New ‘Friends’ of Us in a Bus to launch at Family Fun Day in August

We are very excited to be launching a new ‘Friends’ of Us in a Bus group at the end of August, which will enable us to connect more closely with a wider range of people across the communities in which we work.

There will be a small annual membership fee and all money raised will be used to support the unique services that we offer to people who have profound learning disabilities and complex needs. Full details will soon be available on our website – www.usinabus.org.uk.

Our new ‘Friends’ group will be officially launched, and welcomed, at our Family Fun Day on Sunday 28 August from 2pm to 5pm. This will be held in the grounds of the new Us in a Bus offices at Redhill Aerodrome and it should be a fun–filled day for the whole family.

We are delighted to have secured an amazing live band called Redlands to play for us at the event and we will have great BBQ food as well as a licensed bar. For the children there will be lots to do, including letting off steam on the bouncy castle and having their faces painted!

Advance tickets cost £5 for adults with children going free and your entry ticket will entitle you to some free BBQ food! Adult tickets on the day are £8. To book your tickets or for more information contact admin@usinabus.org.uk
MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The last quarter of 2015/16 was a really exciting and interesting period here at Us in a Bus and we’re all raring to go into 2016/17.

With the beginning of a new financial year I thought my message this time should focus on the priorities and challenges we face as we move forward.

The first and highest priority is that we need to keep delivering high-quality services to the people we support. This is the reason we exist and is the backbone of what we do. We have a highly skilled team of Interaction Practitioners at Us in a Bus, but we do need to continually look to attract new talent whilst retaining our high quality people who are engaged, motivated and enthusiastic. This is a daily focus for all the team.

Secondly, we need to further develop all of our Training, Coaching and Mentoring products. We often work directly with homes, schools and organisations to talk to them about Intensive Interaction and its many benefits for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities and complex needs. This year we are also going to be developing some niche areas, so make sure to check out our website for new information. And if there’s any aspect of Intensive Interaction that you’d like to know more about, please let us know and we’ll get onto it!

Fundraising is the third, and perennial, challenge for this year. One of the things we’ll be doing is launching a ‘Friends’ Group, so watch this space. And if you have a yen to ski-dive, run the Brighton Marathon in April or climb Mount Everest for Us in a Bus, please do let us know and we’ll do everything we can to support you in your fundraising. There is also lots of information and ideas about fundraising on our website if you want to get some inspiration!

Our fourth challenge is that we need to review our internal processes and procedures. Some of these are good and fit for purpose, but some could best be described as ‘good examples of intermediate technology’. So we have lots of work to do here by the whole team, but ultimately it is going to make Us in a Bus a better place to work.

And finally, as with all small charities, we’ll be watching our spending and thinking of innovative ways to save money. One small example that we’ve already identified for a big ‘chop’ is our stamps bills – we’ll be increasing our reliance on email to save every last 62 pence where we can!

But, our first challenge still remains our highest priority to concentrate on this year. We will keep putting the needs and requirements of the people we support at the forefront of everything we do.

I’d love to hear comments and views from readers about our newsletter and our social media output; Facebook and Twitter, so please do get in touch and let me know what you think.

Vic and Lizzie’s Marathon Challenge

Victoria and her friend Lizzie are running their first ever half Marathon in Maidenhead in September to raise money for Us in a Bus and the Brigitte Trust and as part of their training they ran the recent Westminster 10K race. At about 6K Victoria was struggling a bit up a hill when the strangest thing happened ... she heard “Slow down Us in a Bus, I’m trying to catch you!” . Well what a coincidence, when she turned around it was a retired Director of IT who she had worked with 15 years ago and who now lives in Redhill! If you would like to support Victoria and Lizzie, visit their Virgin Money fundraising page and give generously!  uk.virginmoneygiving.com/team/lizzieandvicrunwild
Intensive Interaction and Music

In this article Marina Jurjevic, an Interaction Practitioner at Us in a Bus, talks about how we build safe sensory spaces to embellish communication and self-expression, which have music at their core.

Music is known as a universal language, and there is no surprise that it successfully and creatively links people, regardless of their abilities, gender, consciousness, culture and age. It empowers us and makes us cross the boundaries of conventional communication.

In this article I would like to reflect on this by using a recent example from one of our sessions with Olivia.

Olivia is an amazing young lady who uses her musicality as a way of expressing herself in an incredibly creative way.

We started this session by creating a ‘physical’ space. We positioned a big keyboard on Olivia’s footrest (next to an upright piano) so that she could easily reach the keys and change the rhythms if and when she wished. At Us in a Bus the Interaction Practitioners work in pairs, which gives us the opportunity to make ourselves available as active communicative partners at various levels, allowing a space for synergy.

While my partner, Nicky, was in close proximity to Olivia’s head and responding - mirroring/echoing Olivia’s subtle expressions - I used the piano’s subtle sound to blend into the conversation.

This stage was important, as it enabled us to make basic contact with Olivia, from which our communication developed further. I played repetitive gentle music to create a ‘sound space’ that was predictable and calming.

A sound space is a space of ‘safety’ where the sound means calm continuity and, at this stage, it was not necessarily in response to Olivia. Because it was a relaxed and undemanding sound it enveloped the space, serving as an introduction to our conversation.

Sometimes this can last for a long time, and sometimes it can be less than a minute, but we always adjust our introduction according to the needs of the people we work with.

When Olivia started to pay more attention to the ‘sound space’ we started to follow her musically, using piano, guitar, drum and our human voice, slowly building up a conversational turn taking. As Olivia became aware that she was now leading and shaping the music with her mannerisms, the intensity of her expressions amazingly increased.

Mirroring/echoing the expressions of the people we work with is an extremely important stage in intensive interaction, but this is also a starting point. In order to be heard, we need to make it known that we are ready to listen. The real ability of Interaction Practitioners is in developing those creative additional responses that will capture our people’s intention and motivate them to be more responsive, inventive and creative. This equals to an interesting verbal debate, when we reflect on something relevant to us.

If we repeat old stories again and again we would soon become bored. But in our sessions there are no rules, and there are no limits. We are consistently surprised, and inspired, by the genuine originality of the people we work with.

Continued on Page 5...
ARE YOU READY? ....... By Anne Laney, Interaction Practitioner

One of the questions Us in a Bus Practitioners continually ask themselves during sessions is “how can we best put the person we are working with in control of our interaction”?

We already know that using Intensive Interaction gives them the best possible chance of realising they are influencing us, because we are responding to them entirely, but what happens when we want to move the relationship on? When we want to explore the next level of responsive communication and how best to ensure genuine, meaningful choice.

Nicola was someone who we were lucky enough to meet and work with over the last couple of years. Our constant observations during our time together seemed to indicate that she was listening and attending hard to us as we responded to her sounds and movements. We explored a variety of types of engagement, especially musical and sensory and noticed that she appeared to really like certain things. Specific sounds on the autoharp, keyboard or guitar, for instance, and certain parts of sensory stories caused her to raise her head up off the floor, smile and vocalise excitedly. As we observed more closely we realised that Nicola’s responses sometimes seemed to overlap with the next stimulus.

We all know in theory that everyone needs a different amount of time to process and respond to information and our time with Nicola allowed us the opportunity to investigate in more detail how this manifested itself for her. We were strict with ourselves for a while, actively waiting and counting the seconds between when we did something we believed Nicola enjoyed and when she offered us a response. We regularly counted to between six and seven before she responded and we agreed that this would be the amount of time we would consider she required to process and respond to a stimulus.

Having this as a working figure we adapted our interactions, especially the musical ones and began saying “Are you ready Nicola?” before the repetitions of something she seemed to enjoy. We then waited.......... And counted.......... Nicola’s responses were quite subtle to begin with, but they did reliably occur as we reached six or seven in our counting. Over the weeks, as we continued to use this as often as we could, it appeared that Nicola grew in confidence.

Her vocalisations became louder and more definite, seemingly saying “yes, I’m ready”. She seemed to anticipate more, perhaps savouring having time to prepare for what was coming next and, we feel, coming to realise that she was in control of when it would happen. This more defined communicative exchange added a new and exciting element to our relationship with Nicola, confirming in this case the hope we always have that every person has the capacity to be in control of certain elements (however small) of their life. It is just a question of finding how. These experiences with Nicola influenced and clarified our thoughts in our work with many other people we see and we’re truly grateful for the time and opportunity we had to explore this with her.

(Nicola Wells sadly died in September 2015. We consider this her legacy to Us in a Bus)
KEEPPING IN TOUCH COULDN’T BE EASIER!

Social Media is becoming increasingly more and more important for keeping in touch with friends and followers of Us in a Bus, so we have just undertaken two Workshops to give us the tools and techniques to help us improve how we use and engage through Facebook, Twitter and other Social Media applications. A huge thank you to Emma-Louise Smith, an expert in all things ‘Social Media’, for running the Workshops for us and for her valuable insights into what would work best for our charity. We also want to thank Emma-Louise for all her wonderful work with us over the last 12 months, especially the SMILEPOWER campaign that was such a great success!

We’d love you to join in our conversations on Facebook and Twitter and give us your comments on how you think we are doing: facebook.com/usinabusuk and @UsInABus.

Intensive Interaction and Music  continued from page 3

Back to our conversation with Olivia. We started to add new elements to make our conversation more diverse, both on a close proximity level and in the musical composition. Our playing changed into a jazzy improvisational music and Olivia started to use her feet to play and shape the rhythm, volume and pitch. At first this was an occasional single tone, but as we were developing our interactions, such as adding elements of proprioception – e.g. pressing her shoulder in response to a big sigh or a played loud note, Olivia started to become more and more involved. We responded to her head movements with arpeggios and that seemed to motivate her to do some arpeggios of her own! This was such a big effort and we felt honoured when she allowed us to step into her world of sound and her sense of music. We were able to feel and say ‘we can hear you’. We were part of an amazing musical, artistic and humane exchange.

Our interactions, however big or small, long or short, loud or quiet, are all about trust, confidence, expression and feeling comfortable. When experiencing the beauty of Olivia’s musical expression we felt honoured that she wanted to share her world with us. We communicated, and that is probably the ultimate cultural form of expression.
2016 TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Janet Gurney, Director of Training at Us in a Bus, offers two day-long Intensive Interaction Workshops in Redhill - an Introduction to Intensive Interaction and Next Steps in Intensive Interaction.

The courses are suitable for anyone who wants to communicate and relate more closely with people with profound learning disabilities and complex needs e.g. Day Service and Support Staff, Home Leaders and Service Managers, Advocates, Families, Occupational Therapists, Teaching Staff and Speech and Language Therapists.

Places for any of these Workshops can be booked by calling Us in a Bus on 01737 764774 or emailing admin@usinabus.org.uk.

An Introduction to Intensive Interaction 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.

Participants will have the opportunity to:
• Understand the principles and techniques of Intensive Interaction
• Explore how these principles can be used
• Be enabled to build more fulfilling, interactive and equal relationships with the people they support

2016 workshop dates still available are 13 October and 5 December

The Next Steps workshop 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.

Participants will have the opportunity to:
• Use a reflective learning approach to explore their use of Intensive Interaction so far
• Share experiences and ‘trouble-shoot’ any challenges being faced in implementing Intensive Interaction
• Explore the core purpose of Intensive Interaction for individual service users
• Make plans to ensure the sustainability of Intensive Interaction in their workplace

2016 workshop date still available is 22 November
Meet the People behind Us in a Bus

In this edition of Linking Lives we get to know a bit more about Lynne Crane, an Interaction Practitioner at Us in a Bus....

Q  How long have you worked for us?
A  I started working for Us in a Bus in November 2005 as a temporary Practitioner to cover maternity leave and I loved it so much that 10 years later I’m still here!

Q  What does the role of an Interaction Practitioner entail?
A  I currently work 3 days a week. Two of the days I work in my regular sessions, mainly in the Redhill and Epsom areas, visiting a range of clients, some of whom I have been visiting each week for the last 10 years. We either work with people individually or in a group situation and, alongside a colleague, we explore ways to support people to develop their fundamental communication skills and sociability. My third day each week I am either floating between the 4 teams, working where needed, or in the office catching up on paperwork or writing reports.

Q  What is the most exciting aspect of your job?
A  Definitely the best part of my job is constantly being inspired by the people we support. I feel so privileged to have the opportunity to explore ways to connect and interact with so many unique individuals and I find it awe inspiring when they allow us an insight into their world and provide us the opportunity to explore building a communication bridge with them.

Q  What do you do outside of work?
A  I enjoy socializing with my large family and friends and going regularly to the theatre. I also enjoy taking part in various flying and driving experiences and have been very fortunate to, amongst others, ‘have a go’ at flying a helicopter, a hovercraft and a glider and driving a Segway and a Harley Davison.

Q  What has been your biggest achievement in life so far?
A  That’s easy – definitely my children Charlotte and Amy.

Q  Who do you most admire in the world and why?
A  My children, who never cease to amaze me. They both have significant health needs and despite numerous hospital visits, and sometimes being in constant pain, they strive to achieve in everything they do. It makes me so proud to be their Mum!
Making Contact by Using Touch by Jan Murrells, Senior Practitioner

At Us in a Bus, using physical contact with the people that use our service is an integral part of our work. However using touch with people who are vulnerable can be a minefield. It can be open to misinterpretation and peoples’ histories, as well as their disabilities, can add complex issues to how touch is perceived.

Us in a Bus has comprehensive ‘Guidelines For Using Touch’ to safeguard the people receiving our service as well as our practitioners. These guidelines are readily available for anyone wishing to see them. In this article Jan explores how we use touch at Us in a Bus and why we feel it is so important.

“The primal primal primal form of communication. Alongside smell it is the earliest form of communication that we experience as babies. The first contact we have with our Mothers is to be held by them and it is well documented how important skin to skin contact is as this stage. We recognise the scent of our Mothers before we are even able to see them properly.

With this in mind we can begin to understand why, for people with little or no intentional communication, it can be vital to building relationships and open up the possibilities of communication. Being held by our caregivers provides comfort, security and warmth, making it possible for us to feel loved and all the other building blocks for positive feelings of self worth.

Touch also reinforces other forms of communication. In our daily lives as adults we may not use touch as much as we did when we were children. Depending on our own personalities, relationships, personal boundaries and social environments, we use varying degrees of touch on a daily basis.

A lot of the time with friends and family, as well as in the work place, we don’t need to use touch at all. Our communication skills are well developed and on the whole we are able to communicate successfully using words without the need for any reinforcement.

For people with profound learning disabilities and complex needs, this is not the case. They are not able to use words or intentional gestures to communicate their wants and needs and they are often unable to interpret the meaning of our words and gestures. This is why at Us in a Bus we use Intensive Interaction.

Continued on page 11 …
When we use Intensive Interaction we need to think about the whole person we are aiming to engage with and all of their senses. We need to make it as easy as possible for the individual to know we are trying to connect with them and learning their language.

Many people with profound learning disabilities and complex needs also have some degree of hearing or visual impairment - some are blind, some are profoundly deaf and some are both deaf and blind. We need to make sure they have heard that we are echoing their sounds, we need to make sure they can see we are mirroring their movements. They may not have any kind of visual or hearing impairment, but it may be difficult for them to understand what they are seeing or hearing.

By adding touch when we respond to a vocalisation we add another opportunity for the individual to feel heard: George says “yip, yip” and we respond with a “yip, yip” with two firm and quick squeezes to his shoulder. Instead of relying on the person just hearing our response they have two types of feedback to their communication. Joyce says “aiiiiiiiiiiaaaaa” we say “aiiiiiiiiiiaaaa” back to her and rub the back of her hand as we say it, the same principle applies. Beth is rocking rhythmically in her chair, we want to join in with her, to start to let her notice that we are there with her and available for a connection. We rock in the same way she does. We might add some sound too, perhaps patting our own knees to make a sound and reinforce the rhythm. Once we’ve done that a few times, we might pat Beth’s knees in the same rhythm as well as keeping up the rocking.

These are just a few simple ways we use touch to add possibilities to communication and connection. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, there are many issues to consider and I’ve not been able to address them all in this short article. For example, we would not try making any type of touch before we’ve assessed an individual’s sensitivity to touch, based on their histories and possible hyper or hypo sensitivities.

We also use touch to address peoples’ need for proprioceptive reinforcement and this is a subject that that I will explore in greater depth in a future article in Linking Lives.”
Paying my own Salary!  by Anne Laney, Interaction Practitioner

Due to an unexpected inheritance a couple of years ago I found myself wondering how I might “best” use the money. Whilst not enough to retire on, it did present me with the opportunity to pay my own salary for three months and, Us in a Bus thankfully agreed to go along with my idea, call it a “sabbatical”, and hold my job open for me.

So, what does one do with three months off? Not set the alarm clock is a top priority for me! But, isn’t it interesting that not being tied to a fixed time to rise in the morning has resulted in me getting up earlier….and happily! How weird! A universal phenomenon I’m sure, but one that surprises me.

So already I have enjoyed a stay at the Georgian House within Hampton Court, which was an outstanding experience. It is part of the Royal Palace and subject to security checks and strict rules, but what a treat. Especially having the opportunity to explore the palace out of hours and accompany the security team on their nightly (yes…midnight) tours. Did you know there are about 1000 empty “grace and favour” apartment rooms? There are two remaining tenants and when they pass away there will be no more. The devastating fire there thirty years ago was caused by a resident and it seems the risks are considered too high.

I have also been to Paris. A surprise trip and a wonderful place which I would love to return to. My fears about grumpy Parisians and being rubbish at speaking French proved unfounded and we managed to find good food, reasonably priced and served in a very friendly way. I would recommend the Latin Quarter, near the Botanical Gardens and the Pantheon. Beware of the scammers though…they are VERY clever.

So, holidays over, I now intend to explore my creative side over the next couple of months. I make a variety of garments and accessories from felt and I’m keen to experiment with techniques and processes which take a little more time. I also splash paint about a bit. Colour based art, at its simplest but pleasing to do, and people seem to like them! One can do quite a lot with a bit of gold leaf too! I have a place booked on a glass blowing course in June and, of course, lots of time to practice my clarinet.

I’ve also got a couple of big concerts coming up with the Windsor and Maidenhead Orchestra, so if anyone’s interested in coming along, see you there if you can make it!
Beaches and Fossils  by Janet Gurney, Director of Training

Much as I love my work with Us in a Bus, it’s been a great experience to be away from it all for three whole months. The timing of this break gave me the chance to catch my breath before coming back to my new role as Director of Training and more importantly gave our new CEO, Victoria Goody, a chance to get her feet under the table without any interference from me! But it is great to come back, catch up with everyone, see the very positive changes Victoria is making, and get to work again.

Oh, but I did enjoy the break!

Colin Troy (my husband) and I spent the time on the beautiful, remote Hebridean Isle of Harris, watching the seasons shift gradually from late winter to early summer, marvelling at golden eagles, shuddering in the wind and intensively interacting with seals (yes really – I wish I had recorded Colin and a member of the Finsbay seal colony having a conversation).

Phoebe Caldwell, Us in a Bus’s Honorary President, came to join us on Harris for a week. Phoebe knows the island well, so we re-visited favourite spots, explored art galleries and had a memorable walk on stunning Seilebost beach. Which leads me to the fossil... No we didn’t find one on the beach, although we picked up pebbles with sparkling garnet deposits, but Phoebe had handed over a much-loved fossil to my safe keeping, and it was good to find out more about its journey as we walked.

It started life as a Rugose coral, somewhere in the waters of North Wales, becoming fossilised in the carboniferous limestone there several millennia ago until being found by Geraint (Gary) Ephraim. Gary had a big influence on Phoebe’s work, supervising her study during her Rowntree Research Fellowship in the late 1980s and remaining a supportive and inspiring friend until his death. Hearing Phoebe talking about him it was clear how much fun as well as deep thought he generated. It seems fitting that the person who inspired Intensive Interaction should have both these qualities – successful interaction needs both. So much of our work is about careful observation and serious thought about what we are noticing, but if we were not able to tap into our innate sense of fun, to explore and embellish the engagements we are forging with our communication partner, the connections couldn’t develop and delight us in the way they do.

I feel very privileged to be the Keeper of the Coral. Thanks Phoebe – we promise to keep dipping into the fun as well as the thinking.

Pictured: Top: A Golden Eagle, Middle: Phoebe (left) and Janet on Seilebost beach and Above: The fossil
Spotlight on Fundraising

Jonathan Raises Over £1,000

The Brighton Marathon took place on 17 April and our runner Jonathan Dean was determined to complete his first Marathon for 13 years. The sun shone brightly and the crowds were enormous this year, cheering all the runners on throughout the course.

Jonathan crossed the line to be greeted by his family on the beach. After recovering his breath he admitted that “something had gone” in one of his legs at mile three and that he had been in agony ever since. We can’t thank him enough for pushing through the 26 mile course and to all his sponsors who supported him in raising over £1,000 for Us in a Bus.

We’re now recruiting runners for 2017, so if you are looking for a personal challenge get in touch with Renée on renee.canter@usinabus.org.uk

Wonersh Players entertain and raise money for us!

Wonersh Players again raised money for Us in a Bus during the performances of their 34th pantomime, Dick Whittington and his Cat, raising £200 for us.

The show saw: good fairy overcome bad fairy, Tommy the cat fend off the evil rats and their king, Dick vie with Lazy Jack for the lovely Alice’s affection (no competition there!), and Alderman Fitwarren and his wife bickering about Dick’s suitability both for their daughter Alice and their business. Dame Paulina Hollywood (no relation!) brought slapstick to the kitchen and on board the ship to Persia, where wealthy Sheiks paid Dick for ridding their kingdom of rats. All lived happily ever after with Dick marrying Alice and Jack settling for Paulina! The players are a like-minded group of friends who write, direct and perform their own pantomimes and who also perform Murder Mysteries during the autumn. According to one review “Nobody has more fun!” If you are interested in joining, or watching them, visit their facebook page or email info@wonershplayers.com

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