The aim of this project is to try to increase the completion of blood tests for patients with Learning Disabilities where this has failed in the past and to try to identify any unmet health needs. Many patients with Learning Disabilities have profound fears and anxieties around needles, injections and having blood tests completed. They have often had very negative experiences when blood tests have been attempted in the past. The patients that have accessed this project were unable to tolerate blood collection via the conventional method and may have required sedation in the past because of their anxieties or challenging behaviours.

My name is Andrew Hogg and I am an Assistant Practitioner with the Adult Learning Disability Service in Wigan, Specialised Services Directorate. I have been working collaboratively with Carol Parkyn—a Senior Phlebotomist at Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Trust to develop clinics for the completion of blood tests via the capillary blood collection procedure for adults that have a Learning Disability.

Carol Parkyn had previously worked in partnership with the Learning Disabilities Team, where a clinic session was set up at Golborne Clinic, for patients with moderate to complex Learning Disabilities, and who also had fears associated with blood collection. Capillary blood collection involves using a lancet device to make a small incision to the side of the finger and then squeezing the finger to obtain small samples via tubes or a collector device—only small blood samples are required. This procedure is ideal for a lot of patients with Learning Disabilities as this is a low impact invasive procedure with low risk of injury. Clinics have taken place at Leigh Infirmary and Thomas Linacre Centre, Wigan since May 2014.

Prior to the procedure the patients require a programme of desensitisation sessions. The Desensitisation sessions include a number of different strategies and sessions at home or in a clinic environment. We usually use accessible visual information to talk through the procedure. The aim is to increase the level of graded exposure over 4-8 weeks on average until the patient is ready to attend the clinic.

14 out of 15 patients have had their blood tests completed successfully.
Capillary Blood Test Collection: Daniel’s Story

Daniel has a Learning Disability—he is on the Autistic Spectrum and also has a Physical Disability—Cerebral Palsy and uses an electric wheelchair. Daniel had a negative experience in Phlebotomy previously and he had become very anxious during the last blood test attempt in clinic. Both Daniel and his family had reservations about trying to get blood tests completed again but were willing to talk about the capillary bloods project.

Part of the process was to gain the trust of Daniel and his family around completing the procedure. I discussed the procedure with family and we planned the most appropriate desensitisation process for Daniel. An important aspect of this work is reassuring family and gaining their trust about the procedure. Daniel was offered a clinic tour and given a fact sheet for him and his carers to share which was about the preparation for the procedure. Daniel completed a number of desensitisation sessions at home using visual information, props and graded exposure using tourniquet, lancet and Anaesthetic cream. Daniel then attended clinic for the completion of his blood tests.

Daniel was provided with a social story to help talk him through the procedure in preparation for attending the clinic. Social stories are a visual way to explain something to a person with Autism. This takes them through the process step by step—and is used to help the person to prepare for a new experience or life event.

Part of the desensitisation process with Daniel has been for him to tolerate touch as it is necessary to squeeze his fingers to obtain samples. This has been an issue for Daniel as he does not like touch in terms of his Autistic spectrum disorder. Daniel has now had 2 sessions completed in clinic at Phlebotomy—Leigh Infirmary to get capillary blood tests completed and he now also requires follow up blood tests—due to be completed at the end of March 2015.

Daniel has said that “it feels a lot more easy” having his blood tests completed via the capillary blood collecting procedure. Daniel feels a lot more confident about returning to clinic to have blood tests completed in the future and he has built up a good rapport with the Learning Disability team and Phlebotomy link.

“I was really glad that someone else could get involved and support Daniel when he needs to get his blood tests completed.”
Mrs. Ashton—Mum

“It feels a lot more easy this way.”
Daniel Cowen—Patient.
This sequence of photographs shows Daniel at clinic getting ready for the Capillary Blood collection procedure. Carol will usually complete the procedure and I will assist with reassuring the patient and keeping hands steady or checking on any potential behavioural problems. Sometimes carers or family are involved and sometimes they will not come into clinic.