

NEURODIVERSITY

Neurodiversity means that people's brains work in different ways. There's no single "normal" brain, as Thomas Armstrong explains in his book "The Power of Neurodiversity." This idea includes the many ways people think and behave.

In health and social care, neurodiversity is becoming an important part of promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). It means recognising and valuing all types of information processing, learning, and communication styles.

Because everyone's brain works differently, every interaction with clients, patients and colleagues involves people with unique brain types. However, many organisations don't focus enough on neurodiversity or how to include neurodivergent individuals. This discussion focuses on conditions like autism, dyspraxia, dyslexia, and ADHD and how they affect people in health and social care environments.

In the past, a lack of awareness about neurodiversity meant it wasn't considered when designing care processes, management practices, or environments. As a result, the usual ways of working may suit some but not others, possibly excluding up to 20% of people who self-identify as neurodivergent. These individuals often feel left out by organisational cultures, processes, and technologies that don't accommodate their thinking styles. It is also recognised that many challenges neurodivergent people face at work are due to environments, cultures, and processes designed only for those who are not neurodivergent.

Robust legislation, such as the Equalities Act in the UK, exists to safeguard the rights of individuals with disabilities. Neurodivergent individuals may vary in whether they consider themselves disabled but are protected under equality legislation.

Even though everyone's brain is different, people with similar thinking, communication, and information-processing styles often share a sense of identity, such as being autistic or dyslexic. This identity can come from receiving a medical diagnosis however, there are many people that are neurodivergent and don't have a diagnosis,



and don't feel they need one regardless of an official diagnosis these individuals are called 'neurodivergent.' Those who don't align with neurodivergence are often called 'neurotypical,' though there isn't one 'normal' brain.



There is some debate about what counts as 'neurodivergence,' but it's clear that we need to think more about different thinking styles in health and social care to help everyone reach their potential. Recognising that everyone has unique strengths and challenges can change how we see things.

Organisations in health and social care are increasingly prioritising EDI and staff wellbeing, recognising their connection to a responsible and high-performing workplace. However, neurodiversity is still often overlooked within EDI, reflecting a broader lack of understanding until recently.

Ignoring neurodiversity causes problems like missing out on talent, reducing productivity, and hurting staff wellbeing.

But things are getting better. Neurodivergent people are speaking up more, and some leading organisations are starting to recognise and include neurodiversity. They find that the benefits of making workspaces and processes inclusive of different thinking

styles far outweigh the minimal effort needed. Focusing on neuroinclusion is already helping these organisations with retention and creative problem-solving.

The business case for EDI highlights the value of 'diversity of thought'—bringing together people with different perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences can lead to more innovation and creativity. However, to achieve these benefits, organisations need to be neuroinclusive, ensuring equal outcomes for all types of thinkers.

Embracing neurodiversity is increasingly expected by job candidates who want to work for socially responsible organisations. They expect flexibility, support, and a culture where they can be themselves and do their best work.

Neurodiversity is crucial for the future of health and social care. By committing to neuroinclusion and ensuring equal opportunities and outcomes for all types of thinkers, organisations can stay competitive and not fall behind.



Now, that we know a little more about neuroinclusion, it is important to capture the voices of neurodivergent leaders and colleagues within FHSCP. Each have volunteered their time and energy into helping us understand neurodivergence more, by sharing their story. Each submitted piece is different and shaped by each writer, however, the brief given was:

If you could write a piece to your colleagues to help them better recognise and value, the diverse range of neurological differences creating, an inclusive environment where all neurodiverse employees can thrive.



Evangeline (Evie) Menzies (she/they)
Pronounced EH-vee MEHN-syeh
Social Worker
HSPC Hospital Team East

I remember at primary school thinking there was something different about me. I didn't quite understand things the same as my classmates and would panic any time I was called out to read in front of the class. It wasn't until high school I learnt the word 'Dyslexia'. My drama teacher was very open about being dyslexic and would ask the pupils to help her with spelling on the chalk board. Reflecting back on high school, it was the only time in my childhood I remember someone of authority being overtly open about their learning difficulty.

It wasn't until my undergraduate degree; I was formally diagnosed with Dyslexia and I vividly remember my disability advisor saying 'you are very smart but very dyslexic'. I now know IQ and dyslexia are not linked. Struggling to learn things at school wasn't because I couldn't, it was because I am neurodivergent.

Neurodivergence is the term for when someone's brain processes, learns, and behaves differently from what is considered "typical" in society. Dyslexia falls under the umbrella of 'neurodivergence'. Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling, other symptoms include, poor short-term memory, problems with concentrating, a short attention span, sensations of mental overload and difficulty telling left from right. However, it must be noted Dyslexia effects each individual person differently.

During my undergraduate degree, I developed an interest on why my brain worked differently to others and I conducted my dissertation on Dyslexia. Following my undergraduate degree, I went on to do my Masters in Social Work. I did not think I would be capable of achieving a degree, yet alone two, due to the academic demands of higher education. However, with the support of the disability service in the University and software to aid in my studies, I am now employed as a Social Worker with Fife Council and able to carry out a role in helping others.

Inclusion in the workplace for me starts with visibility. I was unaware of many neurodivergent people growing up and would like neurodiversity to be more open in the workplace. Often a barrier for people accessing the support they require is the fear of being perceived as different from the "norm". I use a yellow tinted screen in the office to allow for reading and I am often asked why I have a yellow screen. I am now comfortable in sharing with people that I am dyslexic and it helps me read.

Being open about my learning difficulty has started conversations with colleagues in the workplace about help and support which can be put in place for neurodiversity. Creating a space which allows people to be themselves and speak openly about neurodiversity can help to build a more diverse and inclusive workplace.





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As a clinician providing psychological therapy within a Psychology service, I initially had reservations about revealing that I was autistic. My internal voice was screaming loudly at me to speak up, but my worries about how I may be perceived or judged, held me back. This is essentially what daily life can be like for autistic and other neurodivergent people. It can feel like being in the spotlight whilst wearing a mask, and putting on a performance, worrying about what might happen if that mask slips.

I believe a main reason for this starts with society, as there continues to be a stigmatisation of autistic people and a misunderstanding of what being autistic really means. Being autistic is often viewed negatively; with a focus on perceived deficits in communication, and an inability to understand what others are thinking or feeling, or show empathy. These are key aspects of my role, of which I have been told I am very good at. I had questioned what others may think of my authentic self. Feeling safe within my working role is therefore priority for me. I believe this to be a key element when considering what it means to create an inclusive environment. Feeling safe is often difficult for many people that come under the neurodivergent umbrella; those that are said to experience the world and think in a way that is different to the majority of the population. Often these individuals have grown up in a world that has not felt safe and have had adverse life experiences due to being perceived as 'different'.

Feeling safe can mean many different things for different people. It can mean being provided with a space in which the staff member feels comfortable to express themselves in their own way, which is valued by other team members. It can mean recognition of strengths, whilst acknowledging these may not be actively recognised as strengths or important to non-autistic people, but they are still as valid. For me, feeling safe starts with identity and the use of language. This can be very important to a neurodivergent person. I am a late diagnosed autistic woman and I prefer to be referred to as autistic. Language varies person to person, however an overarching theme I have become aware of is non-autistic people often change the language because it makes them feel more comfortable. Some examples include 'living with autism', 'have autism', 'suffering with autism' and 'on the spectrum'. It is important to use the language the person uses themselves. Furthermore, I identify with the sex I was assigned at birth. Within the neurodivergent community there is further diversity within gender identity, and many people are transgender or gender non-conforming. Feeling safe within the workplace can mean using inclusive language, and the awareness that what is seen as the 'norm' and majority is not used as default.

What has been helpful for me within NHS Fife started at management level, with senior members of staff creating an inclusive environment for the small team I work in. This included open discussions around neurodiversity, pronouns, and consideration of what adaptations might be needed. It is important to consider what adaptations will be meaningful for the staff member on a personal level and awareness that one size does not fit all.

An inclusive environment would take into consideration the pace in which a new staff member is introduced into the service. It may take longer for the person to process and adapt to a new way of working, to meeting new faces, and in some instances be able to recognise those faces out of the context of where they were first introduced.

When considering practical adaptations, this can include being able to have time in between appointments to decompress and unmask, having autonomy over the working diary (where possible), and consideration of what work environments may be over or under stimulating. It can be helpful for people to know in advance what might be covered in meetings and supervisions, as this can further help with emotion regulation. Prior to group situations, explicitly letting the staff know that they can take breaks and time out when needed can also be helpful. Many autistic people find group situations and phone calls very difficult, so a consideration if another form of communication such as an email or 1:1 meetings may be used as an alternative, when reasonable to do so. Furthermore, direct and clear communication of instructions, tasks, and what is expected of the person can be very important.

Other adaptations might include looking at ways of working, such as how the working day is structured and what is manageable for the person. Being around people on a daily basis and masking is commonly physically and mentally draining for a neurodivergent person. Having adaptations in place, particularly time to decompress, can make the difference between feeling needs are met and workload is manageable, or contributing to the development of burnout and a detrimental impact on mental and physical health. The overarching point I want to highlight is that people feel that, not only is it 'reasonable' to have these adjustments, but they are essential for health and wellbeing.

I believe we need to recognise that society and traditional working environments are not designed with neurodivergent people in mind. We need to embrace diversity and recognise people are different, not less.





Sam Clarke (she/her)
Pronounced Sahn KL-ahrk
Business Manager
Primary and Preventive Care



My Ode to ADHD by Sam Clarke

If I could only pin you down to one thing at a time,
The problems and trouble you have caused!
School reports, too chatty, daydreams.....
And she's back in the room! Where did I just go? Oh, I must remember to.....
And she's back in the room again!
Why can't you just let me think about one thing at a time?
Is it me? I don't feel like I fit in anywhere,
Controlling impulsiveness not to talk over someone or shout out,
Not fully understanding what has been asked of me, too embarrassed to say,
Listening but saying very little for fear that you make it all come out in the wrong way, making me look foolish,
Constantly note taking so I don't miss anything,
You never let me focus long enough to catch every detail before you zone out because you're in overload mode,
Why won't you process my information properly?
It's all your fault!
You are mentally exhausting, anxiety provoking, interfere with my sleep, body dysmorphia and at times, socially awkward and not feeling good enough,
Just a fraction of my daily thoughts, living with you!

ADHD, take note, this is my line, representing my choices, that you try and sabotage at every opportunity!
I will focus my attention on the positive aspects of my complicated brain, ADHD, you will not define me,
With hard work and determination, I win!
I have completed my Nursing degree and Diploma in Specialist Practice,
I currently work as a Business Manager,
I still work clinically as a Registered Nurse,
I am unique but not alone,
I suppose you are a gift in some ways,
How else would we be able to hyperfocus on multiple tasks at a time?
I am me, and I am okay with that,
Are you?



Steven McKenzie (he/him)
Pronounced STEE-vuhn Muh-KEHN-zee
Lead Officer
Adult Services (Resources)

When I got diagnosed with Dyslexia when I was 7 years old, I was like, what is this, I don't have a clue. As I was growing up, I had to learn lots of ways to manage my dyslexia and how I cope with the daily struggles today.

My dyslexia affect my, reading, spelling, writing, and sort term memory, also work recall, also i take time to process tasks, which affects my day.

At the age of 7 years old, it didn't really affect me, I was in the lowest group for Math, spelling and English, but as I grew older, I then started to realize that it was becoming more difficult in my day-to-day learning and tasks.

As I got into High school, it was difficult, as again I struggled with my dyslexia which I got bullied for. Which wasn't a good time for me at school, but never let this put me down. Near the end of school I managed to pass my exams with having a reader scribe. At first, I found this strange but managed to get used to it and pass all my exams, which was a good achievement for me, and was proud of myself.

I try and not let my dyslexia hold me back, but sometimes I have difficult days, as my processing takes a bit of time. I manage to get there. Some time I have dyslexia burn out where I have had a tough day and my brain goes, not playing, and I must stop as my tasks get more difficult to complete. I have got all the support with my dyslexia as my manager gives me time to do tasks and have equipment to help. In my works bag I have fidget toys as this helps me focus on tasks at work so my mind doesn't wonder, and I lose track on what I am doing.

When I write a piece of work, I write the way I speak, and spell phonetically, which sometimes can be frustrating for people who are not dyslexic reading this.

As a male with dyslexia, I sometimes find it hard to talk about it as typically (which I found this word hard to spell) Dyslexia is a taboo subject, but I am like no, people need to understand that Dyslexia is a hidden learning difficulty that a high percentage of male and female have, and can have any job out there.

I have good and bad days, and sometimes find it hard to talk to people about my dyslexia as sometime in the back of my head, it sounds like they are judging me, which is a personal struggle, but i know that this is not the case as all people who I have met, from my family and work collages have been supportive with this.

I fell that there needs to be more support of all staff who have a learning difficulty no matter what it is too fell like to belong it their workplace and not to fear their difficulty. Which I hope I can support with this.

Today I am a Lead officer, and I am a Major and company commander in the Army Cadet force, and I am extremely proud of myself, and with family support to get to where I am. I can't wait to see where I go with my dyslexia.



Ewa Golebikowska (she/her)
Pronounced EH-va Go-wemby-COUGH-ska
Social Worker
HSCP Older People St Andrews

I received my diagnosis (ADHD, combine type) in my mid-thirties and, incidentally, not long prior to starting job in team I am now a Social Worker.

I was very fortunate that my supervisor had good knowledge of the condition due to having a family member affected by it, and they immediately suggested some strategies to support me. I think because of how recent my diagnosis was and how big an impact receiving it had, I would not stop talking about it, so I guess that meant that my colleagues knew from day one I was neurodivergent. I think because our team was already pretty diverse in terms of age, ethnicity, gender etc. and was working well, it was already apparent that diversity in workplace had been an advantage, which probably made it so much easier for me. I had seen a great deal of good practice in my team- genuine interest, willingness to learn and to accept different styles of work, communication, things like this- the fundamental acceptance and appreciation of difference is just there and then you can build up on it, it's easy with that foundation.

It also turned out that Social Work is, in fact, my neurodivergent Special Interest (ADHDers have them, too) so I was able to channel it into work (with a lot of help from medication, too) and subsequently, into studies.

My boss and colleagues not only 'tolerated' but embraced my neurodiversity and were able to appreciate its advantages. I see patterns easier, work in a less linear way and pick up on things others don't and have a good intuitive understanding of technology- the latter one is, I believe, the most appreciated. I do fall into little rabbit holes of special interests and, as I make them known, and my manager listens, I tend to get allocated, when possible, cases that will sustain my attention and are interesting to me and that I will do well working with. I also have a reputation for, rather uniquely in the team, for liking to work duty- I think ADHD for me is very useful in crisis intervention, screening, quick bits of intense work, so I will maybe cover duty more eagerly and often than others. I am also very much a 'dog with a bone'- if something is bothering me, playing on my mind, some information is missing- my hyperfocus will not shift until I have the answer, which is quite good sometimes, in the professional curiosity and finding resources or solutions.

It's not all great: I can struggle with prioritising and organising my workload, which is a nightmare in terms of case and time management; I also can struggle with long-term casework as my brain craves novelty. Some days are just a fight with my brain, me poking it with a stick, saying 'do something' and just being a grumpy toddler. I get support around that in supervision, by having external structure like being set deadlines and having check-ins when I need to.



I think the challenge is also people not seeing that it is a constant added effort- they see you just sitting there, not realising that you are actually working very hard to complete a very basic tasks they don't even think anyone could struggle with. I think that's because they see you being able to do things that are very high effort, you execute them flawlessly and seemingly without breaking sweat and they can't reconcile that you can do those big things but then take like 3 h to record a visit. I think had I not been fortunate to have landed in a work environment that was by design (social work) and accident (above average diversity in the team) more inclusive, things could have been very different. Had I not had a manager that was able to see past some difficulties that could potentially be problematic in this field of work, and made an effort to support me with them, I would not be where I am today. They also seen advantages of my neurodiversity, put them to good use, and got the best of me, to the extent that I decided to qualify as a social worker whilst working as Social Work Assistant. Again, colleagues and manager have been extremely supportive throughout- putting up with tears, giving me time to study, opportunity to undertake a placement in team with enhanced duties and volunteering to take part in my dissertation research. Balancing work and studies was very, very hard- without medication and supportive work environment (and tutors with awareness of neurodiversity) it would not have been possible. I will forever be grateful for an opportunity and for my colleagues and management seeing features of my neurodiversity as an advantage, even when I struggled to!





Podcasts

- [ACAS: Thinking differently about neurodiversity](#)
- [CIPD: Neurodiversity: a vital aspect of workplace inclusion](#)
- [Optimize podcasts and webinars with different lenses on neurodiversity](#)

Local Advice and Information

- [Autism Rocks \(Fife\)](#)
- [ADHD Fife](#)
- [Fife One Stop Shop](#)
- [Scottish Autism - Fife](#)
- [Families Affected by Autism](#)
- [Real Life Options](#)

Useful national websites

- [Optimize](#)
- [Access to Work](#)
- [Dyslexia Scotland](#)
- [Scottish ADHD Coalition](#)
- [British Dyslexia Association](#)
- [Business Disability Forum](#)
- [Disability Confident](#)
- [Hidden Impairment National Group](#)
- [Mind: ADHD and mental health](#)
- [Mind: Autism and mental health](#)
- [National Autistic Society](#)
- [ACAS](#)
- [CIPD](#)
- [Dyscalculia Association](#)
- [Dyspraxia Foundation](#)
- [BCN](#)
- [Scottish ADHD Coalition](#)
- [Texthelp](#)

Get In Touch

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Partnership



Supporting the people of Fife together