

Welcome

Welcome to the 2024 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, as well as a paid opportunity for parents to share their experiences with the Institute of Health Visiting.

Dr Alex Hendry (Chief Investigator)

Delivery is complete

July 2024 saw the final group sessions of this round of the START programme. Thanks to the hard work of the START recruitment and delivery teams – and of course the enthusiastic response from families – we managed to meet our target of delivering 7 rounds of the START programme between 2022 and 2024 in Oxford and Southampton. In total we have trained nine early years practitioners, and enrolled 34 parents and toddlers in the START programme. We have also completed baseline assessment visits with 62 toddlers with a connection to autism or ADHD.



There is still much to do. As well as drawing together all of the data we have collected so far, over the coming year we will be following up families when children turn 3 years old for their follow-up assessment. DPhil student Vicky Hulks will also be inviting parents to share their experiences of the START project in a short interview.

New team members

At the end of September we will be welcoming two new members of the START team.



Ailbhe McKinney (soon to be Dr McKinney!) will be leading the follow-up visits for START. Ailbhe has several years of research experience conducting projects with neurodivergent children and teenagers. Her PhD was about understanding mental health in neurodivergent teenage girls.



Bella Smalley joins us for a one-year placement from the University of Bath where she is studying for a BSc in Psychology. Bella will be helping with the follow-up assessments. She has previously worked as a childminder and volunteered as a cub leader.

Our previous Research Assistant Devangi Maheshwari is starting her Masters at the University of Oxford, but we've persuaded her to stick around and help with the occasional session, along with Maryna Nosyk who is making impressive progress on her research into understanding executive function development amongst Ukrainian toddlers.

Publications and presentations

Our paper reporting the results of the first pilot phase of START has been published in the Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs. It is published Open Access so is free to download from <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12679>.



ORIGINAL ARTICLE |  Open Access |  

Feasibility and acceptability of a parent-toddler programme to support the development of executive functions in children at elevated likelihood of autism or ADHD: Pilot findings

Victoria Hulks, Gaia Scerif, Sinead Rhodes, Sally Smith, Tony Charman, Sandra Mathers, Alexandra Hendry 

We have also been reporting on several other aspects of the project. These manuscripts are currently under peer review (feedback from other scientists) but pre-prints can be downloaded from the Open Science Framework:

- An in-depth description of the development process of START <https://osf.io/9rjem/>
- The protocol for the feasibility randomised controlled trial of START <https://osf.io/preprints/psyarxiv/wsta2>
- A systematic review of measures of parent-child interaction used with neurodivergent parents or infants <https://osf.io/preprints/osf/m5d27>
- Development and validation of the neurodiversity-affirming Parental Self Efficacy and Barriers Questionnaire (PSEBQ) <https://osf.io/xwh2b>

Paid opportunity to share your experiences with the Institute of Health Visiting

The Institute of Health Visiting (iHV) delivers the Changing Conversations: Autism Ambassadors programme to health visitors and those working alongside them, to empower and upskill practitioners to offer support and guidance to meet the specific and unique needs of the young children and families they are working with. They are currently updating some aspects of their programme and are keen to record a new parent/carer voice video to help practitioners to understand what families need from them. They would be grateful if any parents/carers would be willing to share their experiences and are particularly keen to speak to those who have a child, or have recently had a child, in the preschool stage. This should take no longer than 30 minutes (online) and would involve sharing information around your journey with autism, what support helped, and what you would have liked from your health visitor, but maybe didn't receive. They would also be interested in hearing from parents/carers who are neurodivergent. iHV offer a payment of £100 to parents sharing lived experience for use in their training programmes. If you would be interested in participating, contact Carly Green, CPD Lead at the iHV carly.green@ihv.org.uk