

Welcome

Welcome to the Summer 2023 issue of the START newsletter, in which we share updates about progress and emerging findings from the START (Supporting Toddlers with a connection to autism or ADHD to develop strong Attention, Regulation and Thinking skills) project. It has been an incredibly busy year since the last update, so we have lots to tell you...

Dr Alex Hendry (Chief Investigator)

Broadening out

The eagle-eyed amongst you will spot that our strapline has changed slightly: In response to requests from families during the pilot phase, we have extended the inclusion criteria for the START programme to include toddlers who are showing high autistic traits, whether or not they have a parent or sibling who is neurodivergent. This means we now talk about toddlers with a connection to autism or ADHD, not just a family connection.



Recruitment and delivery updates

“ By talking and listening to the host and other people today, I realise some big actions I do with my son ”

The second pilot round of START ran from September to December 2022, with 6 families taking part. Despite a state funeral, train strikes, and a lot of rain, 50% of the group attended at least 8 sessions. Parents reflected on a range of benefits of the sessions, from noticing their child's progress in maintaining attention on an activity, to increased patience with their child.

The trial phase of START is now in full flow. Fourteen toddlers (out of our target 60) have already had a baseline assessment and been allocated to the active or control arm of the trial. The first trial group session began on 14 September and will run until Christmas. We plan for two more rounds in Oxford, starting in January and April, and two rounds Southampton, starting in January and April. Please do spread the word to any families you think might be interested (www.startproject.info)

Oxford groups are being held in South Oxford Family Room on Thursdays 10-11am



Southampton groups are being held in Northam Community Centre on Wednesdays 10-11am

As with the pilots, one of our autistic colleagues conducts an accessibility and sensory hazard review of the venues before the first session, helping the group leaders to identify what changes they can make to ensure START sessions are as inclusive and welcoming as possible.

Spreading the word

We are delighted to share the pre-print (an early release of a scientific article) describing the development process of START <https://osf.io/9rjem/>. This has been submitted to a journal and is currently under peer review.

Meanwhile, in a commentary piece, we share our ideas on why programmes to support children's thinking skills might work best if they improve a child's day-to-day environment, as well as offer opportunities for skill practise <https://doi.org/10.1002/icd.2448>.



We have also been busy spreading the word about START to the general public. Hear lead investigator Alex Hendry on the [ADHD & Science](#) podcast (episode 5), and as part of the [Autistica expert webinar series](#).

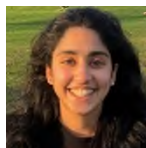
In Spring and Summer, the START team hosted free Play Café events for families at the Oxford BabyLab. These free, bookable sessions gave us the opportunity to chat with mums, dads and grandparents about their priorities and concerns, and to play with their little ones in a relaxed setting. We look forward to hosting more next year. The team also took part in Oxfordshire Play Association play day events across Oxfordshire, which were another great success.

We are running an online info session for families interested in taking part in the START programme on **11 October at 17:30**: sign up for free tickets via Eventbrite: www.tinyurl.com/startoctinfo

Team changes



Our amazing Research Assistant Maryna has been awarded a doctoral scholarship from Christchurch College, Oxford. Maryna plans to lead on an adaptation of START for Ukrainian families.



Stepping into the Research Assistant role will be Devangi Maheswari. Devangi has a wealth of experience from her previous roles at Tufts University, Harvard University and Boston Children's Hospital, as most recently contributing to Project Namaste in India.



Another welcome addition to the team is Caitlin Croke, who is joining us on an internship year from King's College London where she is studying for a BSc in Psychology. Caitlin will be helping with the toddler assessments for START.