. Young people must be educated about LGBTQ+ identities and they must feel that they have the freedom and support to explore what that means to them.

Some may say that we are putting ideas into young people’s heads, that we are confusing them and converting them to an LGBTQ+ lifestyle. To those people I ask how many children have ever become regular churchgoers through Religious Education and mandatory prayers and hymns at school? Those of us that are parents know how difficult it is to persuade a teenager to tidy their bedroom, let alone change their gender identity or sexuality.

To the question of why it is so important at this point to call for more LGBTQ+ education, Sophie responds: “At the moment we are seeing so much push-back on trans rights in particular, but it’s going to have a push-back on all LGBTQ+ life. You look at some of the stuff the LGB Alliance are trying to put into schools. Some identities are being invalidated. When you are at school and coming to terms with your identity, that’s when you want support, not to be invalidated.

“So many things have been progressing so well in recent years. I do a lot of work in schools, LGBTQ+ societies, clubs, activities. I remember going to one local comprehensive school to talk at an assembly in front of 300 12-year-olds. They said we do a monthly LGBTU lunch. I asked what the U stood for and they said ‘undecided’ and I thought that was great – no one wants to be forced into a box.”

Sophie attended one of the meetings and found the school had laid on a buffet “and the room was full of queer kids”.

She continues: “A couple of the students had their arms around each other and said to me: ‘Miss, we are trying to decide which of us is the gayest’. I said there was not a part of that sentence that would not have had your head kicked in when I was at school.

“In my generation it was very difficult, if not impossible, to be out and proud at school. It was a very oppressive environment to grow up in. I think it’s great these generations are doing it but we are seeing a push-back now.”

She points to the Gender Recognition Act consultation as well as attacks against trans and gender variant youth support group Mermaids and the Gender Identity Clinic in Tavistock.

“My concern is if they take away rights from one group it’s very easy to pick us off one by one.”

But it’s not all doom and gloom. “I see these activities at schools all over the country and it fills me with hope. The younger generations just get it in perhaps a way mine doesn’t. Perhaps it’s because they have not read the Daily Mail yet.

“At the moment we are seeing so much push-back on trans rights in particular, but it’s going to have a push-back on all LGBTQ+ life. You look at some of the stuff the LGB Alliance are trying to put into schools. Some identities are being invalidated”

“We need more of the same. We need to instil belief systems in our young people. So much of our education system is based on the industrial revolution to make compliant cogs. We now need free thinkers who can get out and change the world.

“I would love to see schools teach philosophy because once we know our place in the world we can connect with other people rather than [having] separations and increasing prejudice.

“So many teachers are doing amazing work with very few resources because a lot of this stuff is deemed ‘nice to have’ rather than stuff they have to do to meet government requirements.”

She suggests it would be a good idea in schools to instil a value system that everyone should respect everyone else and that “it’s our differences that make this world a wonderful and exciting place to live in”, but doesn’t see government making such work a priority.

“The politics of division led to Brexit and Donald Trump and suits so many people. All the parties are part of the same system. It needs the system to change and I can’t see that happening in the short term-future, possibly not in my lifetime. We see it more and more. Prejudice is there from lack of education and awareness or from hatred.”

And education is important for people who may have long outgrown school too, with Sophie saying the majority of vitriol around difference “comes from the group of people I would class as ‘should know better’ . We need to educate people who have jumped on the gender-critical bandwagon”.

Indeed, younger generations are in many ways taking matters into their own hands. “I grew up in a generation when ‘queer’ was one of the worst insults, but I love the way it’s now a term of sexuality and gender identity and the younger generations have embraced it and are running with it. Because it’s a mish-mash of sexuality and gender identity you might not have your identity as gay or trans – it’s more about saying I am going to be me rather than fit into a box. It’s a new freedom I am amazed to see and wish it had been around when I was growing up.”
Skating has found plenty of new fans in an era that has seen us going in and out of lockdowns, providing a doable outdoor activity and a release from the mental strains of being forced to stay inside for weeks on end.

Many will be familiar with the sight of the Brighton Tuesday Night Street Skate, which sees – when it’s allowable – groups of up to around 70 quad and inline skaters roll through the city, often dressed up and sporting lights.

Brighton Skate was founded in 2010 by Kris Ward, aka Skatemaster, with Liam Boraman, “just for fun so people could skate together as a group”. Kris says: “We don’t know what sport we like until we give it a go. Just watching someone skate well in any way can give you inspiration to at least have a go. The feeling you get from skating has been described as floating or a flying sensation. The freedom you get from skating is amazing, you can skate in many different places and locations and also in groups and with many different people. The skate community in Brighton is second to none, which also leads to friendships and gives out a general positive vibe.

“As well as a physical activity, skating has great mental health benefits too.

“Skaters I have met over the years said that the Brighton Skate had helped them through tough times in their lives, giving them a distraction from the issues they were dealing with. I started Brighton skate on one visit to join a street skate in London called London Skate, which is a street skate through the streets of London.

“I am hoping Brighton & Hove City Council will take note of the roller skating scene and provide Brighton seafront with a skate space for not just the UK skate scene but the international skate scene to draw attention to one of the most vibrant cities in the UK.”

Over the next few pages some of Brighton & Hove’s skating community share their thoughts on the scene.
When did you start skating?
When I was 20, 30+ years ago. Just after I moved to Brighton.

What attracted you to the activity?
Ha, I was travelling in Canada and had a fling with an ice hockey player who had the most amazing muscular thighs, huge legs, and solid bubble butt. He had a pair of ‘dry skates’ that he used in the summer months, new things called ‘inline skates’ and he taught me how to skate in them. When I got back to the UK I imported a pair, I wanted legs like his. The skates cost a fortune and that encouraged me to use them, learning at night secretly down the Marina, until I could skate with confidence. Took me a long winter but the next spring I was ready to roll.

How long have you been skating?
I’ve skated my whole adult life. It gives me a freedom I don’t feel anywhere else. I’m disconnected from friction, I can glide and go wherever I like on a whim, fast. It also allows me to be both exquisitely camp and athletically strong at the same time – it’s very low impact on the body. I can express my essential gracefulness. It’s allowed me to meet people and have some interesting viewpoints on the places I visit. I’d encourage anyone to learn, it’s a graceful, easy way to keep fit and Brighton is an excellent place to skate.

What effect do you find skating has on your mental health?
It has given me the space to think, to let my mind wander, to dump my tension, to glide outside, no one can catch me! It’s my go-to for stress relief. I can be out on my own, get out of the city in moments, flashing like a salmon on wheels through the crowds, doing my own thing. My wheels gave me the confidence to express my camp and silly side and to have wonderful experiences on my wheels: skated naked across the Golden Gate Bridge, dragged in drag by the Dykes on Bikes down Park Lane, a thrilling midnight skate run through the streets of Paris dressed as rabbits, thundering around Bogotá’s streets in a tight formation, marshalled lethal Lesbian Roller Derby events and spent many glorious nights on my own, listening to opera, gliding along Brighton seafront, smiling, flirting and being an OUT silver-haired thick lump of Welshman in his tightest shorts rolling along the prom, dancing with the moon. A rolling Rusalka.

Are you part of a community of skaters?
I’m part of the Brighton Skate Night group, a big group of fully inclusive skaters from across Sussex (and London). We skate together with our cycling sound system across the city regularly. All ages, all skill levels and plenty of LGBTQ+ skaters too, very friendly bunch, join us… They also attend skate nights in other cities, London and Portsmouth and across Europe, Madrid, Paris and Berlin and have family roller-skating events in King Alfred and Sussex leisure centres.
“Roller Derby has always been inherently queer, I know so many people who have done it who have been lesbians. It’s just attractive to women.”
“The sense of community is brilliant. And everyone is supportive and helping each other. It’s infectious. People see us out and about and want to get involved.”
LILY @UNDESIRABLYHARSH
“It allows you to keep your mind on something constantly so there isn’t time for it to wander off into depressive or anxious thoughts. There’s a feeling of pure freedom when you get out on your wheels, freedom of both expression and movement. It’s magic.”
“When I am skating and trying to make a new move, nothing else around me is happening, all the bad things disappear and I totally focus on dancing and feeling good. I learn to just be a person, just feel it inside.”

PABLO @PABZZZ_XOX
“For me it’s the most efficient way to blow off steam; if I am upset or sad about anything I can go hit the streets.”
Much away, but we do know that the story follows Ari, a Jewish drag king ostracised by their family, who clings to their hero – Pepi Littman.

The press release continues: “There are no fiction films about contemporary drag kings, never mind a Jewish drag king. It’s a story about being your true authentic self. Because the central theme is so universal – one of family in all of its forms – it’s a film that has very wide appeal.

“In a moment when Ari is looking for acceptance and family, will they finally be able to embrace themselves and their true voice? History and present must come together in this music-loving and brave story.”

To find out more about what drove this story and why it has such cultural significance today, I sat down to a Zoom chat with Natalie, LJ Parkinson (aka LoUis CYfer) – the project’s drag king consultant – and its Jewish drag king consultant Ashleigh Loeb (aka Rabbi Schmeckie).

“Everybody has their own personal reasons for relating to drag generally as an art. For me it’s reclaiming some degree of patriarchy and I think it’s also about exploring the variety of gender within you”

So what was it about Pepi that resonated so strongly with Natalie?

“I know LJ, so that was one thing, but I’d had a conversation about proto drag kings, or male impersonators as they were called then in the early 20th century, as I had come across a whole host of them while I was researching another project. Then coming across Pepi obviously I dove down that rabbit hole and that was a wonderful thing that took me on a two-month journey of investigating and exploring.”

LJ chips in: “Drag and drag kinging and breeches roles have been huge since about 600AD, right back to the Tang dynasty. Drag queens are getting a lot of mainstream interest right now. People are sort of thinking that drag kings are a new thing but there are some really interesting turn of the century kings, like Vesta Tilley, and Pepi Littman being another one. There are just a few photos and a bit of documentary here and there so to be able to find someone who’s so intersectional like Pepi and doing something that would have been quite controversial in those days, it’s quite extraordinary.

“There’s not that many Jewish drag kings and Natalie is shining a light not only on an underrepresented form of art but also an underrepresented culture, particularly in the UK.”

LJ goes on to talk about her idol, Hetty King,
a heterosexual woman who “really studied men and that’s what their career was founded on” and was a drag king for 71 years.

Back to Natalie, who says: “And yet people don’t know about Hetty and they don’t know about Vesta Tilley and they don’t know about Pepi Littman and I feel like I know about drag kings purely because I have one in my company. But I’ve spoken to so many people and they were like ‘Oh what is a drag king?’ They literally have no idea, which surprises me, but there are a lot of people who know about drag queens because of RuPaul and main media now is shining a spotlight on them and that’s wonderful, but we need now to also swivel that spotlight a tiny bit and make sure drag kings catch some of that light – it’s super important.”

Over to Ashleigh: “Until I was approached with regards to this project I didn’t know anything about Pepi Littman. I got involved because Natalie contacted me as I’m a British Jewish drag king and she was very excited to find me. I believe I’m currently the only one, or the only one I’m aware of.

“There are a lot of conversations at the moment around queerness generally that focus on people who were assigned male at birth and their relation to the feminine and I feel like there’s less discussion about people who were assigned female at birth and their relationship to the masculine.

“Everybody has their own personal reasons for relating to drag generally as an art. For me it’s reclaiming some degree of patriarchy and I think it’s also about exploring the variety of gender within you. That is not pertinent to a specific gender and I think that’s something that’s becoming more and more normalised, and as it becomes more normalised the performance aspect of it is becoming more and more relevant in a way that performance and media often reflect stuff that’s going on in society.”

“Pepi comes on stage with her peyes or dressed as a rabbi and lights up the stage with her incredible voice, her funny jokes her great stories. It was like a sketch show and it was definitely for Jewish people but it didn’t stop there it seems”

LJ adds: “I think there’s also a lot to be gained from women and AFAB people who champion female masculinity. We’ve been taught for decades that women should be a certain way and that they shouldn’t appear to be masculine. To be able to look back on history and a time when these people were playing around with masculinity and did it very successfully… it’s a nice way to pull them back into the modern day and say ‘hey, let’s not forget about our tapestry’, particularly in the queer world. We hear a lot about the Stonewall riots and the gay rights movement and we hear a lot about Marsha P Johnson but we don’t hear a lot about Stormé DeLarverie who began the Stonewall riots. So I think there’s this tendency to wash over history when it includes an AFAB person as the protagonist and with drag kinging there’s no denying who the protagonist is.”

Pepi Littman led a group of Broderzingers, itinerant troupes of folksingers who travelled around mainly eastern Europe, and Natalie says: “I was amazed that Pepi, who led the Broderzinger, this amazing, very famous Yiddish itinerant group that travelled all over the world and was like the Saturday Night Live of that time and yet nobody knows anything about it. Even in the Yiddish music and language community, some of them know about her but not a lot. Some had heard about Vesta Tilley but Pepi kind of disappeared and it was the Jewish drag kings that alerted me to her. When I was looking for info about Pepi it was always linked to Jewish drag kings, mainly in the US.”

When it comes to who Pepi’s audience would have been, while Jewish people would be the obvious cornerstone, there was more to it. "When you read the reviews of Pepi, people said that Pepi was a star,” says Natalie, “When Pepi came on the stage everything changed. Pepi comes on stage with her peyes or dressed as a rabbi and lights up the stage with her incredible voice, her funny jokes her great stories. It was like a sketch show and it was definitely for Jewish people but it didn’t stop there it seems.”
I do think Queer people in finding their history helps you to understand yourself, and to a certain extent, to accept yourself because this isn’t new, this isn’t modern.”

The entire Make Me a King project has been a whirlwind from the start – Natalie wrote the script in a matter of days after finding out about the Pears Fund with only a short period to meet the deadline for entries.

Win a drag king workshop place

Simply by entering your name in our prize draw you could join a Korupt Kabuki drag king workshop and discover your Inner alter-ego with award-winning West End drag king, actor and singer, LJ Parkinson, aka LoUis CFyfer.

LJ has created a unique, virtual three-hour Kabaret Workshop for a small class of six people for Make Me A King’s Who Do You Think You Are?. As the workshop is so small your alter-ego will get extra special attention, plus a short history lesson on those incredible proto-drag kings of the early 20th century, including Pepi Littman.

You can see LJ’s introduction to the workshop here https://youtu.be/ouC15FMLSyE

The deadline for entries is Sunday, June 20 and the winners will be announced in the next issue.

To enter, send your name to us via email: info@scenemag.co.uk
perhaps only Hampstead Heath can rival it. We caught up with an old-time cruiser to ask him what the bushes mean to him. He’s 61 and let’s say his name is, oh I don’t know, Dave, or something.

“Having lived in London for several years, I never found Brighton’s gay venues to be particularly cruisey. I moved here in the mid-2000s. What sex venues there were tended to be quite reserved. I guess that’s because everyone knew or recognised each other. So thank goodness for The Bushes. Most people tended to trot down to The Bushes, a little tipsy, around 2am. Someone who’d given you the cold shoulder on the dancefloor that evening might suddenly be willing to have some fun. The Bushes are one of my main gay cultural highlights of Brighton and part of the reason I stay here,” Dave explained.

We asked Dave about the finer points of cruising in Dukes Mound: “Cruising started as soon as you got on the esplanade walkway. Depending on how out or experienced you were often dictated how far you walked down the esplanade – to where the fully brave could be found. New or curious guys stayed in the shadows on the esplanade walkway.”

Dave even recalled visits to The Bushes when they were packed around The Temple area. It could get so busy it was sort of like an unofficial gay venue operating outside, in the shadows. But that was in the halcyon days of cruising: before Grindr. You could find up to a hundred gays getting down to business. During Pride, it could be even busier.

Cruising can come with risks. If you’re wandering around in the dark in the middle of the night, you are clearly at risk of being mugged. As Dukes Mound is so well known, even by the straights, targeted muggings and attacks have happened.

The police know what goes on in The Bushes. Sometimes a police car will do the rounds, mainly to see that everyone is safe. They don’t send pretty policemen to bust people for “public indecency”. Brighton is a decadent city. The Prince Regent built his pleasure palace here for a reason. The authorities have long turned a blind eye to The Bushes.

Whether or not Dukes Mound maintains its position as a cruising ground, it has secured itself a place in Brighton’s LGBTQ+ history. One day, we’ll all join George Michael in that great pink toilet in the sky; and the ghosts of cruisers past will always haunt Dukes Mound.

Shame has often been associated with cruising. Before homosexuality was legal, cruising gave gay men access to sex in a kind of interzone. A liminal space that’s neither quite here nor there. Once they’d done their business, they could zip up and head home. And no one would ever know.

Cruisers in Brighton have long frequented Dukes Mound, better known as The Bushes, which covers about a quarter of a mile. Conveniently located just behind the nudist beach, Dukes Mound is hidden by 15/20ft tall bushes.

“Depending on how out or experienced you were often dictated how far you walked down the esplanade – to where the fully brave could be found”

There’s an ongoing controversy about trimming the bushes and possibly bringing Dukes Mound’s long history as a cruising area to an end. For now, it will retain its integrity as a cruising ground. These bushes need to stay high for obvious reasons. Not all cruising areas are equal. Dukes Mound is considered to be one of the best in the UK, perhaps only Hampstead Heath can rival it.

Alex Klineberg takes a peek into Dukes Mound, better known as popular cruising ground The Bushes

Writing about gay cruising invites double entendres. I’ll see how many I can avoid. People have been cruising in different guises throughout history. Before the apps brought gay cruising directly to your bedroom, you had to put your coat on, head out into the world and find your hook-ups.

Bathhouses have fostered gay sexual encounters since the days of Ancient Rome. Cruising is different as it always comes with an element of danger. For some cruisers, the thrub of danger as they head into the bushes is as good as the sex. The anticipation of what you might find feels better than actually doing it. That being said, many memorable sexual encounters have taken place in cruising areas. You may have had a few yourself! While you’re reading this you can guarantee that somewhere, right now, gay men are encountering each other in the bushes and public restrooms of the known world.

Cruising gives you the pleasure of sex without the commitment. It’s a sexual dynamic many gay men are familiar with. It’s almost as if we’ve brought the psychology of the bushes into our non-cruising lives.

The police know what goes on in The Bushes. Sometimes a police car will do the rounds, mainly to see that everyone is safe. They don’t send pretty policemen to bust people for “public indecency”. Brighton is a decadent city. The Prince Regent built his pleasure palace here for a reason. The authorities have long turned a blind eye to The Bushes. Whether or not Dukes Mound maintains its position as a cruising ground, it has secured itself a place in Brighton’s LGBTQ+ history.

One day, we’ll all join George Michael in that great pink toilet in the sky; and the ghosts of cruisers past will always haunt Dukes Mound.
POSITIVE FRIENDSHIPS
A new service from Lunch Positive and the Together Co seeks HIV befrienders

Living with HIV can still be life-challenging and isolating. Opportunities to socialise and form meaningful friendships can be hampered by many things – health issues, feeling low, HIV stigma, and other factors.

In addition to this, Covid-19 isolation and shielding over the past year have left many people with HIV disconnected, finding it difficult to regain old friendships and form new ones. To combat this a new HIV befriending and buddying scheme has been launched as a community partnership between HIV charity Lunch Positive and loneliness charity Together Co.

The scheme is open to people with HIV aged 40+ living in Brighton & Hove and surrounding areas who are looking for supportive social connections. It aims to reach those who might be feeling lonely or isolated, or just looking for supportive friendships that they don’t already have, and to match them with a volunteer befriender who has shared interests.

Once linked in, the scheme member and befriender decide what friendship activities they would like to share as part of their friendship. These can range from regular telephone conversations to meeting for coffee, going for a walk or on an outing, and so on. The choice is all mutual, and the befriending is all based on mutual respect, trust, and the highest regard for confidentiality.

Over the past year people who have been part of telephone befriending calls have said that the regular phone conversations they have shared have been life-changing, helping them get through very isolating and often worrying times. Even now, as we come through Covid-19 and things start to open up, the need for meaningful, safe and supportive friendship remains hugely important; especially when people sometimes understandably feel cautious about socialising again.

“People who become volunteer befrienders are fully supported with training and guidance where needed, and offered the opportunity to be involved in a range of befriender training, support and social events.”

This new scheme goes from strength to strength, having more than 20 participants in its first few months. Enquiries from people looking to be linked up with a befriender have been wide-ranging, and especially through the local HIV clinic, The Lawson Unit.

The interest and support of the nurses and consultants there has been amazing, especially while working with the added demand of the Covid pandemic. Lunch Positive is the point of access for people enquiring and interested in the scheme and looking to be matched with a volunteer befriender. Anyone interested should get in touch with Lunch Positive and they will explain all about the scheme, and how to sign up.

Volunteers who give their time as befrienders are coordinated by Together Co and also supported by Lunch Positive. Both the scheme member and volunteer are supported along the way by the two charities, available to help where needed. So far, the befriender volunteer team has given over 300 hours of telephone friendship calls to scheme members.

“Over the past year people who have been part of telephone befriending calls have said that the regular phone conversations they have shared have been life-changing, helping them get through very isolating and often worrying times”

Following this great start to the work, with a growth in people wanting to be befriended, the scheme is now looking for more volunteers to get involved. Right now, the scheme is particularly looking for volunteers who are themselves HIV-positive to provide friendship and peer-support, drawing on lived experience of HIV, as well as people from the wider community. People who become volunteer befrienders are fully supported with training and guidance where needed, and offered the opportunity to be involved in a range of befriender training, support and social events.

The training and support is jointly provided by Lunch Positive and Together Co, all fitting in with the volunteers’ own availability and needs. Peter, one of the current befriender volunteers, says: “I check in weekly with my scheme member by phone and find out how they are doing and hear what they have been up to. “As a person living with HIV I have a personal awareness of the challenges that can come with HIV. We share experiences and tips as well as having a laugh. We talk about anything that is going on for the caller and their plans. Sometimes we all just want to be heard and not feel judged. I always feel honoured that people can share their lives with me over the phone and know that it will be kept confidential. Being able to bounce ideas off someone can make a huge difference and knowing that someone is interested enough to listen to the challenges as well as the triumphs can turn a day around for people according to feedback we have had.

“Making connections and keeping in touch happens when you offer a friendly ear and have a healthy curiosity. I find it all incredibly rewarding and I’m so pleased to be able to offer social support as a peer.”

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer befriender and would like to know more then please visit www.lunchpositive.org and fill out the form. Alternatively, if you would first like to talk more about the scheme and how it works, please call Lunch Positive on 07846 464384 and they will be happy to answer any questions you have. Thank you!
With the gradual reopening up of society, for some people thoughts have turned to how we might begin to engage again in intimacy. Rory Finn reports

Most of us have followed social distancing guidelines and have remained in our social bubbles, to a lesser or greater extent. Casual sex and hook-ups remain technically illegal, a prohibition introduced as part of emergency measures last year – not that as a community we’ve ever paid such legislation much attention. In spite of this, sex is a primal need and no matter how much wanking we might do, for many of us it just won’t cut it. Sooner or later we find we need the intimacy of being up close and personal with another human. But after the months of lockdown isolation, the thought of returning to the pleasures of one to one is causing lots of us to feel nervous, and not in the good way.

Even non-sexy intimacy can be overwhelming. Anecdotes are emerging of unexpected eruptions of emotion when people are receiving touch for the first time in months. There’s the friend of a friend who booked a massage to alleviate discomfort of a bad back and how the touch of a masseuse caused them to burst out in tears in front of them. Alex (not his real name) told me about the first hook-up he had after the first lockdown and how the intensity floored him. “I hooked up with a guy I’d be chatting with online for a little while. I was so floored him. “I hooked up with a guy I’d be chatting with online for a little while. I was so

horny that events took over and he came over. We weren’t doing anything that was unusual for me, a bit of rough role play, but after a while I found myself crying uncontrollably on him as we were playing. I had to stop the session. I felt really embarrassed, crying in front of a stranger, but thankfully he seemed to understand and we spent the next hour just cuddling and chatting.”

Others have spoken about their anxiety about the social side of it. Not knowing how to be and what to say. Indeed, what has there been to say while everything was shut and there’s been nowhere to go except the same circular walk and a trip to Tesco. We’ve become used to our miniature lives of only our household to talk to, or our work colleagues through the dull window of Zoom. Suddenly communicating with a stranger feels a tall order.

The time off from regular sex has given some people time for reflection. What kind of relationships do they want and what kind of sex is satisfying? We might not be feeling much of a sex drive anyway. The effect of a year of lockdowns and uncertainty has left some of us deprived of social contact. Share your anxieties with them. If you can’t talk about it, ask yourself if you’re emotionally ready for sex yet. There’s no shame in not being ready.

Some things to consider:

• Pick wisely who your first hook-up is going to be with. Are they someone who you can feel safe with? Perhaps meet up with someone you already know. Intimacy for the first time might be more emotional than you were expecting. Be kind with one another.

• Start small and build up. Discuss what you want beforehand. Take the tools from the kink community about safe sex: meet with a date in a neutral place first and negotiate consent; discuss desires, likes and limits. There’s a lot that can be learnt even if you prefer things a bit more vanilla.

• Talk about how you feel with your potential date. Chances are they are feeling the same. We’ve all been separated one way or another and deprived of social contact. Share your anxieties with them. If you can’t talk about it, ask yourself if you’re emotionally ready for sex yet. There’s no shame in not being ready.

• Talk about your prospective partner’s hooking up history in recent months. Will you be their first partner too? Think about who might be impacted by your decision to meet someone; do you have contact with someone who is more vulnerable to Covid?

• Get up to date with your HIV and STI screening before you venture out on a date.

handy links:

• HIV & STI tests available from test.tht.org.uk or www.brightonsexualhealth.com
• Directory of LGBTQ+ friendly therapists for counselling/psychotherapy: www.pinktherapy.com
• More tips and advice on reducing Covid risk during sex: prepster.info/covid-and-sex
“This photo features Curry (she/they, pictured on the right) and Sheri (she/her, pictured on the left), and was taken for my socially-distanced quarantine photo project Nashville Queers in Quarantine in April, 2020. I didn’t know this at the time, but this was the day they officially started dating, and these were their first photos as a couple. Six months later they were married. Curry and Sheri are unapologetically queer and committed to providing resources, inspiration, and joy to Black and Queer folks in Nashville and beyond. It was an honour to capture this moment for them.”
BRIGHTON FESTIVAL

Brighton Festival is back, and with over 90 events, this is an ambitious return, making Brighton the first UK city to launch a multi-arts festival since lockdown. The majority of events are outdoors or online, but from May 17, ‘roadmap permitting, there will be socially distanced events indoors in various venues.

The classical music events begin with baritone Roderick Williams, joined by two young singers and pianists to perform Schubert’s Schwanengesang, as part of the Momentum: Our Future, Now collective, in which distinguished artists support emerging talent (May 17, 8pm). Pianist Paul Lewis will perform Mozart, Scriabin and Mussorgsky (May 18, 4pm & 8pm). The Chineke! Chamber Ensemble play Schubert’s Trout Quintet (May 19, 8pm). The La Nuova Musica perform Monteverdi’s Vespro, with added erotically charged madrigals by Monteverdi to push the boundaries between sacred and secular (May 23, 4pm & 8.30pm). New music for cello by Sally Beamish and Lisa Hete links John Newling’s poetic letters, Dear Nature (May 24, 8pm). The string players of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra play music by Jessie Montgomery, Mendelssohn, Ireland and Tchaikovsky (May 27, 4pm & 8pm). Lunchtime concerts include violinist Roberto Ruisi and pianist Sten Heinooja playing Debussy and Beethoven (May 17), cellist Adrian Brendel and pianist Joanna MacGregor playing Britten, Bridge and Franck, and pianist Isata Kanneh-Mason playing Mozart, Chopin, Gershwin and Barber (May 25).

All events in the Brighton Dome Concert Hall, with social distancing, reduced capacity seating, bookings in household bubbles and other safety measures.

www.brightonfestival.org

REVIEW

John Mayer (1929-2004) was born in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) to an Anglo-Indian father and Tamil mother. He moved to London in 1952 and worked as a violinist and composer, co-founded the Indo-Jazz Fusions quintet in the ‘60s, and taught composition at Birmingham Conservatoire. His son Jonathan Mayer (b. 1975) trained as a sitar player from the age of 16, and he now composes and performs. On this disc, there are works composed by father and son, and Jonathan performs sitar on his own compositions, as well as playing tanpura (like a fretless sitar, providing a harmonic drone) on his father’s Violin Concerto No. 2, from 1978. The violinist here is Sasha Rozhdestvensky, and he shows phenomenal technical dexterity, particularly in the perpetual motion and breathless energy of the concerto’s second movement. The tanpura shimmers in the background of the third movement, Ragga, and its improvisatory cadenza for the violin is full of birdlike fluttering. John Mayer’s other composition here is the Concerto for the Instruments of an Orchestra, from 1975. Across its four movements, Mayer often pits orchestral sections – strings, woodwind, percussion – against each other in conversation, occasionally bringing them together. The music is quite episodic, and occasionally lacks continuity, but there are imaginative effects, such as the racing strings Scherzo and spiky woodwind Trio of the third movement. The second movement is the strongest, with its drone background and the winding melody emerging from the strings, before the woodwind takeover, and a solo cello and cor anglais conclude with a heartfelt lament. Jonathan Mayer’s Sitar Concerto No. 2 begins with an extended solo for the instrument, with initial unison string responses developing into a more rhythmic, almost jazzy section. The second movement focuses on repeated patterns, initially a four-note figure on the sitar, with thrumming strings beneath, whereas the third movement has a driving seven-beat rhythm, with a whiff of Hans Zimmer’s film music. It is the most Western harmonically, and the sitar gets livelier and more elaborate as the movement builds, although the ultimate conclusion is inconclusive. Jonathan Mayer’s other work here, the single movement Pranam, begins with the sitar alone, with the orchestra joining as the sitar settles into a melodic pattern. The tabla joins (here played by Shahbaz Hussain), and rhythmic interest in the orchestra grows. Mayer builds layers of texture in the orchestra, then after a hiatus, the sitar is left keening above dark, low strings, before the violins emerge with a winding upward line. Once again, the tabla helps drive the momentum, and faster rhythmic patterns crescendo, almost burying the sitar, the woodblock adding further driving repetition to an ending reminiscent of John Adams. Debashish Chaudhuri conducts the BBC National Orchestra of Wales in strong performances of these fascinating works.

More info

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This month I shall explore Patrick O’Donnell and the dramatic changes that have occurred in his painted and drawn works.

The range of his subject matter having included the constituents of his 2010 exhibition You Make Me Gay, which was a collection of 27 oil portraits of his own personal gay icons who have resonated with him and contributed to who he was then and who he is now. The level of fame related to each of them was not relevant, it was the impact the individual had to influence his personal evolution.

The Origins series, which he first exhibited at the Naked Eye Gallery, looked at the cosmos from a distance. Exploring the notion of how we all are children of the stars in terms of our atomic make-up, each originating in stardust, nebulae and supernova. The planet/moon paintings naturally evolved from these and were zooming into these galaxies, still allowing him to use loose and experimental methods of paint application, using the circle set within the square to centre their painted existence.

His art is constantly evolving as it needs to remain alive and relevant, he tends to follow ideas that he wants to explore prompted by either an image he has seen, places he has experienced or conversation he has had. Using a range of media, paints, screen prints, ink, charcoal, exploring what he can do with it.

His current body of work focuses on the formal elements of edges and shapes and tone, accentuating the presence that can be evoked by their manipulation and their apparent simplicity. Experimenting and making discoveries that can define the direction the work will take or at least note them down to investigate them more thoroughly at another time. The themes of emotional architecture, memory and domestic monoliths and the abstracted deployed poetics of space, becoming more and more visible.

His preferred visual language, having developed from a visit to the Jewish Museum in Berlin, where the Holocaust Tower with its dank, claustrophobic and light-deprived spacial qualities made a deep impression on his practice. This prompted a year of working in charcoals, developing austere and sombre compositions in response to significant research into angular direct imagery, suprematist and modernist 2D graphic concerns visible in their finalised appearances. Their painted developments having allowed him to twist the concept into first flat then folded and shaped supports, each distinctly moving towards their next evocation. His next visual journey being suggested by what is being seen in today’s painted adventure.

**ART MATTERS**

**BY ENZO MARRA**

**ALL THAT JAZZ**

**BY SIMON ADAMS**

**REVIEWS**

**JOE LOVANO TRIO TAPESTRY: Garden of Expression (ECM).** American saxophonist Joe Lovano has been a Blue Note mainstay for years, but has now moved to ECM for a trio set with modernist pianist Marilyn Crispell and drummer Carmen Castaldi. The results are spectacular, eight songs expressing an emotion or feeling, sometimes a coherent thought, elsewhere a passing glimpse at something barely perceptible. As Lovano explains, “the momentum here is in the melody and the harmonic sequence; the rhythm evolves within each piece in a very free flowing manner.” This results in an exquisite music that is gentle and almost spiritual in content. Lovano’s tenor is sensitive and subdued, his tenorato (a woodwind instrument) an otherworldly addition. Alongside him, Crispell delivers an accompaniment full of interesting contours and sound colours. This is as near a perfect album as you can listen to today. I cannot recommend it highly enough.

**DUKE ELLINGTON ORCHESTRA: Ellington At Newport The Complete 1956 Performances (American Jazz Classics).** By the mid-1950s, Duke Ellington’s glittering career as the finest bandleader in jazz was faltering. Newer bands, and the dominant hard bop style, were rendering him obsolete. His career, however, was rescued at the 1956 Newport Jazz Festival when tenor saxophonist Paul Gonsalves stormed his way through 27 choruses of the old Duval warhorse Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue, as a result of which he almost single-handedly reinvented the jazz solo and revealed just how much energy still existed in the Ellington band. Oddly, when a record of this live appearance appeared, most of it turned out to have been recorded later in the studio. This new double CD includes the entire festival concert, as well those later studio numbers and another short live set from earlier that year. This might be for completists only, but it’s a real slice of jazz history.

**ROB BARRON: From This Moment On (Ubuntu Music).** Pianist Rob Barron is a mainstay of the London jazz and studio scene, a first-call pianist highly regarded for his improvisational flair, innate musicality, and deft touch. Concerning his latest project, he explains: “From This Moment On struck me as the perfect name for this album. As well as being the title of the Cole Porter song featured on the record, I felt the optimistic narrative of the lyrics is a positive and hopeful sentiment during this period of crisis in the world. It brings a sense of looking forward to a brighter future.” Amen to that. Eight of the pieces are American Songbook classics, two are Barron originals, and while he sometimes takes the tempo too fast, his adventurousness is evident throughout. Bassist Jeremy Brown and drummer Josh Morrison are strong supporters on what proves to be a fine set.
Boogie Man Will Get You is a comedy take on the crazed boffin genre. They’re short, sweet and in their clear delineation of good and bad, strangely comforting in these troubled times.

I START COUNTING! (BFI Blu-ray). Jenny Agutter stars as a young girl, Wynne, who is in love with her (adopted) brother George, who may be the perpetrator of a series of murders of young women. Within the first ten minutes he sneakily discards a bloodstained sweater, evidence Wynne destroys, thus showing herself willing to help a possible psychopath out of her love for him. Or is it simply lust? This rarely seen cult classic from 1970 is a wonderful coming-of-age thriller lifted into a league of its own by Agutter’s performance. She’s vulnerable yet brave (in the film’s climax perhaps to a foolhardy degree) while having to contend with the pains of early adolescence. David Greene’s film expertly balances its thriller aspects with strands focusing on Catholicism and, perhaps, sexism. It’s hard to tell if one character’s comments on the murderer not raping his victims of as ‘being a waste’, or the pictures of nude women at George’s workplace are reflections of the culture or criticisms of it. The fact that the ‘pure girl’ and her sexually adventurous best friend meet very different and predictable fates further makes this aspect of the film hard to read. The final shot of a childhood home being demolished adds an almost fairytale-style coda to what is a comparative rarity, an almost lost film which deserves rediscovery.

SWARM (Greensky Games). This is an arcade shoot-‘em-up with a difference. Instead of being stationary while waiting for the next wave of evil aliens to battle, you are suspended over water and the only way you can prevent drowning is by firing out grappling hooks to attach to floating platforms. It takes a while just to get used to staying alive, but it’s pretty easy to master and soon you’re swinging about the playspace like a sci-fi Tarzan. Which, I suppose, is exactly equal to Spiderman. This game is great fun and at first it’s hard not to make a ‘wheeee!’ sound as you pull down on the rope above and are lifted high up into the heavens – which can be a great vantage point to fire on the eponymous swarm of hostile droids. It’s fast paced and each level has enough novelty – from different, more powerful baddies to new weapons and skills such as slowing down time – to give Swarm a greater shelf life. If you haven’t quite found your VR legs, it’s good that each battle is relatively short as the game’s movement intensity can be a bit disorientating. Overall this could be a future classic. Available on Oculus Quest and Rift.

KARLOFF AT COLUMBIA (Eureka Blu-ray). This is something of an essential buy for horror fans: all the six films that Karloff made for the Hollywood studio between 1935 and 1942. The Black Room has Karloff playing twin brothers (one of whom may, possibly, be evil) in a fantastically atmospheric melodrama. The following movies are known, unofficially, as the Mad Doctor Cycle and while the dip in budget is noticeable they certainly up the crazy. The Man They Could Not Hang has our hero working on a way of bringing the dead back to life. The process comes in very useful when he is hanged for a crime he sort of committed. His demented plan to get revenge on the judge and jury is barking and therefore more fun than you get from mere rational plotting. The Man with Nine Lives is a variation on the same theme but this time bodies are frozen before being revived. Before I Hang has Karloff using the blood of recently executed prisoners to develop a serum to reverse the ageing process. It doesn’t turn out well. The Devil Commands mixes science with the supernatural as Boris tries to contact his dead wife from beyond the grave. The
1 Jodi Taylor Another Time, Another Place (£8.99, published by Headline Review). In the days when we could travel, a new book by Jodi Taylor was a real treat and perfect fun holiday reading. I clutch it in Departures and savour it. This is the 12th book in her Chronicles of St Mary's series, which follows the adventures of the historical researchers of St Mary's, who are actually time travellers. Taylor's writing style is great fun, silly, stuffed full of factually curious historical information and sometimes just plain daft. A great read if you like soft sci-fi in the style of Jasper Ford or Douglas Adams. The books, which are wonderful fun, follow the people who work in St Mary's, imagine a cross between Emmerdale and Dr Who with some James Bond, Mary Beard and Mrs Danvers thrown in. In her latest book we find ourselves thrown into Babylon at its height and the mischief that a new face at St Mary's causes. Taylor's books excel in giving us real emotional connections with her wide cast of characters and it's not all laughter and fun, there some hard lessons from life in these books. She writes excellent narratives, which pound along with a serious tension, wrapped in personal insights and intimate connections with her characters, who just happen to bounce around history observing some really interesting events in real contemporary time, trying not to mess things up and desperately having to deal with more nefarious unscrupulous agents who intend to change history for their own ends. Endlessly fun, inventive, with layers of historical fact layers into these well baked confections. Reading Another Time, Another Place in my unexotic garden was strange, but the book managed to take me far away and give me a thrill of the exotic. For the full series of Chronicles of St Mary's books, see Taylor's website: https://joditaylor.online

2 Laura Kay The Split (£14.99, published by Quercus). This is a superbly fun book, seeing the opportunity of being blindsided by life as a way of reassessing what's really important, driving a new self of respect and finding out some home truths along the way. Kay's protagonist is lovely, sweet Ally, who wakes up on her girlfriend's boat one morning to discover herself unceremoniously dumped. Shell shocked by this turn of events, and without a job, home or lover, she snatches Malcomb, 'their' cat, and runs for her father's home. It's great shock to this turn of events, and unceremoniously dumped. Shell shocked by this turn of events, and without a job, home or lover, she snatches Malcomb, 'their' cat, and runs for her father's home. It's great to read a story where an LGBTQ+ character returns to a loving home. Her father encourages her to get back in touch with an old friend and it's here the novel starts to pick up speed. Together they come up with a ridiculous plan to win their exes back... to revenge-run a half marathon. Given neither of them can run, they enlist the support of athletic, not to mention beautiful, Jo. Their 'Rom Com' adventure is laugh out loud funny. Kay writes with a real warmth and nothing in the lives of these people is easy, we learn more about Ally and her ex Emily as they discuss the return of the cat in email exchanges. This is complicated, messy, emotionally cringy stuff, real life in other words. I loved it. It's not all happy stuff either, and with the marathon running plot doing things on, we get a fully rounded feeling of the main protagonists' sometimes difficult lives. Jeremy is living with depression and Kay handles this with a deft poise which allows a real dignity to ground him. The Split is a great book, really funny, with a huge focus on family and found family in particular, showing us how important our friendships are, and how an adventure can expose us to change, our fears and the real things we crave.

3 George M Johnson All Boys Aren't Blue (£8.99, published by Penguin). Wow, what an extraordinary book from LGBTQ+ activist George M Johnson. This is their powerful memoir-manifesto, which explores childhood, adolescence, and college years, growing up under the duality of being black and queer in New Jersey and Virginia. In a series of essays, we read of hideous bullying, attacked and teeth kicked out at only five years old, of precious times with their Grandmother, filled with understanding, patience and unconditional love. Johnson shares their life in unflinching detail, with no excuses or apologies – this is fierce reclaiming of space for young queer back men. The pain, so candidly written about, is accompanied by healing they've learned and shared. They write with searing passion about the experiences which have forged, changed and defined them, calling out the daemons who have attempted to stifle, and naming the forces, like toxic masculinity, which aim to silence men about celebrating difference. With insights into sex, love, gender identities, families, inequality, consent and brotherhood, Johnson's all-seeing American eye picks out the details in this rich intersecting tapestry of living and serves us black joy. It's a roadmap for young queer people of colour. We meet characters, like the eponymously named Hope, who inspire and drive change. Johnson's clarion call is for personal responsibility and commitment to community, for people to understand themselves and celebrate their power, to own their faults and love their scars. This is a vehemently vulnerable memoir, told with warmth and humour, sharing hard-won insights and demanding to be seen. It throbs in the hand with the power of a life lived with ferocious passion and urgent knowledge to share.

4 Emery Lee Meet Cute Diary (£12.99, published next month by QuilTreeBk). Noah Ramirez thinks he’s an expert on romance and writes a hugely popular blog, Meet Cute Diary, which is a collection of trans happily ever afters... but he’s made it all up, the stories are fake. His fantasies of a trans boy afraid to step out of the closet has become a beacon of hope for trans readers across the globe. Then a troll exposes the blog as fiction, Noah’s world unravels. He seeks a way to make the fiction real. He meets Drew, who is willing to fake-date Noah to save the diary. As they pose, real emotional connections start to grow and the change ways things are supposed to be working out. Emery Lee's tone is perfect here, capturing all the tremulous expectations of young love, the pressures of being true and the hardship of honesty. Their narrative energy is boundless, the book leaps forward into unexpected places but keeps the main protagonists and their desire to be seen in full focus. This is a great book for younger trans and non-binary readers, reassuring, validating and reminding us that love is fully inclusive and first love is awkward and thrilling as hell and that sometimes we just need to have the course of our convictions and take a wild leap into possibility.
Some people are easier in front of the camera. Some people don’t like the camera at all. It’s important to work through the initial unease and anxiety – on both sides. I come to every shoot with a level of anxiety. We’re all waiting to find out what’s going to happen.

“I can only control so much. You ultimately want the planning to disappear – some photos are happy accidents. They happen quickly. Others the course of an hour-long shoot.”

“She had the beehive. She had notions of where she wanted to go. I guess when you’re 19 going on 20 you’re trying to figure that stuff out. I guess none of us are fully formed at that age.”

Which photographers have been most influential? “There are giants like Richard Avedon and more contemporary ones like Larry Clark. I love what David LaChapelle does although it’s not what I do. Nan Golden – love her work. Cecil Beaton was incredible, of course. Two other major influences are Philip-Lorca diCorcia, I’m still blown away by his book Hustlers. His use of light is so inspiring and the subject matter is riveting. Peter Hujar was incredible, and I go back to his work often, he captured an age so well. Wolfgang Tillmans is exceptional. Tim Walker, Norman Seeff... I’m afraid I could go on all day!”

Instagram has turned everyone into a photographer. About 95 million images are posted on Instagram every single day. This truly is the age of the image, but are there too many of them? How do photographers operate in the social media landscape? “The world of digital photography has opened it up to everyone. It’s no longer a craft where you have to spend a lot of time in the dark room. It’s why I still prefer shooting with analogue. You have to think about the image a lot more. In some ways it’s great. Everyone should be able to join in. But in some ways the industry has been changed – it’s harder now to earn a living in photography. But that’s the way of the world. You just have to make it work for you.”

Amy Winehouse is Charles’ most iconic subject. His book Before Frank captures her pre-fame and pre-beehive. One of Charles’ images became the front cover of her first album. “I met her the day I did her album cover. She came to my apartment in Spitalfields. She put on makeup and some music. I wasn’t a Photographer at the time. I ran around with my camera when my mates went clubbing. A mutual friend had me do a test with her to get the look she wanted for her album. One of those images became the cover for Frank.”

CHARLES MORIARTY
The photographer talks to us about his new book, which captures the male gaze, and working with Amy Winehouse

Charles Moriarty grew up in Dublin. He moved to London when he was 18 and he’s been there ever since. Photography began as more of a hobby than a career path. He took pictures of his friends on nights out, exploring London’s nightlife scenes. This led to him photographing Amy Winehouse as she was on the cusp of fame.

X chronicles a decade’s worth of photographing men. It’s a deeply personal book. The photos are firmly rooted in the gay male gaze. What does the male gaze mean to Charles? “As a gay man there are ideas of desire. With the male gaze there’s an element of trying to understand oneself. It becomes a bit of a mirror. I was photographing my own journey with men. The gaze is happening both ways. I guess I was looking for myself throughout the process.”

Growing up in Ireland, it took him a while to come to terms with his own sexuality. “The first image in the book is the oldest photo – a self-portrait. There are people I’ve had intimate relationships with, also friends and lovers. They aren’t all gay. Some are models I worked with on a shoot for an hour – people I only met once.”

Does he consider the images to be erotic? “I don’t think they’re particularly sexual. Some depict moments of sex. There are moments of eroticism. I’d think of them as more intimate. Some people will look and only see it as something that’s sexually charged.”

Photography has a very spontaneous quality. However intricately a shoot is staged, a dialogue opens up between the photographer and the subject. “There’s a happy middle ground where the camera gets lost and it becomes a conversation with your subject. I don’t really want to put people at ease.
Did Amy know what she wanted musically and visually at that early stage? “I think she was figuring it out. When we were in New York she was certainly working towards the look she had for her second album. She had the beehive. She had notions of where she wanted to go. I guess when you’re 19 going on 20 you’re trying to figure that stuff out. I guess none of us are fully formed at that age.

“She’s at a big transition stage physically, mentally, career wise. It’s that last big build up. The album came out shortly after and her life changed quite dramatically. *Frank* was a highly acclaimed album.

“The image I took of Amy in New York is part of the National Portrait Gallery permanent collection. It’s amazing to be part of such amazing insulation.

“The album cover image isn’t my fave. There’s a couple of faves though. I love the one with the yellow phone in downtown Manhattan. There’s one from the same night where she’s standing just out of focus – there’s something about it that really connects to me.”

On his favourite images in *X*: “One of my favourite portraits is of a friend called *Duran* – there’s something about the look on his face. I don’t know what it is. Works really well. It’s hard to pin them down. They’re all such different experiences. My friend *Tony* is a drag queen in LA putting his makeup on – there’s something very noir about it.”
QUEERLY AUTISTIC

Alex Klineberg catches up with Erin Ekins, whose prominence as a queer and autistic commentator has led to a new book, Queerly Autistic: The Ultimate Guide For LGBTQIA+ Teens

Erin Ekins first found an audience with her blog, Queerly Autistic. She has appeared on The Victoria Derbyshire Show and Radio 5 Live.

We started by discussing her book’s intended audience. “It’s aimed at teenagers but I also wanted it to be read by parents of autistic kids. The main question for me is what support did I need as a kid and what information would have helped me and my friends?”

Fandom and fan fiction play a big role in Erin’s writing. “It’s where I learnt everything about queerness. I didn’t have access to any sort of queer community where I grew up. I was socially awkward. I didn’t get diagnosed until my early 20s. Fan fiction was a safe space – many queer people are interested in fan fiction.”

“It can be hard to come out when you struggle to read people – as so many autistic people do. Coming out is so important. At the same time, I don’t want kids doing it when it isn’t safe to do so.”

Each chapter has a Figuring It Out section. How did Erin approach that question? “It was about untangling feelings and having the language to talk about it. As an autistic person, being able to label something is very important. Writing those chapters was hard because figuring it out can be really hard. Brains are strange things and bodies are strange things. Everyone’s journey is unique. I had questions about my sexuality but never really about gender. I relied on other people’s experience for that. Getting into the depths – the nitty gritty – of something is really important to me.”

What about the overlap between gender dysphoria and neurodiversity? “From my experiences in autistic spaces, a large number of autistic people I know are trans. I think this is held up by research from Tavistock – a disproportionate number of trans people they support were autistic. There’s a crossover, for sure – why I’m not sure. It’s an interesting question to explore. The idea of gender as a social construct overlaps with the way autistic people experience their gender.”

“I’d really like parents to read the book too. It makes so much difference to have supportive parents. Reading and writing this book, I learnt that many people don’t. I did and I’m lucky.”

There is a problem though: “With research we get looked at as specimens rather than as people. I want to look at solutions. Less of the ‘why?’ and more ‘how can we help?’.”

How does she approach coming out? “I think we see coming out as the big explosion and then it’s done, but that’s not how it works. Coming out is different in terms of who you come out to.”

“It can be hard to come out when you struggle to read people – as so many autistic people do. Coming out is so important. At the same time, I don’t want kids doing it when it isn’t safe to do so. You’re not a coward for not coming out if it’s not safe. You need to have money saved and somewhere to go if you’re unsure. Coming out can be so varied.”

What are the biggest misconceptions we have about autistic people? “There’s a few. During World Autism Awareness Month in April, lots of people are talking about us and not listening to us.

“From my experiences in autistic spaces, a large number of autistic people I know are trans. I think this is held up by research from Tavistock - a disproportionate number of trans people they support were autistic.”

“The biggest misconception is this sense that we’re perpetually infantilised. This is an issue for parents of autistic teenagers. I’ve had backlash for suggesting that your autistic 16-year-old might be struggling with their sexuality.

“There was a book a couple of years ago by a self-styled autism mom. Said she’d never be able to see her son in a relationship with a woman without seeing her as paedophile – she can only see her son as a child. This makes autistic people more vulnerable as they don’t get exposed to questions surrounding porn and sexual identity. It plays out when we look at the support available for autistic adults – it’s like we disappear when we turn 18.

“There are also misconceptions about our empathy. That we don’t know ourselves. That girls don’t get autism – another big one. It all ties up in this perpetual infantilisation. I think this is why transphobes weaponise trans autistic kids.”

I learnt a lot of things I didn’t know about autism from talking to Erin. Perhaps the best way we can improve our understanding of autism is to talk to autistic people. Reading Erin’s new book might be a good place to start.

In conclusion, Erin said: “I’d really like parents to read the book too. It makes so much difference to have supportive parents. Reading and writing this book, I learnt that many people don’t. I did and I’m lucky. I want to educate parents and empower people to understand themselves. I’m really proud of the book and I hope it has an impact.”

Queerly Autistic by Erin Ekins is published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers and is available online and at all good bookshops.
everything from gaslighting to ghosting. You dissect them and realise how often these things happen.”

“4 Poofs & A Podcast is all about queer life, dating in the modern day, the pitfalls, the laughs and the exploration of our emotional vulnerability. Even though we can all laugh about it now, at one time it did hurt us and affected us on different levels. It’s a beautiful mix of giggles, gags and shade for every beautiful human to enjoy. Think the queer *Sex & The City.*”

They also spotted a gap in the podcast market: “There’s no media format for the queer community with men talking about how we treat each other. We’re also really passionate about issues that affect the LGBTQ+ community. We realise that we aren’t the most diverse range of people. We realise our privilege in that respect. We almost want to use our privilege and explore the way different issues affect people in the queer community.”

The world of dating and hook-up apps is quite a minefield, especially in cities with big gay scenes. Grindr offers so much choice and it makes us quite disposable. Why stick to one person when there’s always the next person; maybe even more XXL than the last one?

“The queer scene can be a very lonely place, even more so if you’re only just getting to know yourself, let alone others, so as well as entertain in a very relaxed, informal conversation with all the giggles, gags and shade, we want to educate and give those without a voice a voice, or at least let them know they are not alone. As well as the dating catastrophes we also explore key issues that face our community, such as consent, toxic masculinity, sexual discrimination and anxiety & depression.

“We’re incredibly passionate about the issues that face our community and we desperately want to open dialogue to frank and honest conversations. We often say ‘You can’t walk a mile in everyone’s heels’, but you can learn about that mile and with open dialogue we can explore everyone’s journey and make the community a better, closer place where we can celebrate everyone’s differences. As part of the weekly schedule over the next year we will be doing special episodes such as Transgender Day of Visibility, George Floyd’s anniversary, Black Lives Matter, Stonewall, the birth of Pride, trailblazers, Martha P Johnson, World AIDS Day and many more.

“Nothing’s preachy in what we do. We did an episode called The Queer Commandments: don’t be envious of your friends; don’t shame other people’s tribes…”

“We’ve had feedback from people from very diverse backgrounds and had a really good response.”

You can listen to 4 Poofs & A Podcast by visiting [https://shows.acast.com/4-poofs](https://shows.acast.com/4-poofs)
George Pizani chats to local artist Hannah Shillito, whose new exhibition will raise awareness of the Survivors’ Network.

The Brighton Girls exhibition is to open on Saturday, May 22, showcasing a new series by local artist Hannah Shillito. The exhibition, which will feature drawings of 100 local women in seafront gallery Broken Arrowz, aims to raise awareness for the Survivors’ Network, a local charity providing support to survivors of sexual violence.

Hannah launched her project with the hope of bringing some light to miserable lockdown life earlier this year. She credits reaching out over Facebook with enabling her to build a network of support and friendship through the gloomy winter lockdown. Hannah said: “I met the wonderful muses through the Brighton Girl Facebook page at the start of the last miserable lockdown when we were all feeling the grey January blues. I asked if anyone would be interested in being a muse and showcased some examples of my art and the response was PHENOMENAL. I ended up drawing over 100 women – I had to stop at that as I wasn’t sleeping much!” Hannah describes a love for making her muses feel beautiful; each of her 100 drawings is unique and individual to its real-life counterpart.

The project is firmly rooted in community; according to Hannah, this has had multiple benefits. “While we’ve been locked up in lockdown it has been hard to feel creatively inspired, and more than that it has been hard to feel like part of a community,” she said.

“The Brighton Girl network has provided us with that and more, and I have made so many inspiring new friends as well as allowing my art to take off in ways that I never imagined – with a new gallery owner seeing my art and exhibiting it, and the charity Survivors’ Network reaching out and becoming involved too.”

Local residents may be familiar with the Survivors’ Network through the work it does for survivors of sexual abuse as the Rape Crisis Centre for Sussex. The charity aims to reduce sexual violence and its impact on survivors’ lives through counselling, advocacy, peer support and group work. The charity is currently fundraising to expand training and resources to offer education-based prevention as well as care for survivors after their experiences of sexual violence.

The Brighton Girls exhibition hopes to raise awareness for the charity so that it can continue to do its much-needed work. Charities have been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, with Survivors’ Network saying that lockdown has made it harder for people to access the help and support that they desperately need.

“I feel like I have built a network of fabulous people around me who are all cheering each other on and supporting each other through tough times, exciting times and anything in between.”

The chance to connect with so many women through art meant that the project was also an opportunity to share and relate. Hannah spoke of the personal value of the Brighton Girls exhibition. “I also had the pleasure of chatting to them and getting to know them and, in some cases, listening to very personal stories that I felt humbled to hear.”

According to Hannah, the project’s focus is “art, community and a whole load of disco vibes.” On the topic of her eclectic and colourful influences, she said: “I have always been obsessed with Warhol for obvious reasons, I love Margo in Margate for her bold simplicity, Babak Ganjei for his tongue-in-cheek playful nature and lots of local Brighton artists like Haus of Lucy who is so smart and clever.”

Her eye-catching artwork has already proven popular online, with both the women she has drawn and a wider audience. “The reaction to the drawings has gone beyond my wildest dreams,” she said. “I feel like I have built a network of fabulous people around me who are all cheering each other on and supporting each other through tough times, exciting times and anything in between.”

Hannah’s Brighton Girls exhibition will take place with a private view and launch party at Broken Arrowz Gallery, 4 Madeira Drive, Brighton on Saturday, May 22 (date subject to change depending on lockdown legislation). Donations to Survivors’ Network will be encouraged, and prints and originals can be bought with a percentage going to the charity. There will be drinks, a raffle and entertainment from other Brighton Girls singers and artists.

For more info on Hannah Shillito, visit: www.facebook.com/hannahshillitoart/
For more info on Survivors’ Network, visit: www.survivorsnetwork.org.uk
Socially Engaged Art Salon (SEAS) presents new exhibition

The Face of the Other is a group exhibition curated by Gil Mualem-Doron and includes Aubane Berthommé Martinez, Arit Etukudo, Beth Easton, Charlie Wood, Constanza Miranda, Daniel Whiffen, Jenny Nash, Josef Cabey, Keith Race, l’enfant, Maria Amidu, Mengwen Cao, Najma Yusufi, Nelson Morales, Ryan Peter French, R.M. Sánchez-Camus, Tugba Tirpan and Sisters Uncut. More artists and writers will be featured in the SEAS zine, published later in May.

The works presented in this exhibition present two different approaches to the issue of visibility: one that uses visibility to make one’s identity or certain issues visible, to amplify voices, and as a tool of protest. Other works, sometimes even for the same ends, use masquerade, concealment, and defacement or do away entirely with the visual and use audio and texts. These works highlight social and political issues and yet others question the politics of visibility itself.

Curator Gil Mualem-Doron says: “In liberal democracies, visibility or representation and inclusion stand together. Making something or someone(s) visible is an important act in political and social struggles, especially for LGBTQ+ communities. Visibility is directly linked to representation and political power and to the right to protest. In the arts context, making something/someone visible is one of the most important strategies or consequences of socially and politically engaged art and of relational aesthetics.

“However, visibility, especially when enforced, is associated with systems of colonisation, of surveillance and control. For various groups, such as refugees, transgender people, homeless people, people of colour and religious minorities, visibility is always also a risk. Ask any black or brown kid who was stopped and searched, any visibly disabled person, any homeless person, any migrant who does not look ‘local’, a veiled Muslim woman, any trans person who cannot ‘pass’ or any queer-looking person – they will tell you what the dangers of visibility are. Beyond the issue of safety, visibility is reducing their being to a single identity – robbing them of their humanity and excluding them from the rest of society.”

The exhibition can be viewed in the windows of The Ledward Centre and at the Black and Ethnic Minorities Community Partnership (BMECP) from Saturday, May 1 and online at www.seasbrighton.org from Saturday, May 8.

The opening event for the exhibition will be on Saturday, May 8 at 6pm. This will include a talk by the exhibition’s curator, some of the contributors and a Q&A.

Tickets are free and can be booked here: www.seasbrighton.org/post/the-face-of-the-other-exhibition-launch

The exhibition, which also forms part of Brighton Festival and Brighton Fringe, is supported by Arts Council England, the Rainbow Trust, BMECP, Brighton & Hove Communities Fund and the Irene Mensah Bursary.

ROGER’S RUMINATIONS

No-go lands

“Plans are made for the gods to laugh at.” This is a Woody Allen quote that in fact is a very old Yiddish proverb, but is very appropriate for today when it comes to planning for holidays. We’ve not been allowed out of the town, let alone the country, for almost 12 months and now everyone is going stir crazy.

The government is constantly telling us when we can go, but it depends on who is telling us. The travel industry is in complete chaos, some tour companies are taking bookings, saying of course that you can cancel. But try getting your money back quickly. Some airlines are gearing up to start full schedules on May 17; cruise lines are getting very excited and are busy planning for 2022.

Before we all start booking it might be a good idea to reflect on some countries that we really should never visit.

It’s still illegal to be LGBTQ+ in 70 countries, and you could be given the death penalty in 12, as the world marks 30 years since ‘homosexuality’ was declassified as a disease. International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOBIT), May 17, marks the day the World Health Organisation declassified ‘homosexuality’ as a mental disorder.

As the world reaches 30 years since being gay ceased to be an internationally designated disease, it remains illegal to be gay in 70 countries.

The most dangerous country for LGBTQ+ travellers is Nigeria, which is the worst country for violence against gay travellers. There, people can be put in prison for up to 14 years just for being gay, and some states even have the death penalty under Sharia Law.

“As the world reaches 30 years since being gay ceased to be an internationally designated disease, it remains illegal to be gay in 70 countries.”

Sweden is the safest country in the world for gay visitors. Same-sex marriage has been legal there since 2009, and the country has more Pride festivals per capita than anywhere else in the world.

It is quite staggering that 47 of the 70 countries that have made same-sex relationships illegal were part of the British Empire. It isn’t a coincidence. In almost all cases, the laws outlawing consensual gay sex were put into place under British rule and were left in place following independence.

The United States is not exactly wonderful either. There is a great deal of variation in gay rights depending on the state you’re in. There are also no constitutional or broad protections for LGBTQ+ rights under federal law in the US. America might have come a long way, but it has a lot further to go in terms of LGBTQ+ rights, especially for young transgender people. There are 37 countries that have made being transgender illegal.

Then we have the contentious issue of the vaccine passports. Without doubt they will exist for all international travel as many countries have already started issuing them and 15 countries have already started accepting them. The best advice for this year is to stay in the UK. International tourism is still happening, 30,000 people visited Zanzibar in March, they can’t all have been from Russia or China.
Talking heads

Sometimes, I love the way the world is going. In my youth, mental health per se was a never discussed, other than in unhelpful terms referring to people who were very different to us. In Catholic countries, when someone committed suicide, the family of the deceased were often ashamed to admit it. The sorry episode might be described as ‘accidental’ and never talked about again. It wasn’t that much better here.

I remember trying to tell an adult that I was struggling, that maybe I could see a doctor or talk to someone. I thought about killing myself a lot in those days. The response was emphatic. If I told a doctor I was depressed, my medical records would forever mark me out as mentally defective or weak. I would struggle to be taken seriously, get insurance, I would never succeed in life. I’m only talking about the 1980s here, not ‘when dinosaurs roamed the earth’. I think we’ve come a bloody long way.

In my early childhood, same-sex relationships were classified as a psychiatric disorder. Is it any wonder my generation still bears the scars? Coming to terms with my sexuality has been a long, hard road for me, involving anxiety, self-loathing, anorexia, alcohol abuse, anti-depressants and therapy. It strikes me now that mental illness is an entirely appropriate response to the hostile arena I inhabited as a young lesbian.

"In my early childhood, same-sex relationships were classified as a psychiatric disorder. Is it any wonder my generation still bears the scars?"

Of course, mental illness is as manifold as the stars in the sky. There is no panacea, we cannot lump it all together. Some people are chemically challenged, some are fine until they suffer physical injury, others are survivors of emotional trauma, some are just born that way. Freud (the greatest influence on early psychiatry) would postulate we’re all in love with our mothers and want to kill our fathers. His methods are not so popular now, too open to interpretation rather than scientific rigour. When I was growing up I often thought the psychiatrist and patient ought to swap seats.

Thank goodness these days it’s officially ‘OK to not be OK’, a simple but effective little slogan. The Western world has recognised that our primitive minds are just not built to thrive under the massive scope of modern day pressures. We are designed to derive pleasure from the simple things. The pure joy we feel looking at a glorious sunrise or sunset on social media is probably a throwback to prehistoric times, when we were just grateful as a species to have made it through another day.

There is nothing more important than a healthy mind. Many of us are like gleaming fast cars on the outside, but lift the bonnet and the engine’s a mess. As if modern life wasn’t complicated and tough enough to navigate, along came Covid. The prediction of a tsunami of mental health crisis following this frightening pandemic only serves to make us more anxious, but at least we’re all talking about it. It’s more than good to talk – it’s essential.

Going public

For the last year and half I have been working with a team of friends putting together an exhibition for this year’s World AIDS Day at Jubilee Library. The project came about after I had put on a low-key exhibition tucked at the back of the library and was relieved that when I spoke about being HIV positive it was mainly the group of my friends in attendance.

After being inspired by the talk given by Sue Hunter from HIV Hour, I knew I wanted to do a bigger, more public project and so created the More to Me Than HIV project.

Covid-19 forced our hand to the project online, but this year we will be very much out and proud with the exhibit being on display in the window of Jubilee Library as well as hanging portraits in various branch libraries across Brighton & Hove.

"It was only when I really started to investigate topics around transgender on the internet did I realise just how toxic some views can be."

When we put the shout out for people to contribute an image of themselves along with two other photos that represent the ‘more to me’ part of the project, we were really pleased with the response and are very keen for more people living with HIV to come forward and take part in the exhibition.

As part of our outreach we wanted to ensure those participating included people from the ethnic and trans communities, but still need to do more to encourage people from these communities to come forward. From my own personal experience, having lived through decades of hearing and experiencing other people’s fear and negative reactions, I know the tangled range of emotions we go through to stand up and say: ‘I am HIV+’.

Last summer, my own mental health took a real battering as these really tired and old memories came flooding back.

It then really hit me at just how difficult it is for people from communities who continue to face prejudice for just being themselves to then have the added anxiety of also saying: ‘I am HIV+’.

It was only when I really started to investigate topics around transgender on the internet did I realise just how toxic some views can be. It quickly became very clear to me that I knew very little about the subject beyond watching Paris is Buming, but I have since educated myself on many aspects of transgender and the gender spectrum and will continue to do so.

There is a great collection of books in the library and some fantastic films and documentaries on the streaming platforms, which are informative rather than fearmongering. As a starter, I can highly recommend the Netflix documentary Disclosure, which highlights Hollywood’s depiction of transgender and how that feeds into the wider publics misconception of transgender people. I am very much committed to my own transgender education and I am very proud to say I am a trans ally.
Recovery takes time. A lot of it. It is not as though I broke my wrist and six weeks in a cast, we’re good to go. The talking also raises areas of discussion long since buried and some of those conversations are difficult to navigate at first. Months down the line I can start to see, once everything is out in the open, where the connecting factors are. People rarely have breakdowns or a spell of mental unwellness out of the blue. It has been helpful for me to recognise what my own warning signs were and what might have triggered them. In times of stress or mounting workload, challenges in our personal relationships or whatever may cross our many paths, my northern stoicism tends to kick in. Put your shoes on, get out there and get on with it.

During the Second World War air raids in Manchester, as everyone headed into their cellars for shelter, my 18-year-old grandmother worked with the auxiliary fire service. Her role was to stand on the roof of the tallest building in the neighbourhood and spot the fires caused by the falling bombs, and instruct the fire team below which direction to head in.

Fifty years later on the day of my grandfather’s funeral I remember my grandmother’s friend Jean arriving at the flat. Jean, like my grandmother, had also recently lost her husband of some 50 years. Jean looked at my grandmother and with gentle steel said, “God bless you, Miriam”, to which my grandmother replied, “God bless you, Jean”. There was an acknowledgement of the events unfolding, but no public tears. As I write this I am thinking – a little like the Queen. Whatever the world is throwing at you, you just have to get on with it. But the world has changed. Although my grandmother passed on some 12 years ago, I am not sure she would recognise the world we inhabit today, even though 12 years is, in the history of time, a mere moment. Our experiences are different, not less than or more than, those who have gone before, different. There is a strength in ‘getting on with it’ but our strengths can also be our Achilles heel.

Recovery, like life, is a journey and possibly a puzzle that link to this feeling of instability? Ignoring it and pressing on merely adds to the growing and soon to be insurmountable pile. I used to feel guilty indulging surges in emotion, it’s not as if I am putting out fires in the Blitz. Such comparisons are unhelpful and only serve the ground swell that you are a failure or generally not good enough. The reflections may be uneasy and raise forgotten discomforts, but ultimately a broader understanding of yourself is really helpful. Comparing yourself to the Queen? Not so much.

“Recovery takes time. A lot of it. It is not as though I broke my wrist and six weeks in a cast, we’re good to go”

Recovery, like life, is a journey and possibly one without destination. Play the long game. No quick fixes. Wine and gin are lovely, but they are never the answer and consumed in quantity during a depressed phase really quite dangerous. There are other drugs endemic in LGBTQ+ circles which also mask pain, they do not resolve it. If chems are where you turn to in times of emotional distress, please talk to someone and ask for help.

New to me is the consumption of prescribed medication. I have resisted such interventions for more than 20 years, but I have a great relationship with a fabulous GP and we discussed the possibility of anti-depressants on several occasions. Keep your eye out for signs of instability, and don’t wait for a crash, call me. Medication is not for everyone and I did LOADS of research. Read a lot, spoke to a number of people who take them, some had life-long experiences of a range of options. There are side-effects and you should get to grips with what they might be and what that means. All medication has side effects – if you actually read the leaflet in your paracetamol packet you would never take them again. It has just given me some space to think laterally and with a calm quality that was lacking before.

It’s not a magic bullet. There are days when my first thought is that I don’t want to get up, but I now have a rehearsed message that I refer to. I’m also a great believer in physical activity that in turn tones the body and helps mend the mind. My online PT (who’s a real person, he sends me check-in videos) also messages me motivating butt kicks and having a responsibility with someone, having to report into someone else about your progress, is extremely helpful to me.

Get a dog. Other animals are available. Like the prescribed medication know what you are doing, but I have been fortunate enough to spend some time with a pup these past few months and who knew you could fall in love with a beagle. You have to show up for them. Feed them, wash them and walk walk walk them. Walking and talking out in the fresh air with an equally mental four-legged friend is a beautiful thing.

“Asking questions can be an important part of understanding why we feel a particular way. Perhaps a question as simple as, why?”

Recovery is yours. There is help for the taking but those initial steps are yours. Recovery from an extended period of challenging mental health can at first feel insurmountable. Not dissimilar to being overwhelmed with the volume of tasks that have been mounting up in the background, one doesn’t know where to start.

Start you must.
GOLDEN HOUR
BY BILLIE GOLD
Let us laugh.

Our brains are wonderful. Capable of imagining full worlds, writing books, creating art and love, and posing solutions to the most puzzling problems. Trickyly they also have within them at any one time the ability to completely self destruct, which is why mental health for some is possibly akin to a wobbly tightening. As Augusten Burroughs said: “Your mind is like a dangerous neighbourhood, don’t go there alone.”

I am absolutely sick to the back teeth of talking about this year and how hard it’s been, we all know it’s been full of death and loneliness and general natty stuff, but the truth remains, people’s brains have downright exploded. Mine included. And the main evidence I’ve seen of this is in my daily social media scroll. Denial I have found to be a powerful method although short lived, and I saw this in the faces of some of my friends’ Instagram stories. Captions like ‘It’s great to get dressed up even if you aren’t going anywhere!’ Now everyone knows that this is a massive lie, but I wondered how much harm it was doing to post great big whoppers on social media to others that are likely suffering the effects of a gooye brain.

“During lockdown I have taken it upon myself to get finally diagnosed with ADHD and get the proper support and medication from it, and what does anyone do when they get diagnosed? They find others.”

Myself, I’m not one to post big emotional statuses or talk much about my mental health on social media because I personally find it not only painfully self-aggrandising, but straight-up cringeworthy. Don’t get me wrong, I know that there are a lot of people who benefit from knowing that ‘they aren’t alone’, but I do think that there is a certain amount of attention-grabby posts with trending hashtags floating around that I am somewhat skeptical of.

Having said that, during lockdown I have taken it upon myself to get finally diagnosed with ADHD and get the proper support and medication from it, and what does anyone do when they get diagnosed? They find others. So they can talk about how mental they are together, which is an argument for the ‘social’ aspect in social media being actually helpful. I have found a certain amount of power in finding the right groups and pages that talk about our... Condition? Illness? Personal malfunction? I haven’t decided what to call it yet, in a funny way, and to me that is literally the only way to combat something that seems like it’ll swallow you whole if you take your eye off it for a second.

“I know that there are a lot of people who benefit from knowing that ‘they aren’t alone’, but I do think that there is a certain amount of attention grabby posts with trending hashtags floating around that I am somewhat skeptical of.”

Strangely, that has gathered some negative attention. It’s a wonderful thing that mental health is becoming less of a taboo subject, it needs to be spoken about, it’s literally a life or death matter to get people the resources they need to go into battle. But we as mentally battling or neurodivergent folk do also need to be allowed the floor sometimes to laugh at it. God help us, it might just keep us sane.

STUFF & THINGS
BY JON TAYLOR
Knowledge is power

“Knowledge is power as we all know and the knowledge of having a diagnosed mental health problem is a wonderful thing. It’s not actually your fault, there’s a chemical imbalance in your brain and there’s some drugs that can help. There’s suddenly a reason for feeling how you’re feeling, it’s not just a random thing, it’s an actual medical thing that you can do something about or manage.”

And so manage it I have. Sort of successfully. Kind of. Ish. I don’t think it would be a surprise to anyone if I told you that the January just gone was bloody awful. Not only was it cold, grey, monotonous and full of the no joys of lockdown, it felt like the coronavirus was so close, almost oppressively so, and so this fed into my mental state. There were days that I couldn’t face doing much and so went from bed to the sofa and back to bed again. It was tough. Netflix became my medicine and Drag Race became my crutch (I rewatched all 12 series).

And what have I learnt from this past year? That I should get more sleep. Am I stronger for going through it all? Don’t know. I guess we’ll see as more time passes. It’s hard to tell about stuff like that when you’re going through it. It’s only when you look back that you see how things have changed or developed. In the meantime, you just get on with life and enjoy the returning nice things that we can now do. I’ve had one jab so that part of recovery has started for me. I had a little weep after I’d got it as I was so relieved and also because it symbolises a new beginning. A start of things to come. Of pubs and friends and concerts and pubs and hook-ups and holidays and pubs. And pubs.
This month I’ve been asked to write about mental health. If you look it up, the World Health Organisation says mental health is “a state of wellbeing in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”.

Well, that’s good mental health. That’s what it is to me, and we all have mental health. We all have a mental wellbeing, good or bad.

It’s our job to do what we can to protect it. Without our mental health in a good state, everything else goes out the window. We need to protect it at all costs – mindset is everything.

“Being who you really are in the world will lead to calmness and confidence, because there’s no fake, there’s no veneer, it’s just you being you.”

How is your mental health? Is it something you’ve bothered to recognise? It is a part of you – do you protect it, is it something you work on daily?

Part of my job as a life coach is to help people understand by doing daily work on their mindset, protecting their peace. It will impact them positively, their performance as well as other areas of their life. I’ve seen some driven people only care about showing up and being their best, but going in a one-way direction all the time – well, let’s just say I’ve seen some nasty messes. Then it’s a case of picking up the pieces because you’ve spent years pursuing your golden dream, but you’ve neglected your mindset and your mental peace along the way.

How do you protect your peace? How do you improve your mindset?

Well, putting yourself first is an absolute must.

When I was younger and I couldn’t regulate my emotions terribly well, I didn’t understand about mindset and attitude and mental wellbeing.

As I’ve grown older, I’ve become more involved in personal development, my knowledge and understanding of the mind, and I’ve learned the mind is basically a tool, our ability to regulate our emotions, to manage outside scenarios. Let’s face it, a lot of the time we blame other people, situations and scenarios for our mental wellbeing. I believe it all starts with us. It starts with you understanding that your mind is a tool and that everything starts with a thought. You can change your perspective and your point of view if you are willing to go there.

Most of us want to feel good. I remind myself of those words quite often in situations where I might be upset or angry.

When I think about this, it reminds me that if someone has upset me they’re probably just doing what’s right for them. I need to take responsibility for that and dig a little deeper within myself to understand where that came from.

“If a situation seems volatile and crazy and chaotic it isn’t because it is, it’s because we’re attributing chaotic, volatile thinking to it.”

Do I let it go, or do I say something? If you’re not willing to say something to someone, or try to do something about the situation, then you have to let it go because it will sit in your head.

If something’s triggering that thought, and you pay attention to it, the volume of that thought will grow. It’s negative, and it will become so big that the thousands of other thoughts passing through our heads automatically each day will go unnoticed.

Protecting your peace… Be who you really are.

Be brutally honest with yourself. If you’re not feeling good and you are struggling, it’s OK. We all have ups and downs, but always ask for help – it’s a sign of strength of courage. We often attribute it as a sign of weakness, but it really isn’t.

Motivational speaker Les Brown once said to me: “Always ask for help, ask for help, and keep asking until you get it.”

Learning to be self-aware is a crucial part of having good mental health and being the best version of yourself. The way you can do that is to spend some time alone. Each day for just 20 minutes try: no videos, no TV, no phones, no computers. Maybe just go for a walk, sit in a chair and look out the window and spend 20 minutes observing yourself going within.

That is one of the most amazing things you can do to get to understand your mind and get to know you. Maybe think about writing down some of your thoughts – brain dumping is really powerful for getting rid of scrambled, chaotic thoughts. Doing that on a daily basis can release a lot of negative crap.

“Be brutally honest with yourself. If you’re not feeling good and you are struggling, it’s OK. We all have ups and downs, but always ask for help – it’s a sign of strength of courage.”

If you want to tap into your innate intelligence to who you really are to have a calmer mind, then you have to have a clear mind, and the mind’s natural state is to be clear, but we fill it with chaotic, volatile thinking. If a situation seems volatile and crazy and chaotic it isn’t because it is, it’s because we’re attributing chaotic, volatile thinking to it.

A clear mind is its natural state, and it will give you good thoughts. It will bring you calmness. Being who you really are in the world will lead to calmness and confidence, because there’s no fake, there’s no veneer, it’s just you being you.

Work on your mindset every day, and protect your peace at all costs.

Ask for help. And when you’re in a good place, make sure you ask your friends and family if they’re OK too.
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...

MAY 2006

1. May, the season of local and national elections, and last-minute ticket buying for The Golden Handbags… all of which we’ve ignored in this month’s look back at Gscenes from five, 10 and 15 years ago.

NEWS OF A NEW NETWORKING ORGANISATION AND THE CLOSURE OF A BRIGHTON STALWART OF THE 1990S

Over 90 members and guests attended the first meeting of the newly formed Sussex Gay Professionals at the R-Bar on Brighton seafront in April. Members received a complimentary glass of wine and canapés and then bought their own drinks at the well-stocked bar. By 11.30pm, it was still going strong. “It was fantastic,” commented Nigel Patrick, founder and organiser of the group.

“Everyone was so friendly and started talking to each other straight away. I came home with quite a few business cards and made some new friends, which is what it’s all about. Members are even booking their places for the next monthly meet-up already!” Plans are afoot to have a special pre-Pride party, which will be a monthly meet-up already! Plans are afoot to have a special pre-Pride party, which will be a monthly meet-up already!

Brighton Cares raised money through staging theatrical events and the annual February show at The Dome in the 1990s became the hottest ticket in town. Sadly, as the cost of hiring The Dome became more prohibitive it became less attractive and more risky to raise money this way. Fortunately Tony Chapman stepped in and donated the door money from bank holiday Sunday nights at Revenge, which raised a substantial amount of money for the charity. Artists in the past who have appeared in Brighton Cares productions include Les Dennis, Frankie Howerd, Sue Pollard and Danny La Rue, while show credits included a fabulous production of Follies among many others. Thanks go to all the creative people who have given their time over the last 15 years to the charity, including local amateur dramatic societies, the many people who have sat on the Brighton Cares committee. Chairs over the years have included Anne Evans, Chris Gull, Tony Smart and Ann Davies and as the charity closes it is only right to acknowledge the contribution of Brighton Cares’ first producer, Bernard Jay.

At its AGM last month members voted to close down Brighton Cares, the charity that has been raising money for those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS for the last 15 years. It was agreed the charity would donate £5,000 of funds to help establish the permanent AIDS memorial in Brighton and the rest of the remaining funds, which amounted to about £25,000, would be put into a hardship fund, to be administered by one of the local HIV organisations and overseen by Brighton Cares committee member Tony Bennett.

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MAY 2011

1. Ten years ago James Ledward, of sainted memory, was in feisty form with another no holds barred comment piece, and we said a sad goodbye to the last lesbian hangout in Brighton and hello to Subline!

1. In this, our Community Safety issue, I am sad to report the breakdown of relationships between the police and the LGBT Village Pub Watch. It appears to many in the Pub Watch that Sussex Police is trying to deflect attention away from their reluctance to answer concerns of the Pub Watch members by attacking Morham White, the Pub Watch secretary. Chief Inspector Simon Nelson has written to the Village Pub Watch saying the Police are withdrawing their officers from the Village Pub Watch, following disrespectful comments by Mr White, who is a retired public servant with 35 years experience, 33 of those as a senior manager in local government and has no vested interest in his role as secretary of the Village Pub Watch. He is process driven, has no axe to grind and has a reputation for being fair and not allowing himself to be bullied or leaned on. He is not a licensee. The ‘We are the victim’ approach from Sussex Police in their letter to the Pub Watch is not deserving of an organisation whose job is primarily to uphold the law. The letter refers to a lack of respect. Respect has to be earned. In view it is not earned by employing this type of approach. Mr White is a respected member of the LGBT community with an exemplary record of 35 years public service. He volunteers his time and experience for free to make Brighton a better and safer place for LGBT people to live.

Presently the Pub Watch is the only effective mechanism for Sussex Police to formally consult directly with the LGBT community in any shape or form. It is for members of the Pub Watch to decide who their officers are not Sussex Police. Partnership working is only effective when all partners treat each other equally. It is not an option for any statutory organisation to pick and choose who and how they work, when engaging in any type of partnership work. I hope everyone involved sees sense and quickly.

FAREWELL TO THE PV

1. The PV@The Jury’s Out closes its doors for the last time on May 2. Nicky and Gill, the owners, moved to Kemptown three years ago from the original PV in central Brighton. Nicky said: “It is with great regret that we are announcing the closure of The PV@The Jury’s Out. We’ve had a wonderful eight years in Brighton, three of which have been in Kemptown. We would like to thank everybody for
all their love, support and loyalty but we feel that now is the time to move on. The last 18 months have been particularly difficult with the current economic climate and unfortunately we feel we must say goodbye.” However it wouldn’t be The PV without a massive send off, so they have one final big weekend planned on Bank Holiday Monday, May 2.

**SUBLINE: A TRADITIONAL GAY BAR WITH A TWIST IN THE HEART OF ST JAMES’ STREET**

What Brighton has been missing for some years now is a traditional industrial cruise bar. Well, that’s exactly what Subline is. The manager Steven Lee, says: “We wanted to open a good old fashioned gay bar which reestablishes the gay profile in the gay village.” Subline reminds me of a gay bar in London 15 years ago. Industrial in design, well lit with a large comfortable bar to stand and drink at, as well as plenty of places tucked away you can hide away from prying eyes. Every Sunday there’s an underwear party; you don’t have to strip down, just take your top off. After a few drinks you will most likely end up taking a little more off. Well we’re all grown-ups, and there are lockers to put your clothes in. Subline is well designed, has great atmosphere and is a perfect complement to the other venues in the gay village with live DJs sometimes on hand to create their own ambiance. The age profile is very wide, from young smart types through to the more seasoned homos. People have been moaning about how the school-age Ernest liked to dress the other venues in this group. We were there for a cocktail masterclass and to exercise our vocal chords in one of the upstairs karaoke suites. Karaoke, I hear you moan! Well, after the cocktail masterclass and to exercise our vocal chords in one of the upstairs karaoke suites. Karaoke, I hear you moan! Well, after the cocktail masterclass and to exercise our vocal chords in one of the upstairs karaoke suites. Karaoke, I hear you moan! Well, after the cocktail masterclass and to exercise our vocal chords in one of the upstairs karaoke suites.

**MAY 2016**

1 And finally… five years ago, local queer playwright and novelist Neil Bartlett delved into the world of a Stella, and the Gscene team tried out a new venue...

**TRANS? LADY? QUEEN?**

1 Author and director, Neil Bartlett, on the extraordinary true story behind his new show for the Brighton Festival. You might think that gender transformation in all its complex varieties is something that post-dates hormone treatments and surgery. Well, no. A century and a half ago, in April 1870 to be exact, a strikingly well-dressed young woman named Stella was watching the show at the Royal Strand Theatre. The rather daring silk gown she was wearing needed some attention, so she repaired to the ladies’ toilet to fix her drag. However, this was no lady; it was, in fact, the 22-year-old Ernest Boulton, and when she left the theatre Stella was arrested and carted off to Bow Street. The high-profile Old Bailey trial was a battle over identity and labels; was Stella a sex-worker, a lady, a queen – or simply a misguided young man with an unfortunate drag habit? Nowadays, of course, we’d want to know if she was ‘really’ trans rather than drag – because we, in our way, are just as keen to categorise anyone who strays outside of their allotted gender role as the Victorians were. Stella’s mother told the gentlemen of the jury about how the school-age Ernest liked to dress up as the family chambermaid and could even pass in front of her own grandmother – but they took that as evidence of high spirits, rather than of nascent gender dysphoria. Unbelievably, Stella got off. Received wisdom dictates that after all that exposure she ought to have slunk away into obscurity, but not a bit of it; her transformations merely took a new turn. She changed her name, dyed her hair and took her act on the road, touring variety theatres for nearly three more decades as a drag queen, actress and comedian. In 1904, she assumed her final identity; a certain Mr Thomas E Boulton is registered as having died that year in the National Hospital in London’s Queen Square. A year ago, my husband and I moved to a new house, and a chance confusion in unpacking my boxes of papers meant that a long-forgotten photograph of my younger 1980s self in drag came into collision with a photocopied newspaper illustration of Stella on the night of her arrest. That strange juxtaposition got me thinking, and eventually lead me to approach the Brighton Festival with an idea for a new theatre piece. The idea was simple; to bring Stella back to life for the night and just let her talk – to talk to our century, if you like, about the life-lessons she learnt in hers. The Festival said yes. I think we need to put all our categorising and label-wars aside and remember that the gift that all transformers and transitioners and dressers-up give us is an invaluable one. They tell us to trust our queer identities are never a destination, but always a journey. They remind us that in the end it doesn’t matter what category you fit, only how brave you are.

**COCKTAILS, KARAOKE AND A GOOD OLD FASHIONED BOOGIE**

Last month, the Gscene team of writers sampled the delights of Boutique, the venue that offers the more grown-up party animal an alternative night out.

**Boutique is part of the same group that owns the Camelford Arms in Camelford Street. It’s smart, stylish and quirky, the trademark of all the venues in this group. We were there for a cocktail masterclass and to exercise our vocal chords in one of the upstairs karaoke suites. Karaoke, I hear you moan! Well, after the cocktail masterclass and a couple of rounds of shots, the Gscene team were all ready to let their hair down, throw caution to the wind and belt out their favourite songs into the early hours.**

It was an impressive team-building exercise and great fun, but more importantly it gave everyone in the team a chance to get stuck in and within 15 minutes everyone had lost their inhibitions and were able to shine. We had 11 people in our group which was perfectly manageable. Everyone got to make and taste each cocktail and it was brilliant fun. We took over the private bar upstairs for the evening and weren’t interrupted by other customers in the venue. After creating a Cosmopolitan, a Mojito and a Long Island Iced Tea, we finished with some Sex on the Beach before going to a karaoke suite upstairs to sing YMCA, Bohemian Rhapsody and the Birdie Song. All very classy!
and those with mental illnesses have felt... While I think the majority of LGBTQ+ people... both make up my person.

For me, it’s important that I’m with someone who understands and shares my queerness, and in the past I’ve been with people who certainly don’t. However, another issue I face when it comes to dating is that I have lived with mental illness for the past six or seven years of my life, and in the same way that different sexual identities are already misunderstood by many, mental health is also. Although positive discourses around mental health are generally on the increase, trying to explain your mental illness to someone else can be incredibly difficult. Although you don’t have to spill your guts with someone on the first date, I do like to discuss both my identity and my mental health condition with those I grow close to as, while neither define me, both make up my person.

While I think the majority of LGBTQ+ people and those with mental illnesses have felt... much of the prejudice I’ve been exposed to. This combination of general low self-esteem and feeling invalidated has certainly affected my dating life, as a casual coffee date turns into me trying to pick up on any signs that whoever I’m with is also thinking of me as the impostor that I feel I am.

But what happens once you get past the first few dates? You’ve found someone who accepts you for who you are, but then what? Most LGBTQ+ people are familiar with the stereotype that queer relationships, particularly between women, move quickly. One minute you’re on your first date, and the next you’re adopting a shelter cat together. Although this isn’t always the case, I’ve found that my relationships with other queer people have progressed fairly fast.

"Many of the issues I experience in my dating life are rooted in fear rather than reality; feelings of low self-worth are just feelings, and not an accurate reflection of one’s entire self."

One of my more unique mental health symptoms is that I struggle with emotional intensity and feelings of strong attachment to the point where it can have a damaging effect on my wellbeing. I become invested in relationships incredibly quickly, and fast-moving relationships are challenging for me as, while the intensity of my feelings makes me prone to diving into them, this can often have an adverse effect on my own self-worth as I become overly reliant on the other person. And of course, it leaves both parties more vulnerable to getting hurt. Something I’m still trying to learn as a queer person with mental illness is that taking things slow can be better to help cultivate a more healthy relationship with the other person, and with yourself.

Despite the difficulties I’ve found in regards to dating and relationships, I do think it is possible to have strong, happy relationships as an LGBTQ+ person with a mental health condition. Many of the issues I experience in my dating life are rooted in fear rather than reality; feelings of low self-worth are just feelings, and not an accurate reflection of one’s entire self. Moreover, this is the reality for many LGBTQ+ people, as our community is disproportionately affected by mental health issues. Many of us lie in this intersection, and find dating difficult as we struggle to wade our way through our personal struggles and the prejudices thrown at us. Queer happiness is real and obtainable, and whether you choose to abstain from dating while you work on yourself, or you want to dive headfirst into a relationship, it’s important to remember that you’re not alone in your struggles, and as long as you’re taking care of yourself, you will reach a point where the joys of dating outweigh the difficulties.
It was interesting to read that the one sliver of hope from the Covid-19 pandemic was that the number of HIV cases (unsurprisingly) has plummeted. Of course there will continue to be restrictions on group gatherings, so many of the many favourite haunts of the LGBTQ+ community, including bars, clubs, saunas, will continue to be restricted or closed, but the libido of many will ensure there will be much searching of fun.

With this in mind, we stand at an opportunity in time to continue to make a real difference with reducing HIV transmissions and to take responsibility for our own sexual health.

First up, carry condoms with you; should the opportunity arise you will want to be prepared for all of those upcoming sexual occasions.

If you are unsure about your HIV status there has never been a better time to get tested by either visiting your local STI/HIV clinic (or going online), dropping into THT on Ship Street or, as has proven to be very popular, picking up an HIV home testing kit, which for those living in Brighton & Hove is free. For a full list of where you get an HIV test or obtain a free HIV testing kit, please visit: http://brightonsexualhealth.com/online-sti-testing/ or https://test.tht.org.uk/.

And, according to reports, that is what many people have been doing over lockdown, getting an MOT on their sexual health. This news is really encouraging as we work towards eliminating all new HIV cases by 2030.

Following on from this, the teams at Brighton’s STI/HIV clinics (Claude Nicol, Lawson Unit) have exciting plans to increase ways people can get an HIV test, by providing more vending machines across the city enabling ways to normalise getting an HIV test and seeing it as important as going to the dentist regularly or having the annual flu vaccine.

The sooner you know your HIV status, the sooner you can get on anti-retroviral medication and suppress the HIV from spreading to your other sexual partners.

We know we have also mentioned PrEP and PEP before, but it is good to remind the sexually active of what these two amazing medications can do.

PEP is a combination of HIV drugs that should be taken within 24 hours of the time you think you may have been exposed to HIV; it can be taken up to 72 hours later but may not be as affective. You can get PEP from your local STI/HIV clinic or from A&E.

PrEP (anti-HIV medication Truvada) can be taken daily or before having sex and has the ability to stop HIV infection, even if you decide not to use a condom, and is widely available for free from your local STI/HIV clinic or you can pay for it by ordering online.

And finally, a shout out to all those living with HIV, please consider joining our project More to Me Than HIV and together we can stamp out stigma.

For more info, visit: http://moretomethanhiv.life
STREETS OF BRIGHTON
Photography by Tom Selmon

Cerri. @ www.instagram.com/cerri_xoxo/
Francesca (L). www.instagram.com/francesca_e.b/
Daisy (R). www.instagram.com/daisy.golden/
LGBTQ+ Services

- Allsorts Youth Project
  Drop-in for LGBT or unsure young people under 26 Tues 5.30–8.30pm 01273 721211 or email info@allsortsyouth.org.uk. www.allsortsyouth.org.uk

- Brighton & Hove Police
  Report all homophobic, biphobic or transphobic incidents to: 24/7 assistance call Police on 101 (emergency 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 558168 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 Cafe: support for LGBT+ people with Dementia • Volunteering opportunities: 01273 234 009 Helpline hours: Wed & Thur, 7–9.30pm; trans-only webchat on Sun 3–5pm: call 01273 204 050 email info@switchboard.org.uk or webchat: www.switchboard.org.uk/helpline www.switchboard.org.uk/brighton

- Brighton OneBodyOneFaith
  Formerly The Gay Christian Movement. Contact: Nigel Nash nigelnash@me.com. www.onebodyonefaith.org.uk

- Brighton Women’s Centre
  Info, counselling, drop-in space, support groups: 01273 696036 or visit www.womenscentre.org.uk

- Lesbian & Gay AA
  12-step self-help programme for alcohol addictions: Sun, 7.30pm, Chapel Royal, North St, Btl (side entrance). 01273 203 343 (general AA line)

- LGBTQ+ + Cocaine Anonymous
  Meeting every Tues 6.30–8pm, 6 Tilbury Pl, Brighton, BN2 0GY. CA isn’t allied with any outside organisation, and neither endorses or opposes any causes. Helpline 0800 612225, www.cocainedoaneymous.org.uk www.sussexcocainedoaneymous.co.uk

- LGBTQ+ + NA Group
  Brighton-based LGBTQ+ (with others) Narcotics Anonymous group every Tue 6.30–8pm, Millwood Centre, Nelson Row, Kingswood St. 0300 999 1212

- LGBTQ+ + Meditation Group
  Meditation & discussion, every 2nd & 4th Thu, 5.30–7pm, Anahata Clinic, 119 Edward St, Brighton. 07789 861 367 or www.bodhtreebrighton.org.uk

- Lunch Positive
  Lunch club for people with HIV. Meet/make friends, find peer support in safe space. Every Fri, noon–2.30pm. Community Room, Dorset Gdns Methodist Church, Dorset Gdns, Brighton. Lunch £1.50. 07846 464 384 or www.lunchpositive.org

- MCC Brighton
  Inclusive, affirming space where all are invited to come as they are to explore their spirituality without judgement. 01273 515572 or info@mccbrighton.org.uk www.mccbrighton.org.uk

- Mindout
  Independent, impartial services run by and for LGBTQ+ people with experience of mental health issues. 24 hr confidential answerphone: 01273 234839 or email info@mindout.org.uk and out of hours online chat www.mindout.org.uk

- Navigate
  Social/peer support group for FTM, transmasculine & gender queer people, every 1st Wed 7-9pm & 3rd Sat of month 1-3pm at Space for Change, Windlesham Venue, BN1 3AH. https://navigatebrighton.wordpress.com/

- Peer Action
  Regular low cost yoga, therapies, swimming, meditation & social groups for people with HIV. contact@peeraction.net or www.peeraction.net

- Rainbow Families
  Support group for lesbian and/or gay parents 07951 020139 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, Hastings. Call/text Carline Connolly 07971 325076 or email somepeople@eastsussex.gov.uk

- TAGS – The Arun Gay Society
  Social group welcome all in East & West Sussex Areas. Call/text 07539 513171, More info: www.tagsonline.org.uk

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

- The Village MCC

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-Thu 9am-4pm. Wed 9am–12.30pm Brighton & Hove Citizens Advice Bureau, Brighton Town Hall. 01273 733390 or 020 or www.brightonhovecab.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.org

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

- Martin Fisher Foundation

- Substance Misuse Service
  Brighton & Hove: Change Grow Live. 01273 731900. email brighton.info@cgl.org.uk, visit: www.changegrowlive.org/brighton-hove-recovery-service/
Warwickshire Pride cancelled

Daniel Browne, chair of trustees at Warwickshire Pride, has announced that this year’s Pride Festival has been cancelled due to the ongoing pandemic. The festival, which was due to take place in Leamington Spa in August, will be replaced instead by a virtual pride similar to the one held in 2020.

In his announcement, Dan stated: “I want to explain the decision. It was a difficult one, it’s a heart-breaking one and I know that many of you watching this will be sad, possibly devastated.

“We’re still in the midst of the pandemic and although things are starting to improve, particularly with the vaccine roll out and this roadmap out of lockdown, there is still much uncertainty regarding what the situation is actually going to be in August, what we might need to have in place, whether that will put extra costs on us and ultimately the safety of the community.

“Those who attend Warwickshire Pride was at the forefront of our decision. We don’t know if there will be restrictions on numbers, we don’t know if there will be vaccine passports or people needing to be tested or providing evidence that they’ve had the first dose of a vaccine, we don’t know if we’ll have to fence off the pump-room gardens where we have the festival.

“It’s a tough decision that we’ve come to but we believe it’s the right decision at this time when we need to actually decide one way or the other whether we’re going ahead. Organising a Pride festival is a really big undertaking, it takes months and months and months… There’s so much to book in; the stage, the performers, the stalls, safety things to consider, putting event plans together, first aid, and it costs about £12,000 at least to put on the festival and do a good job of it.”

In 2020, Warwickshire Pride hosted a digital festival that spanned roughly 12 hours and included performances, entertainment, talks, workshops and webinars. Organisers aim to replicate this virtual pride in 2021, this time going “bigger, better and more fantastic than last year”.

Join the virtual Warwickshire Pride Festival on Saturday, August 21 which will be streaming on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. More updates will be shared online as and when.

What’s more, they are also planning their next big event, Warwickshire Pride’s Got Talent, which usually takes place a few months before the Pride festival but in 2021 this has been pushed back to autumn/winter. The winner of this event will receive a headline spot at 2022’s Warwickshire Pride Festival, as well as a slot during the first stages of their festival with much of the talent re-booked from the 2020 Pride which never went ahead due to the pandemic.

The event, which is hoped to take place from Saturday, September 25 until Sunday, September 26, features the Main Stage, Dance Arena, Cabaret, Headline Spot at 2022’s Warwickshire Pride Festival, as well as a slot during the first stages of their festival with much of the talent re-booked from the 2020 Pride which never went ahead due to the pandemic.

Birmingham Pride releases first look at 2021 line-up

Birmingham Pride, which is supported in 2021 by HSBC, has been working hard to secure acts for the stages of their festival with much of the talent re-booked from the 2020 Pride which never went ahead due to the pandemic.

The event, which is hoped to take place from Saturday, September 25 until Sunday, September 26, features the Main Stage, Dance Arena, Cabaret, Headline Spot at 2022’s Warwickshire Pride Festival, as well as a slot during the first stages of their festival with much of the talent re-booked from the 2020 Pride which never went ahead due to the pandemic.

Warwickshire Pride joins Rainbow Lottery

Walsall Pride has announced it is now working with the Rainbow Lottery, which is the UK’s first lottery dedicated to LGBTQ+ charities and good causes. The Rainbow Lottery launched on Thursday, April 22 and users can create an account to play with the chance to win up to £25,000 every week.

“The Rainbow Lottery was “set up to support community projects in the local area and operates on the principle of raising money within the community for the community. We empower local good causes to raise money in a fun and effective way”.

For your chance to win the jackpot, head to www.rainbowlottery.co.uk. Tickets cost £1 and 50p of that goes straight to help Walsall Pride raise crucial funding.

For more info, visit: www.warswickshirepride.org

Birmingham and Solihull receive funding from Culture Recovery Fund

Funding of £7,850,631 has been awarded through the Arts Council to support 92 organisations in Birmingham and Solihull as part of the government’s Culture Recovery Fund, which aims to support theatres, other local venues, galleries and museums, performance groups, and arts organisations, ensuring that they have a future after the coronavirus pandemic.

Birmingham and Solihull as part of Birmingham Pride releases first look at 2021 line-up

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Improvement works on Birmingham’s Southside, home to the LGBTQ+ village, will transform the area’s links to New Street Station, and create a safer and more inviting space to enjoy.

The estimated £9.5 million project aims to deliver improved walking and cycling routes from the city’s main railway station, with improvements to pavements on Hurst Street and Ladywell Walk and to the cycleway on Hill Street, plus changes to the pedestrian crossing over Smallbrook Queensway.

Cllr Waseem Zaffar, Birmingham City Council’s (BCC) cabinet member for transport and environment, said: “Providing safe and accessible walking and cycling routes will be key to achieving our clean air targets, and in turn creates a better environment for businesses, residents and visitors. I’m delighted that we are able to get this project underway and provide much-needed connectivity to Southside.”

The scheme also includes a new public square adjacent to the Birmingham Hippodrome on Hurst Street, which will offer a flexible space designed for a variety of public events.

Fiona Allen, artistic director and CEO of Birmingham Hippodrome, said: “After years of planning we are thrilled that the transformation of Hippodrome Square is imminent. The Southside of Birmingham has desperately needed investment and development to match other parts of the city centre. We hope to see the Square a destination for outdoor events, festivals and performances as well as being a gateway to Chinatown and the Village – not to mention the Hippodrome!”

Additionally, the makeover of Birmingham’s Southside will include improvements to the area’s street furniture and lighting. Meanwhile, more trees will be planted to make the area more attractive and welcoming to visitors.

Julia Robinson, Southside’s BID manager, said: “Southside District is Birmingham’s beating cultural heart; we welcome the redevelopment of Hippodrome Square, which will create an inviting and engaging space for everyone to enjoy.

“Now more than ever, it’s so important for us to invest in outdoor spaces to enliven the city and bring visitors back to Birmingham. New street furniture, lighting and the introduction of more trees will transform the area, making it an attractive place for visitors old and new, and adding to the wide appeal of our vibrant district.”

This new scheme is part of the Enterprise Zone Investment Plan (EZIP) and it is a prominent infrastructure project as part of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) Enterprise Zone.

Tim Pile, chair of GBSLEP, said: “This project will transform the Southside area into the new ‘front door’ of Birmingham’s City Centre and GBSLEP’s £8.7 million investment is an important commitment to creating dynamic places for everyone to enjoy. As a LEP we work with our local authority partners, businesses and academic institutions to identify developments that will create jobs, increase social value and enhance the wellbeing of our residents.

“The new cycle routes and pathways will help people access different parts of the district and the new performance space will provide a focal point, which in turn will attract further investment in the area. The Southside project reflects our mission to drive inclusive economic growth in our region for the benefit of everyone.”

Alongside GBSLEP’s investment, BCC has also donated £0.4 million of capital investment to the project, with a further £0.4 million from Southside District, Southside Building and Birmingham Hippodrome collectively.

NMCN, a construction and infrastructure specialist, has been appointed to deliver the works which began in April and take approximately 12 months.

Vip Gandhi, managing director of NMCN’s infrastructure team, said: “This project will transform the Southside area of the city centre and will make a real difference in attracting new visitors and tourists. Our company’s aim is to have a positive impact on everything we touch and we look forward to working with BCC to realise this commitment.”
LGBTQ+ Faces of Bristol

LGBTQ+ Faces of Bristol was founded by Karen Freer in early 2020, as the Covid pandemic’s initial lockdown was lifted. The project has now attracted a great team: Colleen (assistant), Jen (social media manager), Chloe (assistant photographer, PR & communications) and Emma (designer).

Their mission is to empower Bristol’s LGBTQ+ community through the medium of photography, ensuring everyone has positive representation.

To find out more and to get involved, visit: https://lgbtqfacesofbristol.co.uk/about

Bristol Pride to return in July

Organisers of Bristol Pride Festival have today confirmed that the annual event will return to the city again this year in a slightly different format, after 2020 saw the event, like many others, move online.

The popular festival’s planned return will span two weeks from Saturday, July 3 – Friday, July 16, supported by returning headline sponsor Unite Students, which provides purpose-built student accommodation across the UK.

During the two weeks, favourites from the festival’s usual programme of events will take place in venues across the city. Bringing the city alive with Pride as the charity also helps to support one of the hardest hit sectors, especially hospitality venues that are serving the LGBTQ+ community.

Pride Day, which will take place on Saturday, July 10 in Castle Park, will be a day that will focus on bringing people back together. The LGBTQ+ community and its allies have spent so much time apart over the past year that organisers want to create an event that will help people gather, be proud and to celebrate safely.

For this year, the special event in Castle Park will host a food market, family and youth areas and roaming live performances, all delivered with some Bristol Pride flair.

Eye Russell, festival director of Bristol Pride, said: “We’re so excited to be working on delivering this year’s festival in person again and to be able to bring everyone back together to celebrate safely. It’s been an incredibly challenging year for everyone, and the LGBTQ+ community has been disproportionately affected, so it feels right that we create events that will focus on community, giving us all the chance to reconnect but also to be loud, proud and visible once more.”

The highly anticipated Pride Parade March will also make a physical return this year, filling the city with colour and encouraging the LGBTQ+ communities to not only celebrate but also to remember to continue to push for equality. Further details of the route and times will be released soon.

Other events to look out for across the two weeks of the festival include the return of Pride Night, including the official afterparty at O2 Academy; the ever popular Dog Show, a spectacular drag Cabaret Night featuring queens from RuPaul’s Drag Race UK; Comedy Night; Circus Night; Theatre Night; and Queer Vision Film Festival.

Further details of the planned programme will be announced over the coming weeks.

For tickets and more info, visit: www.bristolpride.co.uk

The Chris & Caz Show

A long time ago in a studio far, far away... The Chris & Caz Show was born.

From the humble beginnings of a daily radio show to entertaining the college masses, hosting live events and performances to DJing and hosting some of the famous end-of-term college ‘Bashes’. Having begun in a tiny broom cupboard on the EDC campus called the ‘Studio’, The Chris & Caz Show, which quickly became the show to listen to during the depressing lunch period, has now returned.

Get ready for some of the legendary Caz features, quizzes, LGBTQ+ and mainstream news... and much, much more!

To tune in, visit: www.chris-robinson.co.uk/wp/

It’s A BAME’s Life podcast

El (@Mose_issie) is a podcaster and creator of It’s A BAME’s Life, which is an LGBTQ+ BAME focused podcast discussing the struggles faced by those within the BAME community, including mental health challenges and those working to make a change. The podcast is out every week on all major platforms.

To listen to the show, visit: https://open.spotify.com/show/66X8d8GBdK93xM9JkoLLd or https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/its-a-bames-life/id1512812019

Search It’s A BAME’s Life on

New monthly drag extravaganza

Dare to Drag, a new monthly drag extravaganza featuring some of the hottest performers on the scene, takes place at Dare to Club, Alfred Street on Sunday, June 20 from 1pm.

Not to be missed, this is a socially distanced seated event which is outdoors under a beautiful heated marquee. All tickets must be booked in advance. Included in your ticket price will be your first drink and food which can be purchased from D2 Bear food which caters for meat, veggie and vegan lovers.

Hosted by Alyssa Van Delle, the queens keeping you entertained throughout the show include Holestar, Soroya Marchelle, Victoria Scone, Kittyc Scott Claus, Spank, Cherry Liquor, Yshee Black. Music by Remy Melee with special musical guest Josh Pozzi.

For tickets, visit: hdfst.uk/E64224

Scene in Bristol

Unite Students

It’s A BAME’s Life podcast

The Chris & Caz Show

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New monthly drag extravaganza