First ever ‘Guest Editor’!
This issue of the Newsletter has been edited by Intensive Interaction coordinator Sara Moroza-James.

Sara with her son Tom

Sara kindly volunteered to be our first ever guest editor, writing her own piece and also actively seeking articles from others on her particular area of interest: “Intensive Interaction for Verbal Individuals”.

Sara has also set up the ‘Intensive Interaction for Parents’ Facebook group (with over 600 members), which can be accessed at: https://www.facebook.com/groups/66672213340242/

Sara has also written a book on Intensive Interaction: Learning through Social Connection: How Intensive Interaction can help your child with autism to learn more naturally

This is available as a free ‘electronic’ book through the charity Treating Autism. You can download this free e-book at: http://issuu.com/treatingautism/docs/ta_i.i_handbook_final_single_pages#signin

You can also order free ‘printed’ copies from: mail@treatingautism.co.uk

AUTISM & INTENSIVE INTERACTION:
A new DVD now available!

AUTISM & INTENSIVE INTERACTION: Developing social communication DVD

There is now a new ‘autism and Intensive Interaction’ specific DVD that has just been published by Dave Hewett and the Intensive Interaction Institute.

This DVD, which will be officially released at the ‘Intensive Interaction and Autism: at school and at home’ conference in Nottingham on November 22nd, features:

- 10 video chapters of Intensive Interaction and autism information
- How to do Intensive Interaction
- Why this approach is so important for people with autism
- Real-life footage of Intensive Interaction practitioners and parents

To see a YouTube preview of this DVD go to: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Da0SVnZDaLJ

As the DVD cover states: ‘Intensive Interaction has changed the lives and daily experiences of many people with autism … it helps the person learn to connect and relate, do turn-taking, make eye contact, use and understand facial expressions, develop vocalisations and speech, and to enjoy connecting and relating to other people.’

This DVD is now available for just £20!

To order a copy of the DVD please contact Sarah Forde on Tel: 01920 822027 or by email at: sarahinteract@hotmail.com

Quote of the Month:
“Speech does not equal communication … communication is more important than speech”
Sara Moroza-James – guest editor of this newsletter issue!
(From her commentary on the DVD ‘Intensive Interaction in Action’)

Published by the Learning Disability Psychology Services of the Leeds & York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust in association with Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust and the Intensive Interaction Institute.
Intensive Interaction for Verbal Individuals

As guest editor for this edition of the newsletter I have chosen the topic of “Intensive Interaction for Verbal Individuals” and have invited three Intensive Interaction coordinators to join me in exploring some of the successes they’ve enjoyed using Intensive Interaction with verbal children and adults.

**Intensive Interaction and the Acquisition of Language, Sara Moroza-James**

Within weeks of starting Intensive Interaction, my 7-year-old verbal son (whose full story appears in issue no. 43) began to use emotive expressions such as “oops!” “oh dear!” and “oh no!” for the first time in his life. He also began to create his very own language - we could tell because we had never before heard him make toddler-like mistakes in his otherwise perfect scripts (lifted mostly from videos). My question is, if we didn’t have language goals for him to work towards, then what was it about Intensive Interaction that was helping him develop language? How might it help anyone to acquire language?

Human beings have been attempting to describe language for centuries: We have compiled huge dictionaries and extensive and complicated grammars. Yet, despite our efforts, our current understanding and descriptions of language remain inadequate and superficial (Chomsky, 2000). Typically developing infants, Chomsky (2000) argues, acquire these complex language systems effortlessly due to an innate language learning capacity.

Behavioural approaches, such as the ones we used with my son prior to discovering Intensive Interaction are not modelled on natural language acquisition. Rather they break language down - based on these inadequate and superficial descriptions – into small teaching steps, meaning they teach something other than the language we all use. Furthermore, learning in this way is not motivating - learners are often kept on task with rewards.

So how is language learnt in typical development? Crucially, communication learning comes first and happens via the natural synchronicity of the parent-infant type interactions that Intensive Interaction is based on (Rogoff, 1990). Behavioural approaches taught my son language in a communication void; the result was – he became verbal but not communicative. Intensive Interaction provided an environment in which he was motivated to become a communicator so he naturally began to acquire some of the language that he needed to express his own inner thoughts and feelings.

In typical development, a special register for talking to infants known as ‘motherese’ is thought to aid language development because infants enjoy listening to it and tuning into (working out) its patterns and rules (Maye et al., 2002). In Intensive Interaction we consciously and sensitively tune into our learners to ensure we use language that is acceptable, motivating and engaging for them, i.e. we use a form of motherese that is optimal for communication and language learning for the particular learner we are interacting with.

Joint attention also contributes towards typical language development and is created by adults tuning into and commenting on the child’s interests (Rogoff, 1990). Thus children first learn to name objects and emotions that are important to them, making language learning in this way highly motivating. We know that adults find tuning into individuals who have autism more difficult due to their atypical body movements and non-verbal communications, making joint attention outside an approach like Intensive Interaction difficult. (Edey et al., 2016).

It would appear that, by replicating some of nature’s ways of teaching language learning and communication in our Intensive Interaction sessions, we begin to create an ideal and much needed environment for our learners, in which both their communication and language might blossom more naturally.

**References:**

Intensive Interaction with people with speech
By Jules McKim

In my role as Intensive Interaction Coordinator within adult Community Learning Disability Teams in the south of England, there have been an increasing number of referrals for people with some verbal skills. The referrer often adds something like this: “I’m not sure if Intensive Interaction is relevant, but in my experience, the principles seem to apply.” After several years of working with many people in this category I have concluded that Intensive Interaction is an approach that can be used with everyone we support. Patrick has taught me this.

Patrick has a severe learning disability, is blind and lives with three other gentlemen. He would frequently ask for a “cup of tea” or “cappuccino” often only minutes after he had finished one. I can remember listening to the staff giving him the stock answer: “You’ve just had one Patrick, sit down!”

I think when we work with people with some verbal communication skills there is a great risk that we make more assumptions around their level of understanding and the intentions behind their speech. Patrick, in saying “cappuccino” may have been asking:

‘When am I going to have my next cappuccino?’ or... ‘Thanks for that cappuccino, it was amazing!’ or ... ‘I really like cappuccinos!’ or even (and perhaps more significantly):

‘I just want to spend more time with you and this is the best way I know to get some sort of interaction’.

He has quite a repertoire of words and topics that he enjoys talking about. He will make statements about all the staff such as: “Cathy go home in the morning!”, “Joan coming in later”, “Goodbye Brian!”

When talking about holidays, he will say “Weymouth” and the fact that he “slept in a new bed.” He has a store of nursery rhymes in his memory and will complete phrases if they are begun for him, e.g. “Pop goes the.........” “Weasel!” A great joke for Patrick is the playful pulling of his ears: “Pull my ears!” he’ll ask. And then, while you’re gently pulling them: “Ow! You bully!” And even: “Bite them off!”

These topics all form a rich and varied repertoire that can be explored through applying the principles of Intensive Interaction. The question worth asking about Patrick along with anyone else with some speech is do they have a solid understanding and confidence in using the Fundamentals of Communication (Nind & Hewett, 2001)? A person may have some verbal communication, but still lack confidence with eye contact, find using and understanding facial expressions difficult or have problems with interpreting other non-verbal communication. Interactions, on the person’s terms, will practice and rehearse all these basic communication skills and develop the person’s confidence as a communicator. Talking about what they want to talk about will ensure the motivation is intrinsic.

Patrick’s experience of social interactions was often that he was passive and being encouraged to speak in a directive manner. In a sense even the request to complete the line from the nursery rhyme is directive. Over time I think he had learned to become somewhat passive – he would sit back and wait. Can we make these conversations more reciprocal? Can we support the person and staff to develop “meaningful two-way communication” (VPN, 2009) with each other?

What Intensive Interaction has allowed us to do in our services is, by naming it and following the principles, ensure the interactions are much more person-led, go at the person’s pace and are filled with the content that they find agreeable. All too often what can happen in services is that unless a person initiates a conversation they are ignored while the staff get on with the domestic chores that are visible and noticed if incomplete.

In the services where people such as Patrick live there is a risk that his housemates with no verbal communication will receive lovely, warm social interactions through Intensive Interaction and his housemates with confident social speech will enjoy chit chat and banter with each other and with the staff and those in between (and there are a lot in between) will receive nothing except lots of standard responses to their “demands” for drinks. Or perhaps behavioural support plans in response to their challenging behaviour.

Whenever a functional assessment of someone’s challenging behaviour raises the possibility that it is to do with social attention, Intensive Interaction should be considered as a way to give that person meaningful attention, regardless of whether they have speech or not. Rapport has long been considered a setting event for difficult behaviour (Carr & McLaughlin, 2005). Here, with Intensive Interaction, we have a practical approach to develop rapport.
When speech is present, there is much to explore and great benefit in joining in with preferred topics of dialogue, in turn-taking, in asking questions, in the emotional content, the non-verbals and in handing over the baton of dialogue to them again and again through the very practical technique of mindful pausing.

In response to Patrick speaking about his holiday: “Weymouth, sleep in a new bed”, we may affirm: “Yes, you’re going to Weymouth, to sleep in a new bed” When speaking about specifics of the staff rota: “Brian coming in the morning”, “Yes, Brian’s coming in the morning!”

A certain amount of flexibility and creativity is to be encouraged here to avoid this becoming simply a case of mechanically repeating back to him what he has already said and perhaps what he already knows. Patrick will often just say a member of staff’s name: “Brian!” We could ask: “When’s Brian coming in?”

These conversations with Patrick increase in duration if repetition is embraced. So extension of these interactions is easily possible by embracing repetition and a certain amount of creativity and exploration of Philip’s existing repertoire, e.g. “Did you have a cappuccino in Weymouth?” “Is Brian sleeping in a new bed?” A simple statement such as “Brian’s sleeping in a new bed” will often provoke a response more readily than the demand of a question.

Patrick has taught us a set of guidelines that work for him and also for others. Essentially it is Intensive Interaction:

- Offer him time to chat on his terms. Ensure the people doing this want to do this – that the interactions are genuine and mutually enjoyable.
- Devote time to this, as part of service delivery. Make sure it happens – enough.
- Get to know his repertoire, the words he uses, the things he wants to talk about. Record them so other people can share and build on it.
- Ensure props are available if required (the rota in Patrick’s case so you can give him the correct information regarding staff coming and goings; memory boxes or reminiscence objects for people with dementia).
- Use pauses, give time.
- Embrace repetition. If highly repetitive what function does this serve? Can the person’s needs be met in other ways?
- Avoid asking too many questions.
- Allow him to mostly lead the conversation.
- Be creative – mix the repertoire up a little, turn questions around.
- Experiment with matching tones, pitches, rhythms.
- Find the right balance between rehearsing the familiar routines and introducing new ones; use the concept of scaffolding with skill and precision.
- Look at all the non-verbals too and tune in and mirror some or all of these.
- Explore rhymes and music – adding melody into speech can extend and excite.
- Establish contexts that encourage the congruent use of the person’s speech – for Patrick: sitting with the rota, drinking cappuccinos in cafes and going on holiday to Weymouth are examples that work for him.
- Move into the wider environment – follow the person’s focus of attention, comment on what they are looking at, talk about the “here and now.”

Patrick is happier and more communicative these days. Incidents of frustrated behaviour have reduced. At times he is very talkative! His repertoire has developed. These days he is more likely to say “Go to the pub!” and “Beer!” than “Cappuccino”.

Jules McKim
Intensive Interaction Co-ordinator
Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust

References:
"Intensive Interaction: walking known territory to take new steps"

By Ditte Rose Andersen

I’m a Danish psychologist and founder of Intensive Interaction Denmark. While some of my work is with people with severe intellectual/physical disabilities and limited or no verbal language, I come from an autism background and I also work with children and adults with ‘high functioning autism’ and Asperger’s syndrome, people whose verbal skills are very well developed. In the case-story told here, I focus on the application of Intensive Interaction principles in a therapy session with a young girl with autism who came to see me for therapy. Through this, I hope to point out some of the unique qualities of Intensive Interaction in making true, social communication available to all people on the autism spectrum.

I stumbled upon Intensive Interaction searching for an approach to autism that took its starting point in the recognition of the interests, preferences and actions of the individual, even if those interests, preferences and actions differ from the norm. I’d become increasingly dissatisfied with approaches to autism focusing mainly on deficits and mainly on compensating for these deficits but with no real attempt to acknowledge the person’s own reality.

I found it appealing that Intensive Interaction does not assume much beforehand. One could say that the only assumption is that the individual child or adult is a meaningful, individual, human being with the same need as everybody else to be seen, heard, understood and responded to. To fulfil that need for people with autism, requires of us that we are willing to see, hear and respond to more than just words, even where a person has a very well developed vocabulary and a high IQ. To me, realizing that we often need to work on the more basic communication, (even if language is present) has meant that I’ve been able to address core aspects of the wellbeing and development of people with autism that other approaches seem to neglect or downplay.

Jenny* was 14 years old and went to a special class for students with high functioning autism/Asperger’s syndrome. Her teachers and parents had referred her to me on suspicion of depression and the mention of suicidal thoughts. She had a diagnosis of autism, a normal IQ and a well-developed verbal language.

She would often speak about her favourite subjects for a very long time.

Her teachers often used a visual clock to time how long she could speak about a particular subject, before moving on to something else. E.g. when 20 minutes had passed on the clock, they would switch to a subject picked by the adult. Thus, a change of subject occurred because of a visualized, predetermined ‘agreement’.

I did something else in our first therapy session. In my opinion and experience, people on the autistic spectrum will have extensive experience with others structuring and directing activities and interactions and others setting the agenda. Many individuals with autism may have a lack of experience with influencing the content, flow, length, intensity, rhythm and tempo of the interaction.

The literature on Intensive Interaction states (e.g. Nind & Hewett 1994, Hewett et al. 2012) that in order to develop your communicative skills, children and adults need to experience their own influence on communication. The lack of access to this mutually influenced flow could be one factor in choosing not to take part in social exchanges or finding them difficult. Others may then perceive children with autism as uninterested or unable to engage socially, when really, they lack the proper invitations to do so, even if they have developed a lot of verbal language.

In Intensive Interaction, we try to be extra careful to tune in to all the signals of the ‘least experienced communication partner’, in this case, Jenny. This helps both parties knowing whose turn it is, so that we can enter a more mutual and coordinated flow of speech instead of a rigid, un-dynamic structure of question and
answers. For these reasons, I made plenty of space for Jenny’s favourite subject; a particular movie. Following the principles of Intensive Interaction, I wanted to listen to whatever she brought with her into the room, instead of directing her or ‘moving on to the most important subject’ (I strongly suspected, that I wouldn’t be able to know what the most important subject was before having met her).

For those reasons, I did not set a visual timer when she started recounting the plot of a particular movie. She found the plot highly illogical, and she told and retold me the reason why this was.

I listened; in much the same way, I listen to people with limited or no verbal language. I did listen to the content of what she was interested in (the movie plot), but I also listened to other aspects of her communication; the rhythm of her breathing, her gestures, her tempo, her gaze direction, eye contact, facial expressions. I responded to these signals while she was speaking by following her gaze direction, responding to facial expressions and gestures and attuning my tone of voice to hers, even if all I said was “hm...” or “uh-huh” in the beginning. She spoke rather fast in the beginning, that it did not seem right to respond verbally with questions. She spoke so fast that there was a sense of her not being that engaged in the actual contents of what she was saying. She was the guide in a world she knew better than I did. I held back my own behaviour, observed, tuned in and let my own contributions build on her inputs.

She went over the movie plot several times (repetition, as in any other Intensive Interaction activity!) and then gradually, eye contact became more frequent, deeper and longer, and she slowed down. In the end, she slowed down completely and stopped. She looked at me directly, asking, “What was it that you wanted to talk to me about?”

Jenny took this step, moving on to a new and less secure subject by her own initiative. Nobody could have predicted, nor set a timer for this shift, say, after 20 minutes. Jenny came to be ready for this shift 35 minutes into an Intensive Interaction-session where speech was a natural and important (but not the only) part of the activity. 35 minutes of known territory with the opportunity to lead and influence the interaction, gradually experiencing the validity and importance of her own inputs and her way of approaching a difficult subject. 35 minutes in which she made herself ready to enter less known territory.

And when she asked, I responded to her, by telling honestly and straightforward that she’d been referred to me because the adults around her worried about her feeling low and having suicidal thoughts. She confirmed this. She felt there were many dark and serious issues in her life right now that worried her. She wanted to talk to me about them. Of course, in this session, we spent more than the 45 set minutes and it was the beginning of a series of sessions where we continued working on what was important for her.

The way I see it, Intensive Interaction offers the compassion, social inclusion and respect in which I found other autism approaches lacking. In Intensive Interaction, our role is to try to listen, tune in and create a responsive space where we can hear, see and understand the person with autism. When the child or adult starts experiencing his or her influence and importance in meaningful, social interaction, a deeper, more truly reciprocal and mutually satisfactory communication can develop between people with HFA/AS and those that are close to them.

Ditte Rose Andersen
Psychologist & founder of Intensive Interaction Denmark

*Names and details have been changed to secure anonymity

References:
Learning through play: The Intensive Interaction way

By Anne Barker - Intensive Interaction Coordinator and Play Specialist

I spent this morning with a cheeky monkey who is 5 years old and has a diagnosis of autism. I've been doing Intensive Interaction with him since he was 2 (and pre-diagnosis), and have seen him go from having little to no speech and a tendency to block people out, to the chatty and sociable boy he is today. He now attends mainstream school and although he manages well there as he is very bright, he seems to need our weekly after school session to decompress and relax. I get the impression he works very hard all day to keep himself together and behave according to the expectations of his peers and teachers. This is common among the many verbal learners with whom I do Intensive Interaction.

Our sessions work like this: I bring a bag of toys and he picks what he wants to play with. This means he’s always engaged and relaxed because I have no agenda that might get in the way of what he wants (and probably needs) to work on. In the early days it was very traditional Intensive Interaction: responding to his body language and building up short back and forth exchanges of glances, smiles and sounds. These days our sessions are more dynamic but still absolutely rooted in the principles of Intensive Interaction.

This morning we played with some letter boxes. Cheeky monkey picked up each one individually and, unprompted, said the sounds of the letters on them. I responded with lots of non-verbals: raised eyebrows and nods and affirming sounds. He then took the items out of each box and made up a nonsense name for each of them. I repeated the funny words after him and we had a good giggle. It’s important for him to have this opportunity to play with speech and sounds without correction, especially as he is in mainstream school where the learning is a little more directive, formal and serious. Eventually he found a sun and moon which he had been looking for and spent a long time quietly making them go up and down in turn. I could see that he was really concentrating on what he was doing and said nothing, allowing the pause in our interaction to extend for as long as it needed to. After a while he told me "the sun goes around the earth!" I responded with a very interested “Oh really??” (we'll forgive him for the scientific inaccuracy- he is only 5 after all!) and this turned into a little conversation about day and night.

When we chat like this I can add in questions very naturally as he is motivated and engaged and doesn’t feel the pressure that he might with a subject not of his choosing. Questions would have ruined the flow in our earlier exchanges where his focus was on playing with and exploring the sounds and words he was using. In addition to questions, I can also take the opportunity to tell him things he might not already know about the topic and he will listen with deep attentiveness. The questions and additions that I make form the ‘scenario two’ element of our very verbal Intensive Interaction sessions - added in when the time is just right and they can take our exchange in a new, but comfortable, direction. Our sessions have taught me a lot about how to adapt the Intensive Interaction principles for more verbal learners.

Cheeky Monkey’s parents feel that Intensive Interaction helps their son in a very holistic way. They have seen progress not only in his communication abilities, but also in his ability to focus and learn, modulate his sensory system and manage his emotions. I am constantly delighted and surprised by the amount of learning and growing that can take place when you give a child your full attention and responsiveness and trust them to take the lead.

('scenario two’ is a term used to describe an Intensive Interaction practitioner carefully initiating a sequence of interactivity with the learner, but doing so in a way that deliberately maximises the potential for further engagement e.g. by initiating using a form of behaviour or language closely related to that currently within the behavioural or vocal/verbal repertoire of the learner/person.)
Special Intensive Interaction Conference rearranged to new date:
‘Intensive Interaction and Autism: at school and at home’

Tuesday 22nd November 2016 at Eastwood Hall, Nr Nottingham

Delegates attending this ‘Intensive Interaction and Autism: at school and at home’ conference will hear a range of presentations on how Intensive Interaction can address the social and communication needs of children with autism, both at school, and also in the home.

This conference will provide opportunities to ask questions and contribute to the broader discussion on the development of Intensive Interaction practices and services at home and in school.

The speakers at this conference will include:

Dr Dave Hewett – Consultant and Intensive Interaction Institute Director: Keynote address: ‘Intensive Interaction and Autism’

Lydia Swinton – Senior Teacher, Sunfield Special School: ‘Intensive Interaction and its relationship with triad of impairments in ASD’

Suzi Stephenson – Manager, Pre-school Team Essex County Council: ‘Setting up Intensive Interaction across countywide preschool teams’

Sara Moroza-James – Parent and Intensive Interaction Co-ordinator: ‘Learning through social connection’

There will also be 2 facilitated workshops addressing the following issues:

- “What do schools and children’s services need to do to offer sustainable and good quality Intensive Interaction to all children who need it?”
- “What can be done to help parents provide sustainable and good quality Intensive Interaction for their children with autism?”

This conference is suitable for: teachers, teaching assistants, parents & other family members, heads, deputies, school curriculum managers, consulting clinicians e.g. SLTs, OT, education psychologist, educationalists, and anyone else interested in the use of Intensive Interaction with children with autism.

After attending this conference delegates will have a better understanding of:

- How Intensive Interaction can directly address the social and communication development needs of children with autism.
- How Intensive Interaction can be used both at home, and at school, to support children to progressively develop their fundamental social communication skills.
- How to support improved access to Intensive Interaction for their children both at home and at school.

The conference fee is £150 with lunch and refreshments included: there are also a number of ‘5 places for £500’ offers available. A discounted price for parents is also available at £100.

To book a place online go to www.andrewsimscentre.nhs.uk. Alternatively you can get a booking form by email from andrewsimscentre.lypft@nhs.net or ring 0113 85 55638.