

ASSIST TRUST

2012–13

Progression services for people with learning difficulties



“I look after my own money – I did struggle a bit in the past with money, but I’m more careful and pay my bills on time”

OUTCOMES IN 2012

6 members switched from taxis to public transport to get to Assist

9 members were helped to travel more independently (to the shops or to Assist Trust sites)

9 members were helped to travel to work placements independently

34 small groups of friends were supported by staff (who gave up their own time) to go out in the evenings or at weekends

4 people moved into Assist Trust properties

3 more people will be moving into Assist Trust properties in the near future

5 other members moved into more independent living

22 members were supported to find external work placements

1 person was helped to find paid work, bringing the number currently in paid work up to **5**

58 members had in-house work experience at Assist

“I’ve moved into a new house in Norwich and I’m happier”

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“I’d like to get better at looking after myself – shopping, budgeting and cooking”

ABOUT ASSIST TRUST

Assist currently supports 135 people with learning difficulties, aged 18 and over, to help them gain confidence and become more independent. Individuals are based either at 20 Colegate or at Lazar House in Norwich, depending on which site suits their needs and wishes best. They attend between two and five days a week, between Monday and Friday, from 9am to 3.30pm.

At both sites, members take part in a wide range of activities, all of which are aimed at helping them to grow in confidence, be able to think for themselves and get on with others. Many sessions include life skills such as dealing with money, travelling more independently and cooking. Everything is aimed at helping people to get into the real world and to cope with what they find.

On top of these day-to-day activities, members are supported at Assist in a variety of areas as they become more independent. Depending on what the individual needs, this could mean help with making friends, managing money, travelling more independently, finding work experience, or independent living. Whatever the need, Assist will always try to find ways to help.



“Generally, I’m getting on with my friends better. I don’t hang around with just one person – I’m getting to know other people”

OUR GOALS



Everything that happens at Assist is aimed at helping people with learning difficulties to progress and move forward in their lives.

We:

- provide a wide range of activities that help people to build confidence
- encourage people to speak up, to think for themselves and to get on with others
- create a relaxed and stimulating environment, where people have space to express themselves, make friends and socialise
- challenge people, in a supportive way, to see what they can manage for themselves
- allow people to take managed risks
- give people the chance to learn from their experiences and mistakes, and to become more independent as a result
- find opportunities in the workplace and in the housing market

At Assist, we aim to build on people’s strengths. Our ethos is to treat everyone the same, whether they have a learning difficulty or not. Over the years, we have found that in the long run this straightforward approach is far more helpful than being over-indulgent, or excusing people when they do something wrong simply because they have a learning difficulty.

New members arriving at Assist quickly understand that they will be warmly welcomed by everyone, and that the staff will take them seriously and expect them to contribute and to get on with others. At the same time, we always listen to people’s thoughts and ideas.

“Darren was brilliant at Gressenhall and able to work without supervision”

TRUSTEES' REPORT

2012 has been another hugely exciting and rewarding year for everyone involved with the Assist Trust, and for us as board members in particular. The progress that the members continue to make in all aspects of their lives remains the central aim here and the challenge for many years now has simply been to keep pace with their ambitions! We're proud to say that we believe Assist leads the field in the way it continues to respond to these challenges with such a variety of imaginative and creative solutions.

Our housing partnership with the Society of Friends in Norwich is a perfect example: it has provided two properties, close to Lazar House, into which four Assist members have moved during the year. At the same time, as in previous years, a huge percentage of members attending Assist have been offered employment opportunities and have been supported in ways that help them cope with the challenges they face in the workplace. The sincere, meaningful nature of this support enables all Assist members to continue to make progress, often in ways that are less visible than for those making the big steps, but which make those big steps possible. Our heartfelt thanks and appreciation go to Richard Ward and the senior staff team in particular, but to all the staff and volunteers at Assist who have created – and who continue to create – the environment and the opportunities that underpin this success.

A mention should also be made of the enormous efforts behind the scenes to continue improving Assist's premises and facilities, to improve working relationships and to consolidate our systems and procedures after such a long period of sustained growth and development. We would like to acknowledge the invaluable support we have received this year from Voluntary Norfolk on employment and policy development issues. Since the beginning of the year, when Assist signed up to its gold standard employment package, Voluntary Norfolk has offered excellent resources and timely advice.

After sustaining a deficit this year, approaches were made to Norfolk County Council in order to secure the future running of the Trust by raising its daily rate. We were delighted that the unique contribution Assist makes to the lives of its members was acknowledged and the new rate was agreed. A more secure financial footing will ensure that Assist can continue to innovate and develop services for its members in the future.





OTHER NEWS

A major water leak at 20 Colegate last December resulted in months of inconvenience as scaffolding was installed to make the area safe. Members and staff based there showed great patience while the damage was assessed and the work to repair it finally got under way. We are happy to report that the building is now back to its former glory.

...

The other unfortunate news to report is that we suffered two break-ins at Heath Gardens during the year, resulting in the loss of several pieces of machinery and equipment, as well as some damage to the facilities on site. Undaunted, we are busy repairing the damage and replacing the equipment, and we have many plans to continue improving the site in the future – with extra security in place!

...

A new bird hide has been erected in the wildlife area – we will have an open day on Saturday 1 June 2013 to show off our efforts.



“I’ve been volunteering for 5 years and feel like part of the family!”

OUR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Assist Trust currently employs 27 people, of whom 12 are working on a part-time basis. All of those working directly with the members are qualified to, or are working towards, NVQ level 2 equivalent or above. Individuals within the team specialise in:

- employment
- housing
- communication
- volunteering
- training
- basic skills
- health and safety
- first aid

All staff receive ongoing training to keep them up to date with:

- safeguarding adults
- first aid and fire warden training
- professional boundaries
- risk assessment
- communication
- keyworking
- the rights of the individual and the Mental Capacity Act
- dealing with threatening behaviour
- record-keeping
- safe practice

The organisation is managed by Richard Ward, ably supported on a day-to-day basis by Trish Chapman and Lucy Graver. They in turn are supported by the Board of Trustees, which meets once a month to discuss the members’ progress and to oversee the running and the financial security of the Trust.

In order to support the members as successfully as possible, Assist advertised for an in-house social worker earlier this year. This is a new position within the Trust and we hope that Alison Hill, the successful applicant, will work alongside our skilled and experienced team to enhance the services we already provide.

All staff and volunteers at Assist are taught to treat the members in a natural, straightforward and unpatronising way, so the members have the best possible chance of successfully becoming more independent. At the same time, all workers learn how to remain professional in their roles, keeping communication and risk issues in mind as they work alongside the members.

Volunteers make a valuable contribution to the quality of the services we provide to our members. Previous experience is not necessary – each volunteer brings their own set of skills and life experiences to the role. In return, volunteers gain work experience in an enthusiastic and supportive environment.

If you’re interested in helping out at Assist, please contact us on 01603 230200 or at assisttrusthq@btconnect.com.

“I’m looking forward to moving. It’s a bit scary, but I’ll have my own freedom”

HOUSING



In 2012, Assist Trust added two new properties to its housing portfolio, following the continued success of the flats at Friars Quay. What made this possible was a new relationship between Assist and the Society of Friends. Assist researched and identified two suitable properties, which were then purchased by the Society of Friends through its social housing fund. The properties have been leased back to the Trust on a long-term basis to be sub-let to our members.

Assist now manages six properties in Norwich: a three-bedroom house, a two-bedroom house, two two-bedroom flats and two one-bedroom flats. At present, five people live at these properties, with three more due to move in soon.

The housing team tries to help all members and their families, no matter what their housing situation might be. For example, we:

- help members register on their council housing list
- run housing groups within the timetable to inform members of potential housing options
- talk one-to-one with members who have expressed an interest in independent living, to gain a better understanding of their current situation
- provide information to parents and carers on housing options, benefits and the financial implications of independent living
- help members understand bills and budgeting
- deliver flexible landlord services for Assist Trust properties, including weekend drop-in support for property-related issues (eg. broken fridge, power cut)
- provide encouragement and support for those nervous about taking the first steps towards independent living
- support members to complete housing benefit forms

- complete risk assessments to identify where more support might be required by parents, carers, social workers or ourselves before members move into independent living
- liaise with social workers when parents and members have expressed an interest in independent living
- suggest members to social workers when we hear of spaces coming up in supported-living houses
- identify potential friendship combinations to pass on to social workers
- find creative, flexible solutions to obstacles that may prevent members from attempting independent living, and are proactive to make things happen
- identify where independent living skills may need improving before a member moves into supported living
- identify potential new housing opportunities (eg. our current partnership with the Society of Friends) for the benefit of members

“I made a decision to ask if there were any jobs available at the N&N, and when a job came up I then took it”

EMPLOYMENT

Assist Trust works closely with employers on behalf of its members, and supports members by carrying out risk assessments, on-site visits and job-coaching. We make sure we provide individuals suited to the roles available, we trouble-shoot if problems arise, and we give advice and guidance as necessary.

Members' success in these placements is down to the way Assist works with everyone who attends: people are encouraged to develop their skills and are made aware of what they should expect in the workplace. This can often be a gradual process, but this year, as in previous years, there have been many successes. We have individuals who:

- have struggled with jobs in the past but have found their feet in new roles and have since flourished
- have become so much part of their work teams that they are now regularly invited on staff outings
- have been offered paid work after proving themselves as reliable volunteers
- were not expected to be able to contribute, but who now go out to work with minimal support and provide genuine help in their communities

See Outcomes in 2012 (on the inside front cover of this review) for details of the number of individuals who have succeeded in the workplace this year.

If you think you could offer placements to our members, or you know someone who could, we would love to hear from you.



“I’m going to start buying my lunch from the café on Tuesdays”

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How do I get funding for my son / daughter to come to Assist?

This is normally arranged via the social worker or care manager who has helped with the assessment of the individual’s needs – they will be able to say whether their budget will cover Assist’s daily rate (£31.73 at the time of writing). Before considering a particular person we also insist that potential members visit Assist, to meet us and to see if they like what we can offer.

Who sorts out transport to Assist, if it is needed?

Transport is normally arranged by Norfolk County Council, again via the person’s social worker or care manager.

I’ve been told that our son / daughter is on the Assist Trust waiting list.

What does this mean?

Assist has been oversubscribed for some years now, but we try and accommodate people when space becomes available. This does happen from time to time, when individuals leave because their circumstances change, or because they require less day-service provision altogether, or when they find that Assist no longer suits their needs. We will always try to give a realistic time to those waiting and will keep people informed as spaces open up.

How does the timetable work?

When people first start at Assist, they are fitted into low-key groups so that we can get to know them and they can get to know us. When the timetable changes (in January, May and September of each year) members can choose what they would like to do from what’s on offer. We encourage members to say what they would and would not like to do, and to try to stick with their choices after that.

Can members go out at break times?

Some people can, depending on their level of independence and whether it is safe for them to do so.

What do people usually do for lunch at Assist?

Most bring a packed lunch or go out to nearby shops, bakeries or cafés, if they are independent enough. We are not able to take people to the shops to buy things and unfortunately, due to the numbers of people attending, we are also unable to offer the use of the microwave to warm things up. Some of the activities include cooking lunch – the cost of these lunches will be detailed on members’ individual timetables (each member is given a fresh copy each time their timetable changes).

What other things do people need money for at Assist?

All drinks from the machines at Assist cost 30p, and we have a tuckshop for snacks at lunchtime for those who can’t go out. As with the cooking groups, money required for particular activities will be detailed on individual members’ timetables.

What do keyworkers do?

Each member is assigned a keyworker when they join Assist. The keyworker acts as a point of contact for those involved in the member’s life and will usually attend reviews and meetings to support them or advocate on their behalf if necessary. Keyworkers are changed from time to time and we discourage members from getting too attached at any stage, making it clear that they can talk to anyone among the staff that they feel comfortable with, at any time.

Will my son / daughter get certificates for their activities at Assist?

No. We build on the strengths people have and focus strongly on social skills, daily living skills and job skills. Any groups or activities that involve things like reading, writing or money skills always work on ways of applying those skills in the real world. Instead of giving out certificates, we praise people for genuine progress made, whenever it occurs.

Does Assist help with medication?

We can store medication safely, if required, and remind people when to take things as necessary, but we don’t administer medication ourselves.

Can my son / daughter get a job straight away?

No. We always make sure that we get to know people properly before we encourage steps towards employment. Along the way, we often find that members have things they need to work on before they can manage a job.

Can a new member get one of the Assist flats straight away?

We have an accommodation waiting list and, again, it is essential that we know people well before offering opportunities of any kind.

“I enjoy going to the gardens and raking leaves.
I can talk to my friends while I’m there”



“Shelly’s now able to join in with the banter and gives as good as she gets”

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

For the year ending 31 March 2012

Income	2012	2011
Donations	24,200	100,942
Rents and interest received	26,102	26,734
Grants and other charitable income	604,230	544,648
Total income	654,532	672,324
Expenditure		
(A) Support costs for activities		
Staff costs	390,393	363,538
Premises expenses	142,146	117,608
Depreciation	36,383	39,488
Fund raising	6,500	6,920
	575,422	527,554
(B) Management and administration		
Staff costs	81,012	74,827
Premises and administration	48,287	46,296
Governance	5,143	4,878
	134,442	126,001
Total expenditure	709,864	653,555
(Deficit)/surplus of income over expenditure	(55,332)	18,769
Surplus brought forward	333,164	314,395
	277,832	333,164
Represented by:		
Fixed assets	147,832	161,371
Debtors	77,177	53,160
Cash at bank	86,331	137,550
	311,340	352,081
Less: creditors due within one year	(33,508)	(18,917)
	277,832	333,164



DIARY DATES FOR 2013

Open evening Wednesday 27 February
(details to follow)

Heath Gardens open day
Saturday 1 June

Midsummer ball Friday 21 June

Christmas party
Thursday 19 December

Closures (training days)
Monday 11 February
Tuesday 12 March
Wednesday 22 May
Thursday 19 September
Friday 25 October

Christmas closing
Finish at the end of the day on
Friday 20 December, reopen on
Thursday 2 January 2014



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