

All aboard the Memory Bus

People in Devon with dementia and their carers are climbing aboard a vintage 1959 double-decker bus as part of a project assessing the benefits of reminiscence therapy. Conceived and led by psychologist Dr Ruth Darvill, the project is funded by the National Lottery and run in association with Age UK.

Two groups of 20 people (10 patients and 10 carers) are being taken on six themed trips. For example, a visit to Sidmouth began with the singing of old songs en route, followed by a Punch and Judy show on the beach. Participants then took turns sharing their memories, which are to be collected in a memory book. 'As soon as people get on the bus, they talk about their memories,' Darvill told us. 'The smell of the diesel and the feeling of the bus as it starts to move, takes people back in time instantly. It's a very multisensory experience.' The driver's and conductor's vintage uniforms

and props, including an original ticket machine, add to the sense of theatre.

'There's plenty of research on the benefits of reminiscence therapy for people in care homes,' Darvill explained, 'but not much involving people in the community. These are people who usually receive very little support.'

Darvill is working with Professor Cath Haslam of the University of Exeter to evaluate the impact of the memory trips, which will involve measures of cognitive ability, social support, mood, identity and carer stress. The final trips are planned for April 2012, after which Darvill and Haslam will begin writing up their findings.



RICHARD LAPPAS/ARROWSCORE

'We're hoping the scientific evaluation will demonstrate the impact of the memory trips and help attract more funding,' Darvill said. **CJ**

'Psychologically informed environments' for the homeless

St Basils, a West-Midlands homelessness charity, has begun implementing a project to create 'psychologically informed environments' for local homeless youth, an idea advocated by Chartered Clinical Psychologist Nick Maguire, of Southampton University, in government guidelines published last year (see September 2010 News and nmhdu.org.uk/complextrauma).

Thanks to funding from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), Maguire and Chartered Clinical Psychologist Amanda Skeate of the Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust are training 120 of St Basils' front-line staff in basic CBT formulation and change techniques, and developing reflective practice sessions for

them to reflect on the impact of their interventions. This includes teaching them how to monitor and detect even small incremental changes. This is vital because it allows staff to see the benefits of their work, which might otherwise be missed, and it's highly motivating for clients who get to see the changes they're making to their lives.

'An important thing with "psychologically informed environments" is that you get as many of the staff as possible working with the same psychological understanding of their clients' problems, using the same language, describing the

problems in the same way, generating the same understanding of what's going on,' Maguire told us.

'The whole homelessness



St Basils' front-line staff are being trained in basic CBT formulation and change techniques

area is starting to pick up on the idea that places like hostels need to be psychologically informed, in terms of what

they do, but also in terms of the environment. It really feels like a tipping point,' he said. 'It's also very good news that the government are still

willing to put money into the development of psychologically informed projects.'

The St Basils initiative is one of the first such projects of its kind in the country, with similar initiatives planned by St Mungos in London and Two Saints in Hampshire. Dr Maguire is currently in the process of co-writing further guidelines on 'psychologically informed environments'

for DCLG and will be involved with Dr Skeate in an ongoing assessment of the St Basils project. **CJ**

Laughs, sighs, and full bladders

Psychology has again dominated the annual Ig Nobel awards – the irreverent prizes given by the Annals of Improbable Research to researchers that make us laugh and then think.

The designated Psychology prize at these, the 21st Ig Nobels, was picked up by Karl Halvor Teigen of the University of Oslo for his investigation into human sighing, 'Is a sigh "just a sigh"? Sighs as emotional signals and responses to a difficult task', published in the *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*. Professor Teigen told us he was 'extremely surprised, honoured, and embarrassed' by the award.

Psychology also featured in other categories. The award for Medicine was given to Dr Mirjam Tuk of the University of Twente (she's moving to Imperial College, London) and her colleagues for their investigations into the effects of bladder fullness on decision making published in *Psychological Science* and *Neurology and Urodynamics*. 'It has been fun,' Dr Tuk told us. 'I mainly see it as a recognition of creativity and originality, which is important for scientists.'

In the spirit of the awards (honourees are allowed just 60 seconds to deliver an acceptance speech), we asked Teigen and Tuk to describe their findings in one sentence each. 'We concluded, tentatively,' Teigen said, 'that sighs psychologically imply a realisation that one has to give up something (a hope, a desire, a person, an idea, or an attempt); for instance people sighed a lot when working on an insoluble task.' Tuk said: 'Our study reveals that people who have to control their bladder to a larger extent are also better able to control behavioural impulses, such as desire for immediate but small rewards.'

Other award recipients with a psychological flavour included a paper on procrastination, which won the Literature prize, and an investigation into the distracting effect of a flapping visor on driving ability, which won the Public Safety prize.

The Awards ceremony was held at Harvard University at the end of September and broadcast live on the internet. **CJ**

I Further information at <http://improbable.com/ig>

Twitter mood

Imagine it were possible to chart the mood changes of millions of people around the world. A new study shows how Twitter has made this research fantasy a reality. Scott Golder and Michael Macy at Cornell University analysed the affective tone of the words used in half a billion English-language tweets written by 2.4 million users worldwide from 2008 to 2010. Across cultures, they found most people expressed a peak in positive affect early in the morning and again near midnight. Negative affect had an independent trajectory, being lowest in the morning and rising through the day to a night-time peak. An exception was night-owls. Their morning peak in positive affect was delayed and they had no night-time peak. There were also signs of seasonal effects across the sample. A greater rate of change in increasing daylight benefited positive affect, such that people appeared happiest at the spring equinox. By contrast, absolute length of days had no effect on mood. Surprisingly perhaps, negative affect was not affected by the seasons (*Science*: tinyurl.com/67hp5jo). **CJ**

THE RESILIENT BRAIN

Catherine Loveday (University of Westminster) reports from a joint British Academy/British Psychological Society lecture

Which of us has not at some point wrestled to remember the name of a famous film star whose face we can quite clearly picture? Or walked into a room to fetch something, only to forget what it is we went there for? These so-called 'senior moments' do occur in all of us, but become increasingly common as we get older. However, Lorraine Tyler, Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience at the University of Cambridge, argues that to believe that cognitive decline is inevitable is dangerous and outdated. Outdated because substantial research now tells us otherwise; dangerous because negative attitudes can in themselves impact on cognitive performance and health: a 39-year-long study by Becca Levy and colleagues at Yale evaluated 18- to 48-year-olds for their attitudes to older people, and found that those with negative attitudes were significantly more likely to have early heart attacks and strokes.

So how can we convince society and individuals that age does not have to be something to mourn? Tyler showed us an animation of a healthy brain slice as it passed through the decades. There were nervous gasps from the audience as we watched the staggering reduction in grey matter between the ages of 20 and 80. And if any of those in the younger bracket were feeling like this was all a distant concern, they were soon put to rights as Tyler pointed out that brain shrinkage has already started by the time you reach 30. 'Don't panic though!' she urged us. 'It is what you can do with your brain that matters, not how much of it you have.' There is also a lot we can do to stave off the effects of age.

A key feature of the ageing brain is the huge variability both within and between individuals. Because some regions of the brain are more prone to age-related loss of cells than others, some cognitive functions are more vulnerable to the passing years. Verbal and numeric ability are extremely resilient and often even improve, while factors such as processing speed, problem solving and verbal memory are more susceptible to the effects of age, and most of us can expect these functions to decline to some extent. This is where individual differences come in though. Some people over 80 can perform in line with much younger people, even in cognitive functions that typically decline. A parallel resilience can be seen in the brain itself, and Tyler demonstrated this with pictures of very young-looking brain slices from a 115-year-old woman.

Tyler proposes that we consider a different take on ageing. Yes, chronological age matters, but brain health matters much more. The brain is capable of reorganising its functions and compensating for lost neurons: it remains adaptive and reactive. For example, older adults who perform well on cognitive tasks not surprisingly have more grey matter than those who perform poorly, but they are also more likely to use both sides of their brain.

So what can we do to improve brain health and function? Some have argued for cognitive training, but according to Tyler for every positive study there is a negative one and the jury is still out. Far more compelling is evidence of the link between regular exercise, cardiovascular health, brain volume and cognitive performance. Kirk Erikson showed this year that compared to stretching, a year of aerobic exercise led to greater levels of hippocampal function and better working memory and other work shows that exercise actually stimulates neurogenesis, the development of new neurons.

We cannot avoid getting older, Tyler says, but there are evidence-based steps to build resilience in the brain and thus the mind. Keep exercising and keep the mind engaged. 'Get out there!' concluded Tyler. 'Believe the science and change society's views.'

AUTISM GUIDELINES

In new guidelines issued on the recognition, referral and diagnosis of autism in children and young people under 18 years of age, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) has called for the creation of 'local autism multi-agency strategy groups'. These groups will improve the early recognition of autism, the guidance says. Each group should have a multidisciplinary autism team, including, or with access to, a clinical and educational psychologist. I Full details at <http://nice.org.uk/CG128>

ALCOHOL RESEARCH

A new independent charity, Alcohol Research UK, launched in September, out of the ashes of the Alcohol Education and Research Council, which is to be abolished next year. 'We provide grants to people working at the cutting-edge of alcohol-harm prevention,' says the charity's new website at alcoholresearchuk.org. 'They might be undertaking research, testing out new ideas or running projects that help to disseminate high quality evidence. The key thing is that they are all helping to improve our understanding of alcohol-related harm.'

CLOSING THE LOOP

Researchers have passed another milestone in the field of brain-machine interfacing. Miguel Nicolelis and his colleagues at Duke University implanted electrodes into the brains of two monkeys and showed that they were not only able to use mind power to control a virtual arm on a computer screen, but were also able to discriminate onscreen targets based on real-time tactile information fed straight into their somatosensory cortices (*Nature*: dx.doi.org/10.1038/nature10489). This suggests it may soon be possible to 'close the loop' by designing neurally controlled prosthetics for humans that also provide tactile feedback.

LITERARY PSYCHOLOGIST

This year's winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature is the 80-year-old poet Tomas Tranströmer, who also happens to be a psychologist. Praised by the judges for his 'condensed translucent images', Tranströmer is the first Swede to be awarded the prize since the 1970s. He worked as a psychologist at Roxtuna, a youth correctional facility near Linköping, between 1960 and 1966. Previously he studied at Stockholm University and worked at the university's Institution for Psychometrics.

Managing ethnic diversity at work

Rob B. Briner (University of Bath) and 'Doyin Atewologun (Cranfield University) report from a one-day conference in London

A challenge facing many organisational leaders and HR professionals concerns how they effectively manage business in the context of today's increasingly diverse employee, customer, community and shareholder groups. So, what can psychology research offer to those responsible for managing the complexity of diversity, and particularly ethnicity, at work?

This was the driving question behind a conference organised by the Ethnic Diversity at Work Group, which is sponsored by the Society's Division of Occupational Psychology and was established two years ago to increase the impact of psychology in this area. Over 90 delegates (mainly managers and practitioners) were shown how theories and findings from social and organisational psychology research can help design effective organisational and individual interventions in areas such as career development, assessment and organisational strategy.

The all-day event began with three keynote presentations which, in different ways, considered how psychology research is relevant to understanding ethnicity at work. The first, from Dr Etlyn Kenny, a lecturer in organisational psychology (Birkbeck, University of London), provided an overview of UK research into ethnicity at work, calling for more work psychology research that specifically examines ethnicity. Kenny argued that research from other contexts, such as the US, is not necessarily relevant to the UK – the way both countries consider, debate and experience ethnicity and 'race' issues differ. More comparative research is therefore needed to identify how and when findings from other contexts such as the US can be applied.

Next up was Professor Binna Kandola (Pearl Kandola), a founder of a business psychology consultancy specialising in

diversity. He drew on his latest book *The Value of Difference* to discuss how basic findings from social psychology and research on unconscious attitudes can be used to help managers consider how they manage diversity in a more evidence-informed way. Professor Kandola reviewed how bias operates in organisations, its neuropsychological basis, the impact on decision making and interpersonal behaviour, and the crucial role that leaders have to play in ensuring that positive change occurs in organisations.

The final morning presentation from a leading international researcher on ethnicity at work, Professor Stella Nkomo (University of Pretoria, South Africa), drew on examples from the growing body of evidence from organisational psychology and other areas of organisational behaviour. For instance, Professor Nkomo discussed how congruence between what an organisation

says and what it actually *does* about diversity increases 'identity safety' for ethnic minority members. A clear diversity philosophy (inherent in policies such as 'equal opportunity employer' statements) as well as actual representation of ethnic minorities (beyond token appointments) tends to be more effective than

a 'colourblind' approach for fostering identity safety. And 'identity safe' climate is one in which ethnic minority professionals feel comfortable and trust that they can 'be themselves', free from judgments, stereotypes, opportunities or restrictions that are tied their identities.

Continuing with the theme of applying psychology research to practice, the afternoon continued with four workshops aimed squarely at practitioners, managers and consultants working in the diversity field: 'Proactive career management for minority professionals' ('Doyin Atewologun and



Audrey Campbell), 'Networking, mentoring and the psychology of diversity' (Tinu Cornish and Maddy Wyatt), 'Assessing and selecting without bias' (Nic Hammarling, Dr Pete Jones and Wendy Lord) and 'Organisational strategies for diversity' (Phil Wilson and Gordon Ryan). The day ended with a question and answer panel session involving the keynote presenters and Professor Rob Briner (University of Bath).

Delegates found the day engaging and thought-provoking, and left with evidence and insights to help

those responsible for managing diversity at work. Evidence-based practice is a challenge for all areas of psychology. The Ethnic Diversity at Work Group's activities and approach involving, as it does, both psychology practitioners and researchers, provides one possible model for how psychology research and psychology practice can be better integrated.

For more on the Group, see tinyurl.com/bpsedawg or e-mail the Chair, Tinu Cornish (tinu@coachforchange.co.uk) or Co-Chair, Doyin Atewologun (doyin.atewologun@cranfield.ac.uk)

Increase in stress-related absence

Stress is now the leading cause of long-term absence from work, according to the 2011 Absence Management Survey, published in October by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD): tinyurl.com/6665h4b.

Five hundred and ninety-two organisations across the UK, with a combined total of over two million employees, were surveyed about their absence levels. The findings were analysed and written-up for CIPD by psychology graduate Annette Sinclair, a senior researcher at Roffey Park.

Two fifths of employers said stress-related absence had increased over the last year (rising to one half of public sector employers), with common reasons cited as work loads, management style and restructuring. Job insecurity was also listed as a top-three cause of stress by 24 per cent of public sector, up from 10 per cent in a similar survey conducted last year.

At the same time, there was some evidence that stress management initiatives have reduced, perhaps because of budget cuts. For example, in the public sector (where such initiatives are actually more common), the proportion of organisations saying that they have a proactive stress policy stood at 69 per cent, compared with figures of 81 to 85 per cent from 2008 to 2010.

On a more positive note, there are signs that spending on employee general well-being is on the increase (e.g. free fresh fruit and onsite massages). Of the two thirds of organisations able to provide the data, 24 per cent said their well-being spend had increased vs. 16 per cent who said it had fallen. Organisations who saw a fall in their absence over the last year were more likely to have a staff well-being strategy in place.

Sinclair told *The Psychologist*: 'The current economic environment and growing uncertainty means that the problem of workplace stress, already the most common cause of long-term absence, is only likely to increase. It is critical that organisations focus on monitoring and maintaining employee well-being, particularly during difficult times of change, if they are to retain an effective and competitive workforce.' CJ

A review of the UK's sickness absence system, commissioned by the Department of Work and Pensions, is due to report this year

RESEARCH FUNDING NEWS

Vodafone World of Difference UK programme offers the opportunity to use your skills and **work for a charity of your choice for two months and be paid for it**. Anyone over 18, resident in the UK and eligible to work in the UK can apply. Closing date for applications is 22 November 2011.

<http://worldofdifference.vodafone.co.uk/default.aspx>

Scottish Enterprise and the Royal Society of Edinburgh Enterprise Fellowships offer a year's salary to researchers to **develop a spin-out business from a technological idea** developed by the Fellow. The fellowships also include entrepreneur and business skills training. Applicants must work for a Scottish Higher Education Institution or Research Institute. The closing date for applications is 23 November 2011.

www.royalsoced.org.uk/636_ScottishEnterprise.html

The AHRC and ESRC as part of the Connected Communities Programme have commissioned two grants in the area of Community Engagement Research. The **making of engagement grant** seeks to investigate the factors that stimulate the development of community action, the building and exploitation of community capital, the disposition of communities to pursue a shared interest and the factors that can hold this back. The **second grant is to investigate the regulation of engagement**. This includes the role of the state in enabling communities to act, self-regulation, community rights and legal frameworks. Innovative and interdisciplinary applications are sought. Stakeholders such as local authorities and communities must be involved in successful applications. The closing date for applications is 14 December 2011

tinyurl.com/5vzdrmj

The National Institutes of Health (USA) have the following funding opportunities available:

Collaborative hubs for international research on mental health. The aim of this scheme is to establish two regional hubs to increase the research base for mental health interventions in low- and middle-income countries. Letter of intent due date 11 December 2011.

tinyurl.com/6xo8sj2

Basic research on decision making: cognitive, affective and developmental perspectives. This funding opportunity announcement encourages research proposals that seek to increase the understanding of the basic cognitive, affective, motivational and social processes that underlie decision making across the lifespan. Areas of particular interest are the interactions of cognition and emotion and behavioural economics and neuroeconomics. Letter of intent due date 18 December 2011.

tinyurl.com/438exrr

Health habits: Timing for developing sustainable healthy behaviours in children and adolescents (R21). Grants are available to identify the mechanisms of influence and/or how best to promote a range of positive behaviours to young people. These could include effective self-regulation strategies, adaptive decision making in risk situations, diet choices and physical activity. Standard closing dates of 16 February, 16 June and 16 October apply.

tinyurl.com/6jh6dk6

info

For more, see www.bps.org.uk/funds
Funding bodies should e-mail news to Elizabeth Beech on elibee@bps.org.uk for possible inclusion