

## Newsletter of the Pre-school Autism Communication Trial



*We are looking forward to working with you on the first large-scale intervention study in autism. Many thanks for your interest in the study so far!*

The **Pre-school Autism Communication Trial (PACT)** examines the effectiveness of a communication focused intervention for pre-school children with autism and their families. **PACT** is funded by the Medical Research Council and it is the first large-scale intervention study of its kind!

**PACT** is a three site randomised controlled trial. The trial is led from the University of Manchester in collaboration with the University of Newcastle and the Institute of Child Health/Guys Hospital in London. Jonathan Green is the chief investigator for **PACT**.

With **YOUR** help and support, we are hoping to recruit 144 families; that is 48 families per site.

### *The Intervention in brief*

*Families that have been randomised to the **PACT** treatment will attend bi-weekly 3 hour sessions for the first 6 months delivered by Speech and Language Therapists. After 6 months the sessions will be followed by monthly booster sessions. The routine care of the families in the **PACT** treatment will not be affected.*

*Families that have been randomised to the **Treatment As Usual (TAU)** arm of the study, apart from receiving their regular care, will also:*

- *receive a report based on rigorous assessments carried out by experienced researchers*
- *have the chance to talk to the **PACT** team*

The intervention in London will be delivered at  
Lewisham and Southwark PCT

### **Inclusion Criteria for referral to PACT:**

- *Child between 2 years and 4 years 9 months with presumptive or confirmed diagnosis of 'core' ICD 10 Autism*
- *Child has above 12 months equivalent level in general (non language) development*
- *The family have spoken English at home which is adequate to allow them to participate in this communication based intervention*
- *Neither child nor parent has long term severe hearing or visual impairment that would limit participation in the intervention*
- *No current clinically severe psychiatric illness in parents*

### **Exclusion Criteria:**

- *Epilepsy requiring regular medication*
- *Twins*

### **Randomisation update nationally**

Since starting the study in September, we are pleased to announce that 23 participants have been randomised to the study. With your help we are looking forward to continuing to receive your referrals to meet our target!

## Meet the Team

**Karen Beggs** qualified as a speech and language therapist from City University in 2003 and since qualifying has worked in South-East London, supporting children with autism and/or severe learning difficulties between the ages of 2 through to 19 in special schools and in the home environment. Karen has a special interest in working with children with ASD, and has always enjoyed working closely with parents to help support their children, which is why working on this project is so appealing. Prior to training as a speech and language therapist, Karen taught mainstream nursery age children. Originating from Vancouver, Canada, Karen has lived in London for nearly 12 years. She adores living in London and enjoys all that the city has to offer, and is happy to call it home... although she does love getting away to hotter, sunnier climates whenever she has the opportunity!



Karen & Julia  
Speech & Language Therapists

*“There has been very little systematic research into effective treatments for autism. In funding this project, the MRC hopes that solid research foundations can be established”*

*Colin Blakemore,  
executive of MRC*

**PACT** needs your help!

## Contact the team

**Kristelle Hudry** completed her studies at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia. Her degree included a double major in psychology along with French and Spanish language classes, and she has just completed her PhD in psychology, where her focus has been on the development of preschoolers with autism. As part of her PhD, she completed clinical training and is registered as an Educational Psychologist in Queensland. Kristelle moved to London in early 2005 hoping to pursue a research career with established autism researchers in the UK.

In her free time, she is drawn to the great outdoors, and enjoys camping, walking, and bird-watching, all of which are well catered for in the UK. Her plans are to remain in London for the foreseeable future, making the most of opportunities for international travel which are not so easily available in Australia.



**Julia Collino** qualified as a speech and language therapist from The School for the Study of Human Communication in 1983 (that's 22 years ago!). Since then Julia has worked in various aspects of paediatrics including work at Great Ormond Street where her focus was on child development and eating and drinking difficulties. She has also worked in a children's rehabilitation centre with children who have traumatic brain injuries, here the focus was on developing communication and feeding skills. Her most recent area of work was within a special school for secondary age children with specific language impairment and autism. She really enjoyed working with children on the autistic spectrum and found the work both challenging and absorbing. Julia believes that it is wonderful to have the opportunity to work as part of the PACT study and she is benefiting from the vast knowledge of the rest of the team. She is enjoying working with pre-school children and their families and says "it's great to be able to have an important role at this crucial time in the life of the child." She's got three teenage children (the usual challenge!) and loves travelling, particularly to Asia. She is also a keen gardener who has found the long hot summer rather frustrating!

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