Warsaw Conference
a great success

Late last year Chief Executive, Janet Gurney, was invited to speak about Intensive Interaction at a conference in Warsaw, for Synapsis - a not-for-profit organisation who provide services and support for people with autism throughout Poland.

“Talking about Intensive Interaction and the wonderful changes it can help people make to their lives, is one of the joys of my life” she said “But I usually do it in relatively small groups and with people who share the same language as me – not for 700 professionals and families from all over Poland! So I have to admit that my knees were a bit wobbly when I took to the stage.”

Read more from Janet on Page 3
Being Playful  by Janice Murrells

“‘Playing’ or being playful with our Service Users is possibly one of the most misunderstood, yet arguably most beneficial, aspects of our time during sessions. Sometimes play is seen as something age-inappropriate, has no purpose or benefits.

There are many theories about the benefits of play for adults and there is a lot of evidence to support these theories. In this article I want to focus on a small part of the practical aspects of how we use play at Us in a Bus, what it looks like and how, for us, it’s an integral part of Intensive Interaction.

Being playful can be fun and energetic (although not always). We visit a 50 year old lady called Elizabeth once a week. Elizabeth uses a wheelchair, has a profound learning difficulty and has good hearing and eyesight. She makes some gentle high-pitched sounds, which are louder when she is interested, excited or happy. She also raises her arms in the air when she makes these sounds.

When we were first getting to know Elizabeth she would often wheel herself away from us, turning her wheelchair away and heading out of the room. We would creep around beside her as if we were being ‘sneaky’ and reflect her facial expression in ours; sometimes it was a smile, sometimes a cheeky sideways glance and sometimes a frown. If it was a frown we would take that as a sign that she had had enough and was ready to leave. If it was a smile or a sideways glance then we would continue with the game. My colleague and I might take it in turns to creep in front of her and repeat her sound. We would deliberately exaggerate our movements and facial expressions and, depending on her response increase the volume and intensity of our sounds. At times this game might progress into us moving quickly around the room, hiding from Elizabeth and then re-appearing. On other occasions the game might take a calmer direction with us crouching next to Elizabeth, whispering and popping our faces in and out of her line of sight. Which direction the game took would depend on Elizabeth’s responses. If she was lively and excited, so were we. If not we’d mirror that mood too.

The playful element is about not needing to be too serious when we are mirroring someone’s behaviour and echoing their sounds (using Intensive Interaction). We can smile and have fun too and add our own personalities to the way in which we celebrate someone’s actions. It is important to act on how we like to have fun whilst keeping the focus on the person we are with. This way of being can be lost by the time we get to adulthood - being playful can be deemed as silly in the adult world, or being playful is expressed verbally, using jokes, irony and sarcasm. Word play has no meaning to someone who doesn’t use words to communicate, instead we use their language of sounds, facial expressions and body movements. Simply sharing a joke with someone using their language is something we can all appreciate; the fun is mutual, never at anyone’s expense, the benefits are (amongst many), feeling relaxed, happy, connected and valued.”

Training Workshops Available

Us in a Bus currently offers two workshops, which are appropriate for a range of professionals and family carers:

- An Introduction to Intensive Interaction
- Next Steps in Intensive Interaction

The Workshops are for individuals or teams supporting people who have profound learning disabilities and/or complex needs. Workshops are delivered by Janet Gurney who has over 20 years of experience in this field. They can be delivered either in-house, tailored to meet the needs of individual teams, or on a “open to all” basis. For more information please contact Janet on 01737 764774.
Warsaw Conference
Continued from Page 1

“...But the worth and excitement of Intensive Interaction speaks for itself – and as usual, it took me with it. Lots of people wanted to talk afterwards - about their son, a pupil, how they could use this approach at their school - and some have contacted me since I got home. What I hope is that there are little pockets of excitement somewhere in Poland where people are exploring the pleasure of connection and communication in ways they may not have tried before.

Apart from the speech at the Conference, Dave Hewett, Intensive Interaction Consultant, and I were interviewed for Radio Polski (pictured above). We also had a frosty evening tour of old Warsaw, we experienced more vodka than was good for us, we sampled a variety of Polish dumplings and we were wrapped in welcome and care by Synapsis.

Synapsis describe their services as probably being 30 years behind where we are in the UK. In some respects I’m sure they are selling themselves short – they are a dedicated set of people doing creative and very positive work with young people with autism.

But what became apparent in some of the conversations I had during my stay is that services for adults with profound learning disabilities/complex needs (the people that Us in a Bus work with here) have a long way to go – with many people living in big, long-stay facilities, without expectations of life being better.

This got me thinking about how far we have come ourselves in the UK over the last 30 years, and how vital it is not to let that slip in the face of current economic pressures. Ensuring that people have the continuing opportunity, throughout life, to expand and develop the way they are able to express themselves, to learn more and more about communications, is absolutely vital to the quality of their lives. It’s no good being entertained or occupied or stimulated if you have no sense of how you can opt out or control that input.

Our sense of ourselves and our own influence on our worlds is not the ‘icing on the cake’ – it’s the bread of life. Us in a Bus is committed to helping people explore that – and I know that there are people in Poland doing the same.”

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Pictured from left: Dave Hewett,
Networking at the Bus Stop

Social networking is something that most young people take for granted, but to the people that Us in a Bus supports it is really difficult to access. The Bus Stop was piloted in 2012 and due to its success it continued in 2013 and now into 2014.

Steve Parker, Senior Practitioner at Us in a Bus, helps to run The Bus Stop and he tells us a bit more about the sessions.

“Five people are currently attending The Bus Stop in Redhill alongside four Interaction Practitioners. We always start with our familiar ‘hello’ song. This helps to set the scene and signifies the beginning of the session.

We use Intensive Interaction as our main way of engaging. It’s a way of being with people that puts them firmly in control, where their language is valued and celebrated. It’s a vocal group of people and we take advantage of this. Mirroring and using these vocalisations enthusiastically and with purpose in our exchanges supports and encourages people’s involvement, increases confidence and can motivate further interest and sociability.

In our Bus Stop sessions we are seeking to maximise this sociability. We’re not just focusing on voices though; in one of our sessions our linking voice activity developed into a really connected ‘passing’ game. One of the people had responded with a smile as we rolled our large soft ball towards him, followed by a kick at the ball. This then drew interest from the others and so we took the opportunity to continue the roll onto someone else. The next person took hold of the ball and threw it and we cheered in celebration and passed it on again. This continued for about 15 minutes. As time went on the group got more involved and became more aware of the influence they were having on each other. This opened up the opportunity to vary our activity using a large parachute. Again, we let the direction of this be led by the people involved and in no time a space was created for people to explore this shared sensory experience.

This was a lively session, full of laughter and we ended with our familiar ‘goodbye’ song signifying the end of the Bus Stop, for today.

We’re already looking forward to next week when the session will take on new forms and look different. It will also have those elements of familiarity, turn-taking and inclusiveness, creating a safe space to try new things with other people.

And finally I would like to share a lovely quote we received from a mother whose son attended The Bus Stop. I think you’ll agree it speaks for itself.

“Thank you Us in a Bus. Your input has saved my son’s life, has given confidence back to his staff and restored my hope of my son enjoying his life like everybody else”
Meet the People behind Us in a Bus

In this first edition of Linking Lives we talk to Janice Murrells, Senior Practitioner for the last 10 years, to find out a bit more about what makes her ‘tick’.

Q How long have you worked for Us in a Bus? A I joined Us in a Bus in 1995 - 18 years ago! Before that I ran Art and Music sessions for a group of care homes, as well as being a support worker. I have learned so much in the time I’ve been at Us in a Bus. It’s pretty hard work, but we’re a great team!

Q What’s been your most memorable moment at Us in a Bus? A There are really so many that it’s hard to pick just one, so here’s a few; ‘JC’ catching bubbles; ‘SG’ saying “I like you”, but without the full context it’s perhaps difficult to appreciate how magical these moments actually were. Then there was the time I had to push the old midi van out of the mud – on my own!

Q What’s been your biggest achievement in life? A Other than having my lovely children, it’s achieving my 2nd Dan Black Belt in Taekwondo and teaching my own classes.

Q What’s your favourite film? A The Matrix Trilogy, (it’s all Taekwondo – you know!!)

Q What’s your favourite food? A Too many to mention: Bacon Sandwiches, Camembert, Spaghetti Bolognaise... (It’d be easier to answer which food I don’t like!!)

Q If you were stranded on a desert island what two things would you most like to have with you? A Assuming it can’t be my family and friends, it would have to be a music player of some description and something to draw or paint with.

Q Are there any special places you would still like to visit? A Yes there are lots - The Northern Lights, The Grand Canyon and India, to name but three.

Weather or not?

Driving in heavy rain and flooding can be hazardous. Here are some important do’s and don’ts:

- Use dipped headlights so that other drivers can see you
- Reduce your speed and leave more space between you and the vehicle in front to account for greater stopping distances
- If you break down in torrential rain keep the bonnet closed to avoid the electrical system getting soaked
- Driving too fast through standing water could lead to tyres losing contact with the road. If your steering feels light you could be aquaplaning. To regain control, ease off the accelerator, do not brake and allow your speed to reduce until you gain full control
- Be considerate to other road users and try not to spray pedestrians and cyclists as you drive through water!
- Do not attempt to drive through water if you are unsure of the depth – the edge of the kerb is a good indicator
- Drive steadily and slowly through standing water so as not to create a bow wave in front of the vehicle and allow oncoming traffic to pass first - make sure you have a clear route ahead so you do not have to stop in standing water
Spotlight on Fundraising

Chloe’s a Shining Example

Walking the strenuous 7km up and down Box Hill, with its many steps, steep uneven terrain and battling all sorts of weather, would be hard enough, but 14 year old Chloe Widley from Crawley had the added complication of being blindfolded! Guided by her Grandfather, Ian Johnson, Chloe raised an amazing £160 for Us in a Bus.

Chloe became connected with Us in a Bus when she did a week’s work experience at the Redhill offices in June last year. Her interest in learning more about people with disabilities stems from her Mum who works at SeeAbility, one of the organisations that Us in a Bus works with.

Thank you Chloe!!
The Us in a Bus Team were delighted to welcome Chloe and her mum, Michaela, to their offices when they handed over her very hard-earned, and much valued, money!

Base Connections raise £500 and donate artwork!

During 2013 Base Connections, a telemarketing company based in Woking, selected Us in a Bus as their charity of the year. They donated £1 for every appointment set for their clients and this month Renée Canter, Business Development Manager and Anne Laney, Interaction Practitioner from Us in a Bus were delighted to visit them to receive a cheque for £500.

“The similarities between the brand values of Base Connections and Us in a Bus hit me straight away - connection and communication. And we were absolutely thrilled that as well as raising £500 for us they also donated the artwork, pictured right. The title of this piece is ‘Cutting through the complexities of communication – The Need to Connect’. I think you will agree, this is perfect for Us in a Bus and will hang proudly in our offices” said Renée.

This artwork is one of ten pieces created by Hannah Snider-Muldoon for Base Connections.

Pictured font row from right, Renée and Anne with the Base Connections team
Tiffin Boys Choir to perform Duruflé Requiem

In partnership with the Brandenburg Choral Festival 2014, London’s biggest and broadest annual choral celebration, the Tiffin Boys’ Choir will perform Duruflé’s Requiem on 30 March to raise funds for Us in a Bus. The event, which will be conducted by Simon Toyne, will start at 4pm at St Clement Danes, The Strand, London WC2R 1DH.

Janet Gurney, Chief Executive of Us in a Bus thinks this will be a memorable event, “I am delighted that the Tiffin Boys’ Choir will perform Duruflé’s Requiem and other choral favourites in the fabulous setting of St Clement Danes. This will be a real Mothering Sunday treat and will also give much valued support to our charity.”

Tickets cost £18 for adults and £5 for children and are available by telephoning Us in a Bus on 01737 764774 or apply by email info@usinabus.org.uk

Half of the proceeds of the ticket sales will go directly to Us in a Bus to support the services we provide for people who have profound learning disabilities and/or complex needs.

Five Running 4 The Bus

On 6 April five runners will be competing with over 18,000 other runners to raise money for Us in a Bus. With a target of raising £2,000, Dudley Burrell, John Gunn, Abigail Tee and Carys Rees will be joining Rich Myles, an Interactive Practitioner at Us in a Bus, to run the 26 mile road race.

Now in it’s fifth year, the Brighton Marathon route takes in some of the sights of central Brighton before heading East towards Rottingdean. The race then heads West out to and around Hove, before returning on the seafront and finishing on Madeira Drive, close to Brighton Pier, where an Us in a Bus welcoming committee will congratulate them at the finish line.

Training is going well and you can read more about it through their blog - Run4theBus.wordpress.com - where you can also access their individual fundraising pages.

Go on, give them your support!
Us in a Bus benefit through online shopping

We would like to say a big ‘Thank You’ to everyone who is using TheGivingMachine to shop online. Together we raised £238 in 2013 from people shopping on the Internet and choosing to support Us in a Bus. We have just received a payment of £60 from The Giving Machine and it didn’t cost anyone a penny! If you would like to get involved, visit www.TheGivingMachine.co.uk.

Do you own a vehicle that you want to sell or get rid of?

Giveacar raises money for UK charities by scrapping and selling old cars. They provide a nationwide FREE service which:
- Arranges the collection of the vehicle from your home
- Depending on its age and condition, recycles it at an authorised facility or sends it to auction

Scrap donations raise about £100 for the charity (depending on the price of metal) while auction cars can raise much more.

To arrange donation of a car, visit www.giveacar.co.uk or call 020 7736 4242, quoting US IN A BUS as your preferred charity.

Thank you Sutton & East Surrey Water!

Two service user families were each selected to receive a hamper donated to Us in a Bus by Sutton & East Surrey Water just before Christmas. Thank you to everyone at Sutton & East Surrey Water, they were most gratefully received!

And finally ..... can you help?

Us in a Bus search for new office space

The lease on Us in the Bus’ current office space at the RNIB site in Redhill comes to an end soon so we are looking for other lease opportunities in the Redhill or Reigate area, ideally for a minimum of 3 years.

We are only a small team of 14 so would be looking for office space between 150 – 250 square metres, with secure overnight parking for 2 or 3 small vans and parking for our staff during the day.