Famous Five raise over £2,000 at Brighton Marathon

After months of intensive training five Us in a Bus runners set off from Preston Park, Brighton, on Sunday 6 April amidst the buzz and excitement of over 18,000 competitors running the 26 mile Brighton Marathon road race.

Apart from Rich Myles, an Interactive Practitioner at Us in a Bus, Dudley Burrell, John Gunn, Abigail Tee and Carys Rees were recruited through newspaper and on-line advertisements to run for Us in a Bus.

Turn to page 10 for more pictures and to read more.

2014 Training Opportunities

Janet Gurney, Chief Executive of Us in a Bus, offers two day-long Intensive Interaction Workshops.

The first is an Introduction to Intensive Interaction and is for anyone who wishes to relate more closely with people who have profound learning disabilities, including family carers, residential and day services managers and staff teams, care managers and advocates. 2014 workshop dates still available are 8 and 15 September and 26 November.

The second is a Next Steps workshop and is for anyone who has already attended Janet’s Introduction to Intensive Interaction workshop. During it you will reflect on your practice of Intensive Interaction and explore how to extend the connections you've built with people who have profound learning disabilities. 2014 workshop date still available is 13 October.

Don’t delay, contact us today to book your place – tel: 01737 764774 or email: admin@usinabus.org.uk


Being a Trustee has been most rewarding

Catherine Redman is a Trustee for Us in a Bus and she tells us a bit more about what it means to her.

“I was asked how I felt about being a Trustee for Us in a Bus. I can say that I’m proud to be associated with the organisation. I really care about the work done by our professional staff at Us in a Bus in bringing communication to our service users, thereby enabling new experiences in their lives. At the beginning of every Trustee meeting we hear a “Snapshot of Session” from a member of staff that reminds us of the purpose of our organisation and the dedicated work done by the Interaction Practitioners. These reports are often very inspiring and moving too.

In my role as a Trustee, I am constantly reminded about how hard life is for people with profound learning disabilities, and am humbled by the huge effort they have to make to do the everyday things we take for granted. For anyone who would like to understand some of the complexities of life for such people, I would recommend reading the book “Grace Williams says it Loud” by Emma Henderson. The author’s sister was placed in an institution as a young girl and it is a fictionalised account of her life and struggles.

While serving as a trustee I’ve made some good friends and enjoy the company of the very committed staff. The fact that there is a good working relationship between trustees and staff makes the role of trustee that much more satisfying. I’ve also had a lot of fun, as there is a wonderful lightheartedness in the very professional approach to the work of Us in a Bus.

We are looking for new trustees now. I believe that a Trustee needs to care about Us in a Bus and have a sense of commitment to the objectives of the organisation. It is crucial to have the willingness to learn about the issues involved in running a charity, especially in the current economic climate. We are guided in our work by a Code of Conduct, which underpins the philosophy of how Us in a Bus works.

We need and welcome people from all walks of life. We value a wide range of experience and skills. This variety of skills brings a useful broad spectrum to the Board. My own experiences have been gained mostly in the caring professions. I have had various roles from Housemother in a children’s home, through several posts as a Social Worker in different areas of specialisation and a spell as a Speech and Language Therapy Assistant in a school for children with severe learning disabilities. My latest job before retiring was as a reflexologist, which I enjoyed immensely, literally being very ‘hands on’ and being there for people.

I first made contact with Us in a Bus in my role as a Social Worker. I was responsible for helping adults with profound learning disabilities move out from large institutional accommodation into homes within local neighbourhoods. I appreciated how the relationships that had already formed between my clients and the Us in a Bus practitioners gave my clients a sense of stability amidst all the change.

There are lots of benefits to be gained from being a trustee, but I suppose the greatest for me is knowing that I am helping to maintain this valuable service for our service users and that I am contributing to society in a small way.

About Catherine

Catherine belongs to a very close extended family, which means everything to her. Her three daughters and their families all live in the same town. Having six grandchildren aged six and under living close by means her family life is very busy at the moment, quite tiring, but great fun. When all the little ones visit at once it immediately feels like a party!

When she has some spare time, Catherine enjoys needlework, reading, watching cricket, meeting friends, celebrating birthdays and playing with her grandchildren. She also loves walking, especially along a coastal path on a windy day! Asked what her greatest achievement was, she decided it was learning to wink (if rather badly). It came in very useful many years ago when, as a teenager, she met her husband by playing a winking game at their Youth Club and winking at him... The rest is history!
The important role our Trustees play

As a registered Charity, Us in a Bus is required to have a Board of Trustees to ensure we comply with our objectives and charity regulations. But more than that, we use our Trustees as a sounding board, critical friends and to utilise their specific skills and knowledge.

The day to day running of the organisation is the responsibility of the Chief Executive and the Management Team, but they provide regular reports to the Trustees to allow them to best monitor performance, provide clear strategic direction and also to protect the good name and values of Us in a Bus. Our Trustees question, probe, advise and if required challenge the Management Team to ensure the best outcome for the organisation.

Every Trustee brings something different to Us in a Bus, be it skills, knowledge and/or experience. Such expertise might be offered by providing comments on draft documents, helping staff to focus on key issues, sharing the experience of having a family member who has profound learning difficulties, alerting staff to new policy and practice developments in their field or providing a business perspective on decisions. Being a Trustee of Us in a Bus is a serious, but, we hope, a rewarding job.

We are currently looking to recruit new Trustees to the Board. If you are interested in finding out more please contact the office for an Information Pack at admin@usinabus.org.uk

Tropical FUN at the Staff Summer Party

The Us in a Bus Team welcomed Trustees, Sessional Workers and their families to the annual Summer Party which had the theme ‘all things summery’.

The team decorated the hall with home-made bunting and flowers and everyone got in the spirit by donning flip flops, summer hats and tropical shirts. “It’s a great opportunity for us all to relax and celebrate working together” Janet Gurney our Chief Executive said after picking Russia in the World Cup Sweepstake!

Music was provided by Russell, our resident DJ, whilst Sasha, one of our Sessional Workers, taught a few of us some samba steps. It’s also great to be able to invite our families along to recognise the valuable support they give to us.
Training Weeks - having ‘Time Out’ is Vital

by Janice Murrells, Senior Practitioner

Four times a year the Us in a Bus staff team pack away their ‘kit boxes’ to have a week out of sessions. While this might sound like a ‘nice break’ these weeks are usually jam-packed with activities.

Training weeks are the only time when the whole staff team get together, so we always have our staff meetings at this time, as well as any in-house or external training. We have become surprisingly efficient with our staff meetings despite being a team of 15 enthusiastic people! Most of our training is done in-house these days - pretty much like everyone we’re having to cut back on our expenses. Training is usually led by Janet, our Chief Executive, or by our Senior Practitioners. During the last training week we looked in detail at Hyper-sensitivity and Sensory overload.

Although we call them ‘training’ weeks, the bulk of the week is taken up with the Interaction Practitioners evaluating and planning their sessions. This is a vital way of maintaining a high standard of work that is service user led. We use a process called S.N.A.P., a format originally developed by Graham Firth from the Intensive Interaction Institute and Leeds PCT, which we’ve tweaked slightly to best fit our ways of working. S.N.A.P. stands for Strength and Needs, Analysis and Planning, and we make a plan for every single service user we visit (this is over 200 people).

Vocalisations, movements, breathing

The S.N.A.P.’s involve a review of the careful observations that we make during each sessions, reviewing the aims we have for each Service User and discussing what we believe to be their Strengths and Needs.

Service users’ Strengths in this context are almost anything the service user does that could be an opportunity for connection, communication and engagement. The ‘anything’ could be vocalisations, movements, breathing or even changes in skin colour...!

The Needs are the areas we believe might be the most useful to focus on. These could stay the same over long periods of time, or they may change with some regularity. It really depends on whether or not the service user has changed and if we’re achieving our aims.

With this level of detail going into our planning for each service user it does take quite a long time, but we feel very strongly that it’s well worth it to ensure that we’re giving our service users everything we possibly can!

However, we don’t complete a S.N.A.P. for every service user during every training week, but our aim is to review each person at least once a year.

Training weeks are also a time where we do our extended ‘un-picking’ meetings and you can read all about what these are on page 7.

As you will realise, training weeks are a busy and vital part of how we provide our sessions and I haven’t even touched on the many reports that are written and risk assessments that are completed as well.

I hope this article gives some insight into what happens when the Interaction Practitioners are not in sessions.

The Us in a Bus Team during the recent Training Week
How often, I wonder, are we in a situation in our work when it feels as if there is a barrier between us and the person we are trying to engage with? We are not sure if there is anything happening. Are our attempts to connect noticed? Do our responses to someone’s breathing, for instance, break through into the other person’s world? And what if our attempts to connect appear to be rejected? Do we retreat to the safety of believing we are respecting someone’s communication and stop trying?

These are all constant thoughts being processed by an Us in a Bus Practitioner as we continually seek to engage with those we spend time with.

The premise for our work, in all cases, is to create an environment and relationship within which we can explore how someone can experience the pleasure of being sociable and reinforce their feelings of “I’m good to be with”. This may look very different from how you and I experience sociability and always initially relies on us sharing something they are familiar with. The parallel for us is that most of our social experiences share something: a love of music for instance; sharing conversation or perhaps a physical interest such as dancing or sport.

There may be several factors which determine how quickly someone responds to our attempts to connect. They may take longer to process information and therefore need a greater amount of time to react. They may have limited comprehension, which means repeated attempts to engage are needed for them to notice. They may have become used to their responses not being noticed and therefore stopped responding. It is likely that there is also an element of uncertainty for them. What’s happening? I might not like this? This is new?

We may not know which of these is relevant for the people we see and we can only hold these thoughts in our minds and retain our empathy with just how potentially frightening it could be to move out of their inner world into a more sociable one.

We know and understand the rewards and pleasure of human connection, but it sometimes requires a huge amount of courage and trust for the people we work with to make the leap to experience it.

Ben is a young man who has been known to Us in a Bus for about a year. A generally quiet person, who kept his head hanging down, he initially often appeared to be asleep during our time with him and although our feeling was that he was aware of us it was not clear if this was the case.
Careful observation showed that there were very subtle responses when we used intensive interaction techniques with Ben. We spend long periods of time breathing with him and he began to vary his breath, occasionally puffing out much more distinctly. We mirrored this by gently puffing on his hand. Was that a hint of a smile?

Gradually, over the coming months we extended our interactions around Ben’s breathing to include much bigger puffs on his hand, puffs of air or gentle blowing on his neck and cheek, firm downwards strokes from his shoulder to hand saying “Ben” in response to his out breaths. The smiles became frequent, Ben lifted his head, he offered his hand. We celebrated every interaction, frequently telling him how brilliant he was and, little by little we began to see Ben’s confidence grow.

Ben now makes steady and prolonged eye contact and explores equipment in what seems a very intentional way, especially musical instruments. He reaches for our keyboard and plays it in a variety of ways with his hands. He has started to communicate clear choices about which sound setting he wants on the keyboard by moving our hands to the buttons and “flapping” towards them.

We even heard Ben’s voice for an extended period of time during one session, which we understand is a rare treat. We feel that Ben recognises and anticipates his time with us and on one of our most recent visits we were thrilled to hear that when his support staff had prepared him for our visit he had seemed to get really excited. He seemed to confirm this by offering us both a hug when we arrived and this has become a regular part of his greeting (see picture left of Ben greeting Interaction Practitioner, Nicky Bracey).

When we first spent time with Ben we wondered all the things mentioned at the beginning of this article, and we analysed every response, however small; minutely.

We wondered if we imagined the slight crinkle of his eye and twitch of his mouth and we experienced the slightly underwhelming realisation that this was going to require our maximum creativity, focus and energy. But, persevere we did, even when Ben sometimes seemed to be rejecting us (by not responding) and when we could have taken the message he appeared to be giving of “I’m not interested” to be his final word.

Consequently, we feel like we are at the beginning of a fulfilling, positive and exciting social relationship with Ben and believe his response to us may mean he thinks that too! What a wonderful place to be!

So, there are reasons for the perceived barrier but remember........

‘The brick walls are there for a reason. The brick walls are not there to keep us out. The brick walls are there to give us a chance to show how badly we want something’

(Randy Pausch - The Last Lecture)
The New Jumper  by Janet Gurney, Chief Executive

Words like ‘quality’ and ‘standards’ are very familiar to all of us involved in supporting people – and so they should be! But sometimes the words can seem a bit empty, or it can be difficult to work out how to translate them into everyday practice. Keeping our practice of Intensive Interaction as sharp and effective as possible is at the heart of the quality of Us in a Bus’s work and one of the ways we have developed to make sure this happens is what we call our ‘Un-picking meetings’.

I remember helping my grandmother unpick hand-knitted jumpers that I had grown out of. I loved the process of unpicking, rewinding and then the excitement of watching the old wool, mixed with another colour from her wool-bag, turning into something new and fresh in front of my eyes as she got to work knitting my next jumper. Well, this is a bit like that – it helps us to make sure that our work is fresh and vibrant – and that it fits!

Here’s the structure that we use. You might want to tweak it to fit your own purpose – after all, it’s your new jumper, not ours – but you might like to have a go!

Before the ‘Un-picking’ Meeting:

- Each participant identifies an Intensive Interaction issue that they would like to unpick. It could be a barrier to interaction that they are experiencing, it could be a question about “what next” or it could be a really satisfying moment of connection

- The purpose is to explore possibilities, not to be judged, so it’s the responsibility of the whole group to create a supportive and enquiring atmosphere

- It usually helps to appoint a ‘chair’ for the meeting and it doesn’t have to be the same person each time. Their role is to keep the meeting on track, not to have to come up with solutions

At the start of the ‘Un-picking’ Meeting:

- Each participant has no more than 2 minutes to describe their core issue to the group (if it’s a big group, then it might be easier to do this in pairs and then feedback very briefly to the group). Everyone else listens without comment at this stage

- The group then decides whose issue is going to be unpicked. Interestingly, whatever the issue that is chosen, it always seems to have some relevance to everyone in the group, so don’t worry that you might choose the ‘wrong’ one

Left: Janet leads an ‘Un-picking’ Meeting during the recent Us in a Bus Training Week

Continued on Page 8
During the ‘Un-picking’ Meeting:

1. **Experience - a specific event**
   It really helps to be specific, instead of general. Rather than “Whenever I try to be with Tom, he’s not interested” try “This morning, in the dining room when I sat by Tom, he looked away and covered his eyes”. Be detailed about what actually happened, the facts, rather than your interpretation (that comes next!). Did he make a sound when he turned away? What was his facial expression? Were there any other movements/actions that you noticed.

2. **Reflection - take yourself back to the moment; what did you think and what did you feel?**
   This is your interpretation, e.g. “I thought I was intruding”, together with your emotional response “I felt rejected and sad”. Beware! Our minds get a bit tricky here – we often say “I feel that...” when what we are describing is a thought, not an emotion. It could be that we feel more comfortable describing our thoughts rather than our feelings. But, it is really useful to remember that this is an interaction between two people and your emotional response plays a part in that interaction. (As a general rule, thoughts happen above the neck and feelings happen beneath it!)

3. **Making sense of the event - what would you do differently? What would you do the same?**
   This is the juicy bit! Before you get into a discussion, it helps to clarify what your purpose is, then you can check any decisions you make against that purpose. So for example, if you agree that your purpose is to help Tom feel more at ease with the proximity of others, any action you decide on needs to be compatible with that. It might be that you decide to do exactly the same – and the only thing you will do differently is change the way you think. For example, “I’ll still sit down near Tom, on a regular basis, not too close, and copy the little sounds he makes, but I will stop feeling rejected.”

4. **Testing it out - applying what you have learnt**
   When will you next have a chance to sit near Tom? How will you record what you are doing? Who will you share your reflections with?

After the ‘Un-picking’ Meeting:

- If you have the time to make quick notes of the meeting, that’s great. At the very least, agree a date for the next meeting.

![Kolb Cycle](image)
In this edition of *Linking Lives* we find out some interesting facts about Tiw Raegening, and get his views on life as an Interaction Practitioner at Us in a Bus.

**Q** How long have you worked for Us in a Bus?

**A** I started as a Sessional Worker in October 2005 and in June 2006, having gained more experience, I was offered a full time position as an Interaction Practitioner. My answer was to run for the hills, I mean graciously accept, of course!

**Q** What does an Interaction Practitioner do?

**A** We have four teams of two Practitioners who travel around Surrey and its borders offering up to four sessions a day, for up to five days a week. We also do something that’s not done enough of - Intensively interact! During the sessions we try to find ways to support people to experience the joy and fun of expressing themselves, responding and communicating socially. This can be explored with those we work with either on a 2:1 basis or, where appropriate, as part of a group.

**Q** What is the best thing about your job?

**A** Well there are in fact many great things. Going to see people who you have built a relationship with, usually around saying on many levels "you are good to be with". Going to see people who will let you know exactly what they think of you. Not quite knowing really what will happen in each session. But especially, going to the many homes where the people we work with are often genuinely pleased to see you and offer you the most fantastic and warm welcomes. Sadly, the worst part is hearing that they have passed away.

**Q** Did you always know you wanted to do this sort of job?

**A** When I was growing up I had no idea this job even existed, how many people had PMLD (Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities), where they lived, or what was possible. If I had known about it before, then yes it would have been a job I would have wanted to do. It appeals to something in me which is not only my sense of fun, but I can only describe it in the terms that drive me and they are honour, chivalry and doing right. For me it is a real privilege to visit the people I see, as I know it is to the many staff who support them daily.

**Q** What are your hobbies?

**A** I have far too many, but I will let you know a few! I have a strong interest in military history from the Roman invasions of Germany to modern times. Basically I like to understand the why, where, when and how did these things happen and sometimes I find it hard to believe that they actually did! Also I like singing and playing the piano (in my own way!), horse riding (used to do battle re-enactments), acting, writing, reading (non-history as well), walking (around towns, castles, museums and battlefields - walking the Naval and Air battlefields can be tricky). I also like acquiring random facts and awful jokes, watching Rugby Union, documentaries, war films, spy films, comedy films and Futurama. I would like to do Archery (longbow) and fly WW1 and WW2 planes as well as various other arts of a martial nature. I would like to speak in English - as the English who fought against the Normans would have spoken - and write their words in the letters/symbols of English Runic. So I get to bore people on another level!

**Q** What is your most favourite food?

**A** I’m a Vegan and I love savoury foods, especially Curries, but there are too many favourites to mention them all.

**Q** What type of music do you like and do you have a favourite band?

**A** My music tastes are very varied! I like most of Vaughan Williams’ music; Prokofiev - especially his 'Alexander Nevsky'; various film music - War, Sci-fi and Westerns; MANY Indie bands, such as the Klaxons and Bloc party, plus Kasabian, Panic at the Disco, Funk and Soul, Motown and Crooners such as Dick Haymes - and more!
Brighton Marathon Success

Continued from page 1..

“We are extremely proud of our team of five who ran the Brighton Marathon for us and for their dedication and commitment during the long months of training. The £2,000 raised will go a long way to support our work with profoundly disabled people” said Renée Canter, Business Development Manager for Us in a Bus. “To put it into context, the money raised could cover the cost of employing two staff members to run four sessions a week for 15 people for about three months. Or it could pay for 10 weeks of running ‘The Bus Stop’, which is an interactive, motivational ‘youth club’ style session, for five young people in the Redhill area.”

Us in a Bus is a registered charity specialising in working with people with profound learning disabilities and complex needs who can be difficult to reach. The charity’s belief is that each of us deserves the opportunity to discover more about ourselves and to express our emotions and creativity.

Through intensive interaction Us in a Bus is transforming the lives of their service users, enabling them to live more fulfilled lives and enjoy experiences that most of us take for granted.

Abi and Carys live in Cardiff and they became aware that Us in a Bus were looking for runners through Facebook. "The work that Us in a Bus does to communicate and connect with people who have profound learning disabilities is very close to our hearts, so we ran every one of the 26 miles with pride and passion. This was our first ever marathon, which was a massive challenge and the hardest thing we have ever done. The support of the crowd was incredible and certainly helped us complete the last few miles to finally step over the finish line. We would like to thank everyone who sponsored us, as well as the Us in a Bus team who gave us such a warm welcome in the Charity Village."

Runners needed for 2015 Brighton Marathon

The 2015 Brighton Marathon will take place on Sunday 12 April 2015. Public entries are now closed but Us in a Bus has purchased 5 charity places. So if you are fit and able and want to run to raise money to support the incredible work that Us in a Bus does please contact Renée Canter on 01737 764774 or email renee.canter@usinabus.org.uk
**Vines BMW raise £300 at Networking Event**

Catherine Redman, Trustee and Marilyn Anderson, Marketing Assistant for Us in a Bus (pictured right) were delighted to attend and showcase the charity at one of ‘thebestof Guildford’ events at the end of April, which was hosted by Vines Mini Guildford.

Vines are supporting Us in a Bus this year as their charity of the year and at the event they raised £300 by organizing a spectacular raffle, prizes of which included a Mini weekend bag and a rugby ball signed by all the England players!

“We were so pleased to be asked along to thebestof Guildford networking event which Vines hosted in their Mini Showroom” said Catherine. “There were over 50 local businesses present and we were able to spread the word about the wonderful work that Us in a Bus does and how it is making a difference to so many lives in the local area. The fact that Vines raised £300 for us through the raffle was the icing on the cake. I was also lucky to win a prize in the raffle – no, not the signed rugby ball, I won 40 toilet rolls, so I should never be caught short again!!”

Thebestof started life in 2005 and now has coverage in over 300 areas across the UK, showcasing and supporting over 30,000 businesses. Thebestof Guildford provides a unique gathering point for the community and great local businesses in Guildford with a passion to see businesses and people grow and prosper. They are a hub for thebestof everything local, where you can find the best businesses as recommended by real local people, get access to the best offers from those businesses, keep up to date with what’s happening in the area and have your say on the things that matter.

To find out more about ‘thebestof Guildford’ visit: www.thebestof.co.uk/local/guildford

**Choral connection**

At the end of March, in partnership with the Brandenburg Choral Festival 2014, the Tiffin Boys’ Choir performed Durufle’s Requiem at St Clement Danes, London and raised £320 for Us in a Bus. The event was conducted by Simon Toyne and the choir performed for an hour and a half to a packed audience.

Janet Gurney, Chief Executive of Us in a Bus, attended this memorable event, “It was a delight to experience such inspiring music in such a spectacular setting. It was also a profound reflection of what we try to create with the people we support. What this wonderful choir managed to achieve with their audience was what we are aiming for during our sessions – moments of intense connection. The connections don’t depend on words or meaning, but on a shared and meaningful experience. I’m sure I wasn’t the only one in the audience for whom the whole experience was more important than the individual words sung. Thanks to everyone in the choir for creating this for us to share. And thanks to people’s generosity that raised money for Us in a Bus to create more moments of intense connection with people with profound learning disabilities”

*Above: The Tiffin Boys Choir perform at St Clement Danes*
Caption Competition

From the ‘Meet the People’ feature on page 9 you will have learned a bit more about Tiw Raegen, one of our Interaction Practitioners. Get your thinking caps on and write a caption for the ‘very thoughtful’ picture of Tiw on the right!

Please send all entries to Renée Canter at the address below.

The most humorous entry, which can be printed(!), will be published in the next edition of Linking Lives.

Your name: ____________________________

Caption:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Spreading the word at the Flower Club

Renée Canter, Business Development Manager at Us in a Bus was asked to present to the Reigate Flower Club last month about the work of Us in a Bus.

Speaking at events like this help to raise awareness of Us in a Bus within the local community, so that people can understand more about what we do and the people we work with.

Renée also picked up quite a few flower arranging tips while she was there. I think you will agree the picture, right, shows a very innovative use of a pair of 1970’s silver platform shoes!

“The ‘F’ Factor” demonstration by Tricia Bashford

Paper copies of this Newsletter are produced through the kind generosity of Sutton & East Surrey Water

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