Cheryl Intro Video

In studying autistic development we get a deeper understanding of typical development because in typical development, developmental processes are highly intertwined and so you can't necessarily unravel developmental processes. When you are seeing it in typical development, it's beautifully timed, beautifully integrated. In studying autistic development, sign developmental processes proceed in the ordinary way at a normal rate, whereas other developmental processes don't and so we can look at the impact of those processes that don't develop and how it impacts on other areas of development. So in autism, development becomes unintwined in a way and so really then we start to understand strands of development and what's needed for other development to take place. So we really start to understand when a process is missing, how that can have a cascading affect on other developmental processees. And in fact I'm particularly interested in how children develop a sense of self so how the child comes to understand him or herself and not just him or herself but also him or herself in relation to other people, so how does a child understand who she is, how he or she interacts with other people and how does the child comes to understand other people and the relationship between himself and the other person. And in understanding this, we really start to begin to understand how children come to respond socially to other people and how children come to understand what other people are thinking and feeling. And this is very relevant to autism because we do see autism as a disorder of self, in many ways. They seem not to develop their sense of self in the same way as typical developing children.

It's very easy to assume that development proceeds differently in autism across the board in terms of behaviour and cognition but in studying this area, which is very broad of course and we then break it down, but what we find is in studying these processees, is that we're trying to hone down and look in a very detailed way of where development in autism follows a normal developmental trajectory and where it traverses a different trajectory and in knowing when the disjunctions happen and in studying these areas then it informs us on how to intervene and where to intervene. So that when we first started this work we thought people with autism were evasively unresponsive socially and we know that that's not true at all. They are socially responsive in many ways but there are some areas where they're not responsive. So how do we understand those areas, how do we intervene and be much more exacting in our interventions with people with autism. And we what to look at them across the life span rather than just focusing on one certain developmental period because if you focus on one period you might find lots of differences, all of the similarities, so you really need to take a longitude approach in understanding development in autism and I think this work ultimately will help us to understand the phenomenology of autism spectrum disorders and that's really where I hope the centre will get to.