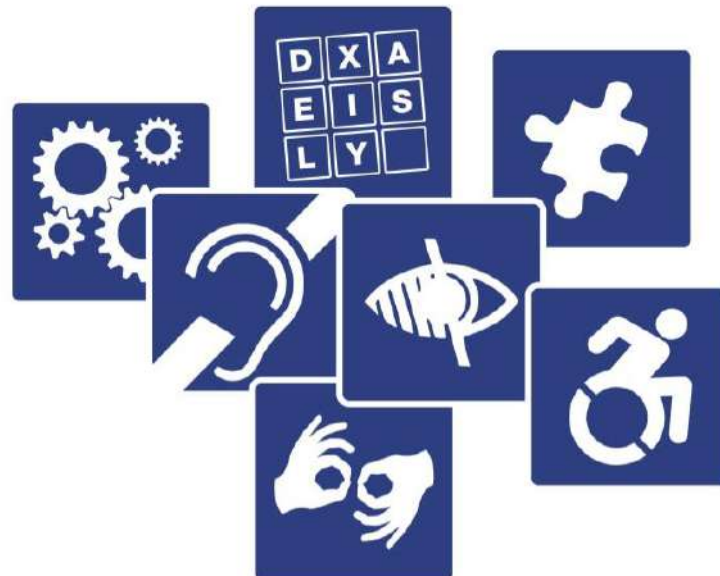


STAART Newsletter

May 2021

STAART



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ECOSIA- The search engine that plants trees

I remember documentaries and articles commenting about trees being lungs for our planet and it seems like a no-brainer that we should look after them, especially with Global Warming and Climate Change in mind.

Yet, we as humans are cutting down more trees than we are replanting them, with agriculture being almost half of all known causes of deforestation. I remember going to Italy, a few years ago, I wanted to plant a tree in our holiday home's garden. When we got there, I bought a shrub and soon afterwards dug up a patch and placed the shrub inside. Inspired by my determination, my parents bought an apple and pear tree at €10 each and planted them next to the drive. If I could get 7.5 billion people to plant a tree, we could help fight climate change.

Well, I stumbled onto Ecosia about 6 years ago, on a YouTube advert for a TED-Talk video about the environment and have been using it ever since. Ecosia is a search engine that uses its advertising revenue to fund tree planting projects all around the world. Founded in December 2009, making it 11 years old, it has managed to reach a massive milestone of 115 million trees. It works just like Google in many respects, though its algorithms do provide different results, with the biggest difference being that it picks up the most recent news on subjects, rather than prolific articles. It also comes with its own app to download onto your smartphones and tablets.



When I first started using Ecosia, I remember that it claimed to take on average 3 seconds to plant a tree. Now, it takes less than a second! I remember an article saying that if 10% of Google's traffic went to

Ecosia it would reforest the world several times over. I've been raising awareness of Ecosia to multiple businesses, family and friends to try to get more traffic to Ecosia as I know that more people means more trees, and the best part is that it's all free.

Ecosia has been publishing reports on where and how many trees are being planted on a monthly basis and it has also created environmental incentives such as wooden bank cards. Personally, I have used Ecosia for 14,350 searches which means 319 trees have been planted. At the beginning of December 2020, Ecosia were responsible for planting over 115 million trees.

Recently the Co-op has decided to make Ecosia its default search engine. Let's hope the other supermarkets follow suit.

Peter – STAART Member BSc Environmental Science

Creating Aspiration in Education, Employment and Wellbeing



In January 2021, Deaf Unity – a UK charity preparing deaf people for success – launched their exciting Deaf Futures Content Series, which STAART are proud to be supporting. The video series consists of masterclasses, high-profile interviews, timely advice and resources which are fully accessible to the Deaf Community and its hearing supporters, with British Sign Language, audio and captioning.

According to Deaf Unity, deaf people often feel disenfranchised and struggle to find basic information and support throughout experiences in education, job seeking, the workplace, and general wellness. Their mission is therefore to unite the Deaf Community and be a pillar of support, unification and inspiration. They also believe in working with those outside the Community who can lend their expertise or are willing to increase their awareness and appreciation of what the Community and its members can offer wider society.

The Deaf Futures series will run throughout the first half of 2021 with regular video content sent by email to event registrants. An example of some of the content already available or due to be released is below:

- A UCAS Personal Statement Masterclass and What Next? Offers, Clearing and Finances presentation with Heather Judd, Careers Coordinator at West Kent College

- An interview on Creating a Thriving Learning Environment and Remote Learning for Deaf Children with Dani Sive, Headteacher at the Frank Barnes School for Deaf Children
- An interview with YouTuber Jazzy on Building an Online Community
- A CV Writing Masterclass with UK careers advice experts Bright Network
- A Masterclass for Freelancing or Starting a Business with Alan Reed, COO at ELREM
- A talk on Domestic and Sexual Violence in the Deaf Community and Help Available by SignHealth, the Deaf Health Charity



If this is of interest to you, or might be beneficial to a friend, family or teacher, please encourage them to sign up for this incredible series by going to deaffutures2021.eventbrite.com

For any questions, please contact Karla Sharp, Head of Deaf Futures at karla.sharp@deafunity.org

Karla – STAART Ally

The Natural Resources Institute or NRI

Unless you work or study at the Natural Resources Institute (NRI), you may not have a good idea of what exactly we do.

NRI's research, consultancy, and training in food, agriculture, environment, and sustainable livelihoods dates back 125 years. Our work aims to address the UN Sustainable Development Goals and interrelated global challenges affecting everyone from local farmers and consumers to the UK food industry, and smallholder communities in the developing world. Together with our international partners, we tackle complex issues including poverty, food and nutrition security, sustainable agriculture, climate change, gender and social inequality, responsible production and consumption, exploitation of natural resources and environmental management.



Pioneering work from our history includes locust control, safeguarding against foodborne diseases, controlling disease-transmitting species including tsetse and blackfly, and the discovery of aflatoxin – a family of dangerous toxins found on food crops.

NRI has won an extensive number of prestigious grants from organisations such as the Gates Foundation, McKnight, Worldfish, and BBSRC (Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council) to name a few. One of our Gates funded projects is the African Cassava

Whitefly Project (ACWP). The purpose of this project is to understand the cause(s) of superabundant African cassava-whitefly populations in East Africa. Cassava is a root crop, a good source of nutrients, high in calories, is tolerant of drought and important food security crop, and staple ingredient of many diets worldwide, especially in Africa. Since the 1990s, there has been an unprecedented increase in African cassava-whitefly (ACW), Latin name *Bemisia tabaci*, in the cassava growing regions of East & Central Africa. These whiteflies are responsible for transferring the plant viruses that have caused on-going and devastating pandemics - Cassava Mosaic Disease (CMD) and Cassava Brown Streak Disease (CBSD).

It is estimated the resulting crop losses in nine East and Central African countries are as high as 47% and the areas affected are continuing to expand, resulting in hunger, recurrent famines, and annual losses of more than US\$1.25 billion. The long-term vision of the project is to use the new knowledge discovered on the project to provide durable whitefly control in the future.



[Left: Prof Maruthi Gowda, from NRI/Middle: Dr Zuberi, from TARI/Right: an infected cassava leaf]

NRI's work is world renowned and prizewinning. Our awards include three Queen's Anniversary Prizes for Further and Higher Education, a Times Higher Award for International Collaboration in 2014, and the Guardian University Award for Research Impact in 2015. NRI's most recent Queen's Anniversary Prize, in 2019, was awarded in recognition of our applied research into pests and their sustainable management.



[L to R: Lord Paul Boateng, Professor Andrew Westby (NRI),
UoG Vice Chancellor Jane Harrington]

Another significant achievement for NRI has been our development of a portfolio of our successful MSc programmes reflecting the Institute's core areas of expertise. Recently we have developed a new Climate Change BSc, which is one of a kind in the south-east of England, and where students can be taught by academics with extensive experience of working directly with climate vulnerable populations globally.

I have been part of NRI for 31 years and love my job, but it is not just the job that I love. I also love the people I work with. Being part of NRI is an absolute privilege and I am often in awe of the work my colleagues do. Throughout my time at NRI my role has changed several times however in the last 2-3 years I have had the opportunity to see first-hand the work NRI scientists carry out overseas and how vital this is to the vulnerable communities they support. I have been fortunate enough to have travelled to Ghana, Benin, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Kenya and Rwanda and each trip has been rewarding and taught me something new.



[Ladies peeling Cassava in
a Benin village]



[Women answering questions
by proj. team]

I'll close this piece with one of my favourite images (below) from a trip I took to Benin in early 2018. I spent most of the day walking around a small village on the Benin/Nigeria border in 38c (admittedly with no hat or sunscreen.....I have learnt my lesson!).

The research team were there to interview the villagers about cassava and other important root crops in their diet. I was followed everywhere by this group of children. They were fascinated with my height (I'm 6'4"), my watch, my phone, and a magic trick I used to show my niece! It was at that point I realised



the work NRI is involved in will hopefully improve life for this group of children, and possibly many generations to come. To be a part of an organisation working in international development, and with dedicated professionals who want to improve life for those less fortunate, is a special thing - and for that I am grateful every single day.

Caroline – NRI Marketing and Events Manager & STAART Ally

What makes Greenwich special is the support



When we gave Zoe Robinson a route to continue her studies, she decided to give back by committing to help students with a variety of additional needs.

As a mum of an 11-year-old autistic son and occasional carer of her parents, Human Nutritionist Zoe Robinson has a lot to juggle.

She began a degree with the Open University but decided on a change and applied to join Greenwich through Clearing at our Medway Campus, which is close to home.

As a mature student, Zoe expected to keep a low profile and complete her degree, but she was taken aback by the diversity of the student body and soon got involved in the supportive culture at the university.

Despite an already formidable list of responsibilities, Zoe became an ambassador for STAART, our scheme to support disabled and diverse students, and has joined the team to support care leavers.

“I started off as a student ambassador – working at Open Days, graduation ceremonies, and the university’s first Pint of Science festival,” she explains.

“Then I took extra training to become a STAART ambassador. I wanted to show people that think they’re too old or from the wrong background, or those with a disability, mental health condition or learning difficulty, that university is an option for anyone who’s willing to work hard.”

Starting her final year in 2020, Zoe also joined the Care Leavers team, which offers support for care leavers and care experienced students to join and succeed at the university.

Support during lockdown

Zoe is open about her struggles with mental health and has called upon support from classmates and the university’s services to keep everything on track during lockdown. “My year group is quite small, and we’ve all become close and would socialise outside of lectures,” she says.

“It’s been hard during Covid, as studying can feel quite lonely. But the university has set up all students with Microsoft Teams and we’ve had lots of video calls to keep each other on track. I’m lucky that I have a supportive partner and parents who help to entertain my son when I’m buried in assignments or cramming for exams,” she adds.

Zoe has used the university’s wellbeing and counselling services to help her continue with her studies. She has also found allies from within the same communities she supports.



“I think what makes Greenwich special is the support available to us,” she says.

“My personal tutor, Dr Susan Force, has been supportive and helpful throughout my studies. She has checked up on me regularly via online meetings, and other members of the nutrition staff have supported me when needed”.

“I’ve also received support from STAART and Dr Melanie Thorley. As well as the online social groups, we’ve also arranged video calls and had online quizzes, a virtual graduation and birthday celebrations.

“One of the main activities I am involved in is working as Melanie’s deputy for the SEND Planning Partnership. This partnership enables me to work with staff and students in schools, colleges and universities in Kent and Medway.”

“I’ve made a lot of friends through STAART and I credit the group and Melanie for how well I’ve managed to juggle study, life, care responsibilities and work.”

“I couldn’t have got through it without them.”

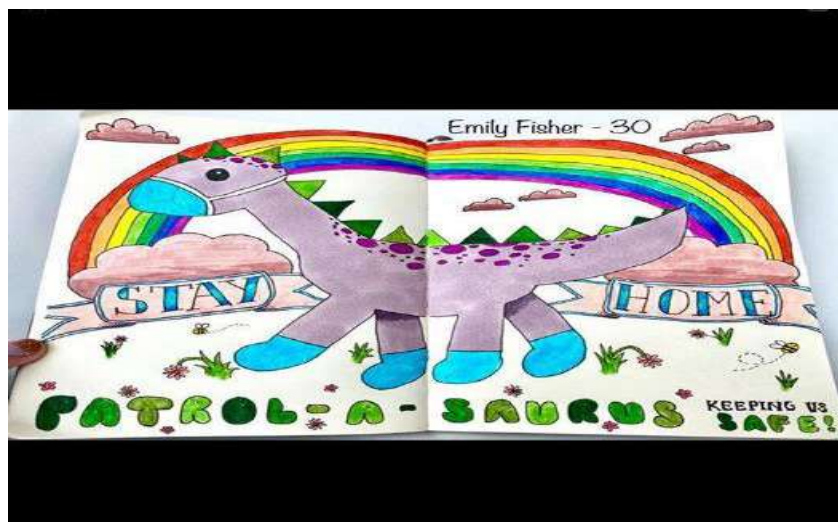
UoG Content Team

The 3rd STAART ART competition

As some of you already know, we introduced our first prize STAART ART in March 2020.

We knew that many people would benefit from a distraction from the lockdown as many people were not able to go to school, college, university and/or work. Plus, at STAART, we know that creativity is good for our mental health wellbeing.

Our first prize competition was in March 2020 – draw a dinosaur. There were two joint winners:



Our 2nd prize competition was Cats & Dogs. All of the cats and dogs used templated from the especially created STAART Colouring Books. The winner was Kaitlynne, aged 13:



This April (1st to 30th) we are providing our **third** prize STAART ART competition. This time the competition is to draw, paint, create and/or embellish an Easter Egg. You can make your eggs manually or use a computer, whichever suits you best.

We have had many different materials and artistic interpretations of dinosaurs, cats and dogs. We have had the usual paper and pen drawings; images created with software; collage; crayons; felt tip pens; make-up; even embroidery. Absolutely anybody, any age and any location can take part in this activity. The oldest entry was by someone aged 57, and the youngest was just 3 which shows these competitions are accessible at any age.

There is a first prize of a £25 Amazon voucher and two runner-up prizes of £10 Amazon voucher. The winners will be decided by a public vote and calculated by how many likes, emojis and shares the entrants receive. The three winning eggs will also be in the September 2021 newsletter. So, make your egg as colourful and as creative as you can! And remember to post them on our dedicated [STAART ART Facebook page](#).

Holly – STAART Ambassador 2nd Year Law student

STAART WhatsApp Groups

It is amazing to see that both STAART chats have been used regularly throughout term 2 and still offer a way for many members of STAART to communicate with each other.

Barely a day goes by where a conversation does not take place in the STAART group chat and it has been lovely to see members continuing to offer each other support and guidance, as well as having a friendly catch up and some laughs. Advice is always welcomed, and members do the best they can to help one another with both university and personal queries. Pets are still a popular topic of conversation with members sharing updates and pictures.

Some members of STAART are graduating this year which has also meant that we have been working on our final year projects, myself included, and some members have even kindly participated via survey links.

As we are currently still unable to get together in person, STAART social continues to promote our weekly virtual catch ups which take place through Teams. We have also started to host a monthly quiz with different members writing and hosting their own on a topic of their choice.

So far, we have had a general knowledge and environmental quiz and we are looking forward to the next couple on culture and geography. With the gradual easing of lockdown rules we also have trips to a nature reserve and a farm in the pipeline for late spring/summer.

This past year has been tough for a lot of people, but both groups have been fantastic and as we approach the end of term 2, and hopefully the easing of lockdown rules, we will be hoping to see many of you soon.

Shona – STAART Ambassador BSc Human Nutrition (Hons.)

Melanie 🐾

Amy 🍒

Eilis 😺

Leanne 🦊

Peter 🐱

Sam 🦉

Jenny 🍷

Sarah 🦒

Annie 🥰

Kieran 🍷

Megan 🧑

Usman 🦋

Shona 🏡

Becca 🧪

Georgia 🍷

Luke 🦁

Rebecca 🐱

Tori 🦁

Joyce 🌿

Melisa 🥜

Sophia 🦎

Miriam 🍌

Bradley 🦊

Gesiele 🦊

Holly 🦄

Brad 🥑

Hannah 🍷

Maryam 🧑

Richard 🐎

Tyra 🐟

Varsha 🐔

Patrick 🎮

Lily 🌻

Izzy 🦋

Cheryl 🦋

Abi 😊

Brydi 🐮

Kaitlyn 🌸

Aida 🙄

Ru 🐝

Vanessa 🦢

David 🧘

David 🌿

Boris 🐻

Caitlin 🎀

Mariya 😊

Amy 🐯

Dami 🚂

Kieran 🌈

Nathalie 🍕

Ryan 👉

Zoe 😊

João 🎮

Holly 🎮

Treavon 🚂

Louise 🙄

Bethany ✨

Dami: My University Experience

Hi there, I am Dami and I studied Business at the University of Greenwich between 2014 and 2017. I studied at the Greenwich campus but also I worked on the Avery Hill and Medway campuses. Being at this university was one of the best times of my life and I had a great experience at the university as a disabled student and the university really supported me during the time I was at Greenwich, and even after graduating. Can I just say that STAART is the best thing to have come out of this experience at Greenwich, there is no questions about it?

The university helped me loads when it came to the DSA or disabled student's allowance. There was support around me and assistance when it came to the process of applying, providing evidence, what support you get etc. I knew about STAART before I started at the university as I had met Dr. Melanie and some of the student ambassadors when I was in 6th form. After I became a STAART Ambassador, I went back to my old college and supported other blind and visually impaired students.

I also got assistance learning about the campus and finding out where everything is and learning about the students union. Anyways, let's skip a little to my main university experience as it was a lot better than I expected. Being able to cope with the workloads, assignments and lectures and students union was one of my worries and my concerns when I started but I have surprised myself and I have managed to keep myself organised and not panicking.

I love being part of the STAART community and being surrounded by friendly people who are always there encouraging you, supporting you and who are always happy to chat. I feel that even now, I still get loads of support from these people and it makes me feel better in myself and really increases my confidence. Being also part of the Students Union was a great and valuable experience. Learning what was being done to improve



student's experiences and to assist in so many events such as Fresher's week, gave me such an insight and gave me such inspiration to help improve student's experiences and get students involved in activities, societies and other events. My favourite part of being part of the SU was the Fresher's Fairs or Welcome Fair (as it is now called), they were wonderful events and the staff and other people I worked with were amazing with me and really supported me throughout that time, there was always good vibes and energy.

I want to share more but I think I will leave it here. I think being part of the Greenwich experience is life-changing and for me such an empowering experience and one I will always cherish and I thank everybody, especially the STAART community for the love and support and for giving me such a great group of friends and memories along the way. For new students who are starting, make use of every opportunity and don't be afraid to ask for support and help and have the best time at Greenwich.

Dami – STAART Graduate BA Business Studies

Toxic Positivity: It is OK not to be OK

I was actually intending to write a different article altogether for this edition of the newsletter. However, there have been a number of articles and research papers published in the last 12 months on the rise of toxic positivity. The simple explanation of what toxic positivity is:

It is OK not to be OK.

A more comprehensive description is the overgeneralisation of a happy, optimistic state that results in the denial, minimalization and invalidation of the authentic human emotional experience. In other words, toxic positivity is an unhelpful coping mechanism because the more we mask our feelings, the worse and more tired we will eventually feel.

There has been a notable increase in ‘positive thinking’ popularised by the author Rhonda Byrne in her bestseller “The Secret”. However, focussing only on the bright side of life can have a detrimental effect on both your physical and mental wellbeing. Experts in this area have suggested it is important to acknowledge sadness, fear and grief to enable us to heal.

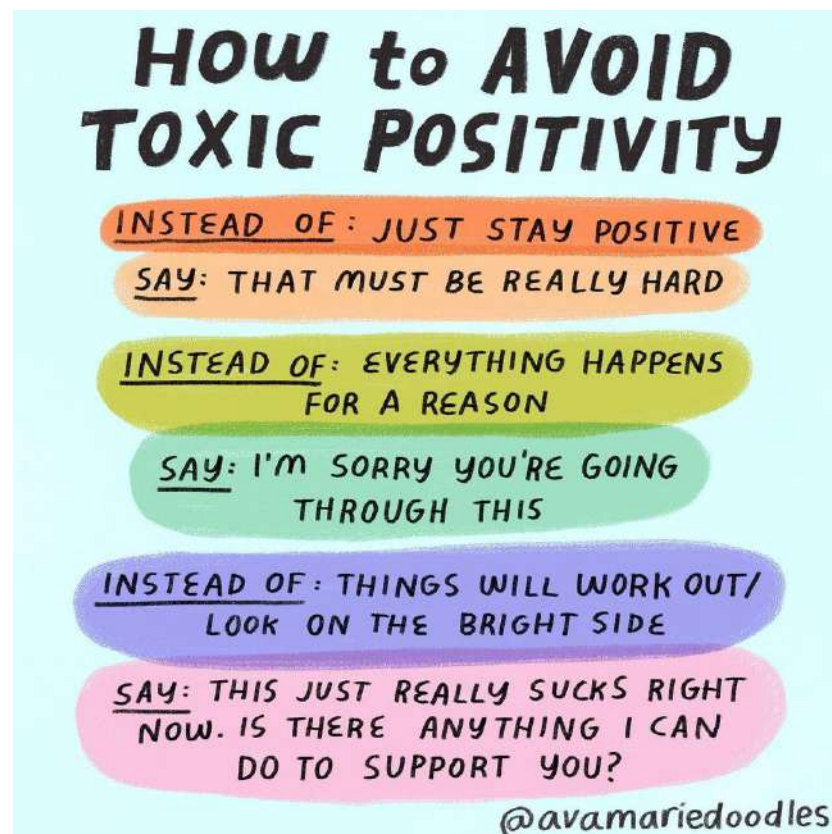
The pandemic and subsequent lockdowns have affected everybody. People have lost loved ones, jobs, accommodation, friends and numerous other important factors. People who have not experienced mental health conditions previously have faced living with anxiety and/or depression for the first time in their lives. Other people who already have anxiety and/or depression have found the lockdown has exacerbated these feelings.

Personally, myself (and my husband Stephen) have been very fortunate during the previous twelve months. Our jobs are secure, we can pay the mortgage and bills, we have not had to care for elderly relatives and/or had to cope with homeschooling whilst working. However, I have tried to be honest with my friends and colleagues. If I do have a particularly hard day, and someone asks how things are going, I try to be honest. BUT I do remind myself and others that the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns are temporary.

Signs of Toxic Positivity

- Hiding or masking your true feelings.
- Trying to 'get on with things'.
- Feeling guilty for feeling what you feel.
- Minimising other people's experiences with 'feel good' quotes or statements.
- Trying to give someone your perspective – do not say it good be worse.
- Chastising or shaming other people for expressing any emotion which is not regarded as positive.

How to avoid toxic positivity



Instead of saying everything happens for a reason, say I am sorry you are going through this.

Some useful resources:

[Psychologists say toxic positivity is on the rise – but what is it and why is it harmful? | The Independent](#)

[Ava Puckett on Instagram: “Some examples of how to support loved ones in need. 💞 It’s so hard to know what to say when you see someone going through something...”](#)

[Toxic Positivity: The Dark Side of Positive Vibes \(thepsychologygroup.com\)](#)

Dr. Melanie – STAART Manager and Sociology & Education Graduate.

Waiting for Inspiration

This painting is called "Waiting for Inspiration". I think that many of us find a sort of freedom in writing or painting. I tend to visualize my own paintings and then I tend to project myself in them in order to see the perspective or the way in which the main character interacts with the environment... to see if the character follows a certain logic of positioning or moving. I think the process is the same for writers especially during the world-building process. Using one's imagination you can be free in the world you create regardless of the circumstances.



The setting of this painting is a bit "vintage" with the wheelchair resembling an old wooden armchair with a metal framework to support the wheels because I wanted to imply progress through creativity like moving from old to new by using one's imagination. I imagined my character as being from a different time period when the wheelchairs were not something common, the armchair is something old and passed through generations, but it was given a new purpose in order to give the character the freedom of movement. So, my painting is about a writer that is waiting for the necessary spark in order to create and be free and move from old to new in an organic manner not discarding the old but giving it a new meaning in order to progress.

Dr. Marina – STAART Ally and Imagology Graduate

Barrier Free World

Hello, my name is Brad and last September, I bought a 3D printer to start a new hobby. I started printing dyslexic reading rulers as a way to pay off the printers and 7 months on I made it all the way to the finals of the Enterprise Challenge. 10 finalists were picked from a pool of over 100 ideas.

I started a little social enterprise, Barrier Free World, where I aimed to create products for disabled people at affordable prices. The idea was to combat 'disability tax'.



Thank you so much to everyone who has supported and voted for me and my idea. I can't wait to introduce more products, expand and grow. Hopefully, one day I can even be a household brand.

The University of Greenwich and STAART have been massive champions of the work I do and my ideas for so long. Thank you very much to everyone, I really appreciate your help and encouragement.

A special thank you to my mentor, Jon Sibson, who has been an integral part of the development of my business. Also, a massive thank you to the judges for their time and support, and all the Generator Team for the great event, well done.

Due to the overwhelming amount of support, I have had, I was also lucky enough to win the Social Enterprise prize of £2500 towards my business and expanding it.

Thank you to everyone for helping to create a barrier free world. Here is a link to my Etsy page: [Dyslexic Reading Ruler Must Have Reading Aid | Etsy.](#)

Brad – STAART Graduate and Biology PhD student

Calendar

April 2021

- 1st- 30th – National Pet Month
- 1st – 30th - Stress Awareness Month
- 2nd – World Autism Awareness Day
- 6th – Sexual Assault Awareness Month Day of Action
- 7th – World Health Day
- 9th – National Day of Silence
- 20th – 25th World Immunisation Week
- 20th – 26th – Orchid Male Cancer Awareness Week
- 22nd – National Earth Day
- 30th – National Sarcoidosis Day

May 2021

- 1st – 31st – Maternal Mental Health Month
- 2nd – World Asthma Day
- 4th – 9th – Viral Meningitis Awareness Week
- 4th – 9th – Deaf Awareness Week
- 4th – 9th – Anaphylaxis Awareness Week
- 6th – World Mental Health Day
- 12th – World Fibromyalgia Awareness Day
- 12th – International Nurses Day
- 12th – ME Awareness Day
- 21st – World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development
- 24th – 30th – National Epilepsy Week
- 30th – World Multiple Sclerosis Day

Editors: Brydi Edwards, Melanie Thorley

STAART - Support through *AccessAbility retention and transition

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