In 1849, Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr said (in the Paris equivalent of Private Eye magazine), “The more things change, the more things stay the same.” It used to irritate me, but I think I’m finally understanding what he meant. This newsletter is full of things that change and things that stay the same. There’s an article that talks about the ‘science’ behind our work. The theory of Intensive Interaction that underpins our work is solid and grounded – it stays the same. But on a daily basis, it is open to creative interpretation. Our Interaction Practitioners use the theory to guide their work, but every interaction they have is based on what is happening for our people at that moment – and no two moments in an interaction are ever the same, even when they are based on repetition and mirroring. Each connection we make (and I mean all of us) is made up of the ever changing play of mood, perception, observation, response – and so much more.

Over the last very nearly 25 years of Us in a Bus’s life, we have witnessed huge changes in the lives of the people we support – where they live, what opportunities are open to them, how the support they need is provided and funded, even how they are ‘seen’ by the communities in which we all live. And at the same time, the core human need to be recognised and valued is unchanged. We all have that same need, to be valued for the unique people we are and to live a fulfilled life.

One of the joys of our work, that has never changed for me, has been to be part of the process of supporting people to live their lives to the full.

And now something else that is changing – and staying the same. The Us in a Bus logo and name was created in 1990 and we have found ourselves wondering if it properly represents our work. After a lot of consideration, talking to a wide range of people who know our work and guided by some creative and very generous professionals who gave their time, patience and ideas for free, the conclusion is that our name is absolutely ‘us’ and we should keep it, but that we could do with a little work in the ‘looks’ department. Have a look on pages 8 and 9 for more. We hope you like the change – and the same!

(And another thing about that Monsieur Alphonse Karr – he was also famous for his work in floriculture, especially introducing varieties of dahlias. So next time you see a dahlia in bloom, see if it’s changing or staying the same……)
Being a Sessional Worker

Sessional Workers are an integral part of the Us in a Bus team, helping to cover staff sickness, annual leave and providing permanent staff with the time they need in the office for report writing etc. In this edition Pip Petty talks about the role and what it means to her.

I’ve actually been a Sessional Worker for Us in a Bus twice now, before and after being a permanent part-time member of staff for a few years. I also trained as a psychodynamic counsellor while I was working for Us in a Bus and I worked for ten years in that role before retiring.

The highlight for me of being a Sessional Worker is sharing in those magic moments of connection when a session goes really well. It also lets me keep involved with the lives of people I’ve known for a long time.

It was through my daughter that I first heard about Us in a Bus and the work they do as she joined the organisation straight from University. It was during our many conversations that she persuaded me to try out as a Sessional Worker. So I observed a few sessions and I loved it!

Before working for Us in a Bus I had a role supporting children with disabilities and their families for a project called the Home Emergency Link Project, or HELP, which sadly no longer exists. I found it interesting to move into a new field working with adults and with a different emphasis to the mainly practical.

Having been involved with Us in a Bus for several years now, doing sessional work gives me the opportunity to keep in touch with the people we support and with colleagues I know. I also love to meet new people as new sessions come on stream, and to keep my hand in with the techniques of intensive interaction.

If anyone is reading this article and would like to look into becoming a Sessional Worker then I would say wholeheartedly ‘give it a go!’ Us in a Bus offers tremendous support and encouragement, and you will have the opportunity to learn from experienced colleagues, and from the best teachers of all - the people we work with!

Jan’s Ice Bucket Challenge

Janice Murells, seated and wet in the picture opposite, is a Senior Interaction Practitioner at Us in a Bus.

In her spare time, Jan is an instructor at the Guildford Bytomic Taekwondo class, and she agreed to participate in a Mega Ice Bucket Challenge that all her fellow Bytomic Instructors were doing. Her students donated generously so that at the end of a recent class they could freeze and soak Jan, raising over £100 for Us in a Bus.

Thank you to Jan and all her students, who enjoyed the occasion immensely. They did something to Jan that we would have loved to – in the nicest possibly way of course!

Your fundraising has supported our Interactive Sessions in Guildford. nICE and easy does it Jan!
Connecting Lives at our Awayday

Once a year the whole Team at Us in a Bus, together with our Board of Trustees, meet out of the office for an Awayday.

For the last two years this ‘time out’ was used to do some ‘heavy’ thinking about our values, our name and the forms of communication within the team. However, this year we wanted to donate our time to a good cause so we opted for a different kind of ‘heavy’ work.

Donning their gardening gear, half the team spent the morning at Earlswood, our local Infants School in Redhill, working up an appetite by tidying up their wildlife garden. The other half of the team worked in the kitchen making a delicious lunch of homemade soup, rolls and desserts. After 3 hours of clearing thick undergrowth, pruning and digging, and toiling in the kitchen, the whole team came together to share stories and have a well-earned lunch.

Renée Canter, Business Development Manager, organized the event and said “Everyone had a really productive morning. Doing something different for our Awayday this year gave us the opportunity to challenge ourselves, to help our local community and to interact with colleagues in a way we don’t usually get to, which felt great!”.
A Shared Passion

Twenty four year old Abigail Tee from Swansea in South Wales is in her second year of a doctoral course at Cardiff University where she is training to be an Educational Psychologist. This year she was one of five runners at the Brighton Marathon who raised over £2,000 for Us in a Bus, so we wanted to find out more about her and how she became connected to us. Abigail takes up the story ....

“My first experience of Intensive Interaction was before I really knew that it existed. I had the opportunity to study abroad during my second year of my undergraduate degree and I visited a place for adults who had complex needs. Here I was unable to communicate verbally as I was unfamiliar with the language, so I observed and tried to 'tune in' very carefully to the candle making activity they were doing. When I joined in I was able to support and expand the activity and the individuals became fully engaged with me, watching my next move in the process. We experienced some lovely moments where we smiled at each other, just enjoying doing the activity together. We had worked out our own language where my shoulder shrugs became a sign that I was ready to move onto the next step in the activity and the individuals shrugged back at me when they felt ready too. It was a magical moment!

I am not a very competitive person, but I find a lot of fun in challenging myself, so when I heard that Us in a Bus was looking for runners for the Brighton Marathon I didn’t hesitate in applying. Training for, and running, the marathon made me think a lot about the ‘journeys’ that some of the very inspiring people I have worked with have been on. Their journeys were much more physically and mentally challenging than a 26 mile run, and keeping this in mind when I pounded the streets of Brighton spurred me on to make every mile count. I have also gone on to complete the Swansea half marathon and successfully finished the 2014 12 mile Tough Mudder obstacle race – great fun!

I will leave you with one final thought. I think it’s amazing how powerful it is to have a strong, determined, hopeful and positive mindset. Having that hope in place, and a commitment to it, is at the heart of what keeps me motivated when I compete in events to raise money for Us in a Bus. Try it and see what you can do!”

“I first heard about Us in a Bus through the Intensive Interaction Facebook page. I am very interested in intensive interaction and have special interests in autism, communication, play-based approaches, and the impact of stress on learning and attachment... to name but a few!

I instantly felt connected to Us in a Bus because we share the same passions, objectives and the belief that there is always something we can do to promote the range of communication skills we have available to us.

I can’t remember a time before I became interested in this area of work. I am very fortunate to have an incredibly inspiring mother who was passionate about working with young people with additional needs. Through her studies and work, I was introduced into a world where I was motivated to try to find creative ways to communicate that could be individualised to a person and spark some form of communication that was new (no matter how small this may be) with the hope that it may lead to a small development, a learning experience and, arguably more importantly, enjoyment.

Much of my time at weekends was spent at social clubs for people with additional needs and I was so inspired by these young people, who taught me so much about alternative ways of communicating. I liken this to The Bus Stop, created by Us in a Bus, to support young people in Redhill.

I did quite a lot of work experience with children and young people with additional needs, from working as a learning mentor for young people during my college studies, to being an Intensive Interaction facilitator for young people with autism whilst completing my BSc Psychology degree and Masters in Research Methods in Psychology.

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Giving feedback to our colleagues is a vital part of how Us in a Bus functions. We work very intensively in teams of two, so naturally there will be different ideas on how to proceed during sessions.

In order to deliver the best possible service to our people, we need to be successful in the way we talk to each other about those different ideas and how the sessions are going. We use a feedback process that we fondly call ‘The 3 F’s’: Facts, Thoughts, Feelings, followed by an open-ended question. This process is simple, but it does take courage to tell someone what you really think and feel!

Us in a Bus offers training in successful feedback, but in this article, rather than explaining the whole process, we talk about what it takes from each of us to give clear, honest and constructive feedback and what that achieves.

Most of us don’t find it difficult to give another person positive feedback, such as “I like your new hair cut” or “nice car”, but how often do we give each other negative feedback and how does it feel to do that? I expect most of us would say we avoid it. Some of us would even say we avoid it at all costs, and on a daily basis it probably doesn’t matter too much. It doesn’t matter if Renée doesn’t know that I don’t like her new dress! But it does matter when you can’t tell your colleague that you had some concerns about the way they were interacting in a session, or that you felt scared while they were driving.

So why can it feel so difficult? Well, most of us don’t like upsetting other people, especially people that we have to see and work with every day. We imagine that by giving them feedback we are going to hurt them, make them angry or cause a confrontation. This can actually feel incredibly daunting.

“What if they never speak to me again, what if they stay angry at me, working with them everyday will be a nightmare” or “They’ll really hate me, they’ll think I’m horrible, they’ll think I’m really stroppy or making a fuss over nothing.

All these thoughts and many, many more can run through our heads at the prospect of giving someone feedback. So deciding to step out of those thoughts and into the truth that actually we don’t know what they’re thinking and we don’t know what the outcome will be, takes courage - sometimes a lot of courage.

To help people find that courage we have a solid structure of formal and informal support, supervision and agreements in place with each other that we will give feedback.

You will find that it does get easier with practice and experience. Sometimes the other person had an inkling that there was something awry and is relieved that we have spoken to them. A lot of the time the response is nowhere near as bad as we think it will be. Most important of all, the feedback leads to discussion and learning. Sometimes we discover that we had misunderstood our colleague’s intentions and we discover something new about the way in which we work. Sometimes our colleague discovers something about themselves, or the way in which they are working that they would like to change.

With clarity, empathy and respect, when giving feedback to our colleagues, it’s a lot easier to find courage and instigate change for the better.
The Science of Intensive Interaction by Anne Laney and Steve Parker

You may well have heard the Us in a Bus Interaction Practitioners talking about Intensive Interaction, or have read about it in one of our reports. It is one of the main tools that we use, is a well established and proven approach to working with people who have learning disabilities, profound and complex needs and/or autism, and it is based on science. It isn’t, as one support worker initially thought, “just mucking about”!

The science says that for all of us, the mirror neuron nerve cells in our brain allow us to recognize what another person is doing. Even just watching someone move their arm creates an identical response in the observer’s brain and this even happens with experiencing emotions. I look at someone crying and sad and I may feel sad, depending on how aware and receptive I am. Examples we may all have experienced are that moment when a giggle is “contagious” or when a yawn is “caught”. When we mirror someone’s movements, not only are we letting them know that we have noticed them on an emotional level, celebrating their achievements and boosting their esteem, but also at a biological level as they recognize their own movements in ours.

If we think back to the first interactions a parent has with a baby, the sounds made by the baby are copied by the parents and act as confirmation for the baby that his/her very existence has been noticed. When the baby has had enough feedback to reinforce this he/she moves on to another sound or action and the process repeats and continues. For people who have profound learning disabilities/complex needs - and perhaps sensory impairments - this process breaks down or is delayed. They may take so long to process the fact that someone has responded, that their subsequent sounds are not noticed or do not happen......they might get lost somewhere in the complexity of firing neurons. They might not hear that they are being responded to and therefore not experience the confirmation of self and, over time lose the desire to reach out to others.

This also explains why many people have created sounds or habits (often vocalizations of some sort) which they make often. They are providing their own confirmation of themselves.

Luckily, our ability to recognize ourselves in others doesn’t have a ‘use by’ date on it, so we can use Intensive Interaction with anyone who isn’t finding it easy to engage with others. Through careful observation we can begin to recognize the confirmation someone is giving themselves. Then we can experiment with different ways of mirroring that sensation back to them.

To illustrate this let’s look at a simple example. We know that ‘Bill’, a 52 year old gentleman with profound learning disabilities and very limited vision, expresses himself vocally. We’ve also noticed that these vocalizations vary - some are quite low pitched, rhythmic and quite constant whilst others are higher pitched, quieter and less frequent. Bill’s use of his voice may well have an element of intentionality, i.e. he might be letting us know he wants to go out for a walk, but there is also strong evidence that this vocalizing is to a large degree Bill’s confirmation of himself. When we use Intensive Interaction we can respond to Bill’s sounds using our own voices or we can be creative about our response, maybe celebrating Bill’s voice with some rhythmic hand clapping or touch, relating directly to Bills vocal expression and its varying tones and rhythms. We are letting him know that we’ve noticed him and that we value his expression. Our response isn’t just limited to Bill’s sounds; we may respond to the way he moves his head or stretches his arm. For Bill, this process can be motivating, leading to connection and an increased willingness to reach out and engage with the world. Discovering new and creative ways of responding to Bill can be serious and joyful at the same time - and just as that support worker saw – it can look like ‘mucking about!”

So, if you get the opportunity to see an Us in a Bus session you might want to notice how we were exploring this process of observation, confirmation and response. Tell us what you see, what you think - and please let us know if we missed anything!
Meet the People behind Us in a Bus

In this edition of Linking Lives we meet Rosie Brookes, an Interaction Practitioner who is the latest addition to the Us in a Bus team.

Q Where did you work before joining Us in a Bus?
A I worked as a classroom assistant in a Special Educational Needs school for children and teenagers with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) and Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD). I have worked in three different schools since leaving college nine years ago. My job involved helping the children/teenagers to access the curriculum and I enjoyed supporting and building their confidence, self-worth and communication. I developed many wonderful relationships and adapted my way of working and communicating to help each individual achieve as much as possible.

Q How did you hear about Us in a Bus?
A Through my good friend Jenny Clarke, who was helping Us in a Bus with their re-branding project. She contacted me about this fabulous charity whose work she thought would suit me down to the ground, so (luckily for me!!) here I am.

Q How did you get started in this line of work?
A While studying Health and Social Care in college I completed a week’s work experience in NCYPE (National Centre for Young People with Epilepsy) and I loved it so much that I applied to work there in my gap year. My gap year then developed into my career as I realized how much I loved the work of engaging with individuals with SLD and PMLD and couldn’t bear to leave that environment. I undertook qualifications whilst working to develop my abilities and understanding further, and this was where I first discovered the art of communicating with someone in their language - intensive interaction. It was something I'd been doing already, but now I understood why it was so important and how much opportunity it could provide for individuals as well as myself.

Q What hobbies do you have?
A One of my passions is gaining new knowledge and learning, and I have just started my third year of studying at degree level part-time, for a Health and Social Care degree with the Open University. So in June, when I finish this module, I will be half way to completing my degree! I also volunteer with Diabetes UK, a charity very close to my heart having been diagnosed Type 1 diabetic 25 years ago, and provide support weekends for families with newly-diagnosed diabetic children and a holiday every summer for diabetic teenagers. These are such fantastic events and I really love doing them. I don’t have much other time to myself, but when I do I love baking, seeing friends, reading and going for walks - especially through creepy woodland with ruins!

Q What’s been your greatest achievement in life so far?
A There have been many things in my life of which I feel proud, yet in my eyes my greatest achievement was to be nominated for the 2013 National Inspire Awards from Diabetes UK. I have volunteered for many years and absolutely love it, but I never dreamt I would be nominated for such a prestigious award. I couldn’t believe it when I was announced the winner, especially when I received the large, engraved glass trophy! I felt elated that I had been nominated in the first place, but I felt humbled to have won it.

Q If you were stranded on a desert island, what two things would you most like to have with you?
A It would have to be a good book and a bottle of rum! What better way to spend the time, especially when stranded!
Introducing our new look ....

After 12 months of reviewing our name and look, we are very excited to launch our new vibrant logo.

As we embarked on this very important project we were extremely lucky to have the support of Jenny Clarke, a marketing brand expert with many years of experience in the commercial field, who is also the daughter of one of our trustees. It was Jenny who helped to steer us in the right direction from the word go, so thank you Jenny!

The first decision that we made was to keep the name, Us in a Bus.

We canvased the views of a wide range of people - staff, trustees, friends, external companies and the care homes that we visit - and it was overwhelmingly felt that the name was well-known and after nearly 25 years should remain.

People felt that the name was quirky, provoked discussion about what we do, was inclusive, approachable and fun. But it was felt that the organization would benefit from the logo and image being updated.

Over the last seven months we have been working with a multi-media design company called Think!Creative, who have donated their time and expertise for free to create our new logo and materials for us. Thank you so much to Paul Hough (right) and Iain Farmer (pictured below) for all their valued support. You can read more about Think!Creative at www.thinkcreative.uk.com

So we say a fond farewell to our old logo, which has been a faithful friend to us over the years.

And we introduce our new logo - a bright, vivid and clear identity - which focuses more on ‘Us’, our service users, our team and our supporters, with the overlapping colours illustrating the connections and interactions of the services we provide.

We have added the words “connecting lives” underneath the logo to give people a clearer idea about what we do. But, of course, you can’t tell everything about our work in just two words so we have also created a new shorter and sharper strapline “Opportunities for people with profound learning disabilities and complex needs”. You will see us using this new strapline in a number of ways over the coming months.

One more person who has helped steer us through this process is Marilyn Anderson (pictured below). We have been fortunate enough to have secured Marilyn’s time and expertise as a volunteer. She has a background in marketing and communications and for the last 12 months has been volunteering her time and skills to help us manage a process involving lots of people, ideas and feelings, which at times has been quite emotional and thought provoking. So thank you to Marilyn for helping to make it such a positive experience which, in fact, has had an impact in lots of different ways.

So, as our Chief Executive, Janet Gurney, talks about in her article on the front page, “the more things change, the more things stay the same”. We are really pleased with the change to our new logo, but our name, the dedication and passion of the staff and the caring, professional work of Us in a Bus most certainly stays the same!
Watch out for our new look Vans ....

We would like to say a big thank you to Vines BMW at Guildford for supporting the re-branding of our fleet of vans.

And in conjunction with Vines we are offering a prize to the first person who spots one of our new look vans. All you have to do is email info@usinabus.org.uk stating your name, the day, time and place you saw the van and we will let you know if you are the winner!

And our fourth van hits the streets

We are delighted that a new van has now joined the Us in a Bus fleet. The growing number of new Interactive Sessions and Coaching and Mentoring Programmes meant that the team needed more wheels to get around.

And we owe a big thank you to The Wolfson Foundation, Yorkshire Building Society Charitable Foundation, The Rank Foundation, Gatwick Airport Community Trust and Charters Citroen for the funds raised to purchase and run this van for the next year.

We’re now regularly delivering services into Surrey, Hampshire, Berkshire and Middlesex so if you spot one of our four vans out on the road, sporting our new logo, give us a wave!

Steve Parker, Senior Practitioner, tests out the new van
Spotlight on Fundraising

Doug raises over £861 in first ever Reigate Half Marathon

Doug Bennett wanted to set himself a challenge this year so what better way than running a half Marathon for charity!

While chatting to Renée Canter about the work of Us in a Bus Doug decided that he would run the inaugural Reigate Half Marathon in September and raise money for us. Doug is a great believer in helping his local community and small local charities that rely heavily on fundraising, donations and grants. He also helped us set up a new Just Giving account, which is an easier way for people to sponsor fundraising activities.

On the day the sun shone and the crowds gathered in and around Reigate to cheer on their friends and family. It was a fantastic atmosphere at the finish line in Priory Park and Doug was pleased to finish in just under four and a half hours, which was the goal he had set himself. He also raised a staggering £861, which was more than his fundraising target! Thank you to Doug and to his family who supported him during his training.

If you fancy taking on a challenge and raising funds for Us in a Bus during 2015, contact Renée Canter at renee.canter@usinabus.org.uk to have a chat and receive a Fundraising Pack.

Vines BMW support is making a huge difference

Our friends at Vines BMW are continuing to support Us in a Bus as one of their adopted Charities of the Year. In September they held a Golf Day in Guildford and from September to December they are contributing an amount to us linked to every car sold in their BMW and Mini Dealerships.

Keeping our services going is at the heart of all fundraising, and the money raised by Vines BMW so far from these activities will go towards extending The Bus Stop until Christmas. This will ensure that five young people in Redhill continue to get the opportunity to meet up with our team every week to explore communication together and make connections with each other.

We use Intensive Interaction as our main way of engaging with this group of young people and for most of them it’s the only opportunity they get each week to go out and meet other people in a safe and tailored environment. We have been surprised by the connections that have blossomed between our young people since running The Bus Stop.

Here are the words from Christopher’s Mum who came along to observe a recent Bus Stop session:

“Watching Christopher in control of the intensive interaction session was pure beauty on every level. His delighted empowering squeaks were felt by all. It was harmony in action as Christopher took turns to converse with a stamp of a foot, a flick of the fingers, a kick of the wall, a spin. His language!”

Pictured: Having fun and interactions at The Bus Stop
Ali Baba and his 40 thieves raise £200

Us in a Bus recently received a donation of £200 from The Wonersh Players, part of the proceeds raised from their performances of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves.

The Wonersh Players was formed in 1982 and are a like-minded group of friends who enjoy putting on a show and who write, produce and perform their own pantomimes.

Nicky Bracey (pictured third from the right of the standing row) one of our Interaction Practitioners has been a member since 2004 and agrees with one local critic who wrote “Nobody has more fun than The Wonersh Players”.

Nicky said: “I first became involved when my son Griff wanted to continue “pantomiming”, having performed as a Dame in the local Scout and Guide pantomime. We approached Wonersh Players when he left scouts and they agreed he could have a part, but as he was only 13 at the time I needed to take part too! The things we do for our children!! I only had a few spoken lines as the Tooth Fairy in Puss in Boots, but I was absolutely terrified! However I soon got the bug and have only missed performing one year since then. This year I was a poetic hairdresser called Shelley, who worked in Ali Baba’s salon, but I have played numerous parts from royalty to witches!”

To find out more about the Wonersh Players visit their facebook page or website www.wonershplayers.com

Team Jackman take up The Challenge to create us a sponsorship plan

The Challenge is a national charity that aims to connect and inspire people to strengthen their communities and for the second year running Us in a Bus has partnered with them to inspire a group of young people to work together.

This year we met Team Jackman, a group of 16 year olds. We shared with them the challenges our service users face in connecting with the world and specifically outlined The Bus Stop, our project for younger adults.

Their task is now to develop a sponsorship plan to raise money for Us in a Bus, whilst also developing their skills and confidence by working with a group of people they wouldn’t normally meet.

We eagerly wait to hear the outcome of their plan, but we feel proud that we can play a part in connecting lives in our local community.

You can read more about The Challenge at www.the-challenge.org
Caption Competition Winner

Thank you to everyone who entered the Caption Competition in the last edition of Linking Lives. Below is the winning entry submitted by Paul Rawlings from Redstone House – well done Paul!

2015 Training Dates

The dates for the 2015 Us in a Bus training courses have now been finalized and are available to book now. So don’t miss out, book today!

Introduction to Intensive Interaction
23 January, 18 March, 21 May and 8 July

Next Steps with Intensive Interaction
28 April and 4 November

Shared Words

Renée Canter, our Business Development Manager, shares this poem that reminds her of what is at the heart of our work.

Finding a Way by Myra Cohn Livingston

I’d like you for a friend.
I’d like to find a way
Of asking you to be my friend.
I don’t know what to say.

What would you like to hear?...
What is it I can do?
There has to be some word, some look
Connecting me to you.

TICKETS AVAILABLE

2015 Brandenburg Choral Festival

Building on a successful 2014 event, in partnership with the Brandenburg Choral Festival, a Heavenly Choral Classics concert will be performed by the University of Reading Chamber Choir and the Felicitas Chamber Choir to raise funds for Us in a Bus.

The event will be held on Sunday 22 March 2015, starting at 4.00pm at St Paul’s Covent Garden, London

Tickets £18 for adults and £5 for children

To book tickets telephone Us in a Bus on 01737 764774 or apply by email to info@usinabus.org.uk

For more information visit www.usinabus.org.uk

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