



## 1 Introduction

Neurodiversity Celebration Week is a worldwide initiative, which for 2024 took place between the 18-24<sup>th</sup> of March. The week aims to challenge stereotypes about neurological differences and focuses on celebrating and championing neurodivergent individuals.

At Cordis Bright, our observance extends for a month, running from 18<sup>th</sup> March to 18<sup>th</sup> April, to celebrate neurodiversity, as part of which we continue to ensure Cordis Bright is an inclusive workplace for neurodivergent individuals.

As part of our internal events, we have produced a short blog post of a conversation we had with someone with lived experience of neurodiversity. In this, we discuss their journey of navigating neurodiversity, their experiences pre and post receiving a diagnosis, and barriers and enablers in their work and personal life.

### What is Neurodiversity?

Depending on how our brains are wired, we think, move, process information and communicate in different ways. Many people use neurodiversity as an umbrella term used to describe alternative thinking styles such as Dyslexia, DCD (Dyspraxia), Dyscalculia, Autism and ADHD<sup>1</sup>.

## 2 Neurodivergent journey

Patricia is a coach and therapist who works with abuse and trauma in neurodivergent teenagers and adults. She also works with organisations as an experienced advisor on topics related to domestic abuse, sexual violence, trauma, and safeguarding.

Our conversation with Patricia began with discussing the inception of her neurodivergent journey. Patricia expressed how she always felt different growing up, even amongst friends. After years of masking and living with undiagnosed autism, she was first misdiagnosed as having bipolar disorder – a misdiagnosis that often occurs in women and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.neurodiversityweek.com/introduction>

children<sup>2,3</sup>, she stated. Despite having this diagnosis, and receiving treatment for it, she found the treatment made no difference to her.

Her journey to the right diagnosis began with the birth of her son, who is also neurodiverse. 'I saw myself in my son's diagnosis' and this is what led to being officially diagnosed as having autism, she stated.

### 3 Diagnosis as a way forward

Prior to her diagnosis, Patricia recalled masking a lot, often feeling the need to be a different person in different social spaces. Her previous job role was a particularly exhausting space, where she was not allowed to be herself, or have her needs addressed.

Cultural influences also played a significant role growing up, in having her differences and needs acknowledged. Patricia shared that the taboo and stigma of being different, plays a considerable role in one being vocal about mental health and mental health needs.

However, Patricia's diagnosis gave her the freedom to choose to not mask anymore and embrace her neurodivergence.

*"A lot of things felt different after the diagnosis. I was not questioning myself all the time... wondering 'why am I like this'. I'm more of the opinion – after diagnosis - that this is who I am. There is something refreshing and freeing about it."*

Now, as a coach and therapist, she specialises in abuse and trauma in neurodivergent teenagers and adults. Patricia says with her current role, she is much happier in her ways of working, and in embracing her neurodivergence every day. In her role as a therapist, we also discussed the 'trend' of late diagnosis that often occurs in girls and women. The increase in accessibility to information makes you asks questions, she stated, 'If I hadn't met the kind of people I've met, I wouldn't have asked the right questions'.

As the mother of a neurodivergent child, she also realises the difficulties around catering to the needs of an autistic child, and as part of her role as a therapist, is helping make therapy more accessible and available for autistic children.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thebraincharity.org.uk/neurodivergent-women-adhd-autism-adults/>

<sup>3</sup> Eaton, J. (2023). Autism Missed and Misdiagnosed. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

## 4 Experience in the workplace: progress and barriers

Although Patricia is very happy in her current role, she noted that various challenges in her previous workplaces have not always allowed her to feel fulfilled at work. She told us that she has used these experiences to help her learn what it is that she needs from a workplace to feel comfortable, understood and respected.

Patricia explained that, in her experience, neurodivergent individuals are often scared to open up about their neurodivergence at work because of a fear of the perceived stigma or negative connotations associated with their diagnosis. When Patricia did share information about her neurodivergence with previous colleagues, she recalled people making insensitive and offensive comments because she did not align with their assumptions of what it means to be neurodivergent.

She shared how this lack of understanding often caused people to misinterpret her actions at work:

*“I feel things differently from other people, I am more ‘it is the way it is’ – more black and white. This caused me problems at work because people thought I was very abrupt. Also, a lot of autistic people dump information, so often people thought I didn’t have a measure on when to stop myself.”*

This lack of understanding about the needs of neurodivergent individuals also meant Patricia was told to ‘do certain things in a certain way’, rather than adapting existing practice to accommodate for her requests to work more flexibly.

In this way, Patricia felt it was crucial for workplaces to educate their employees and raise awareness about neurodiversity and the different ways it can present itself. She suggested that workplaces having an inclusion policy which has a focus on neurodiversity was a helpful starting point. However, these policies must account for individual differences and be thoughtfully written – “just one word added or taken away makes such a huge difference”.

In her current workplace, Patricia explained that there is a shared understand that everyone is different and will have different needs. This has created an environment where she feels empowered and comfortable to ask for the things that she knows will help her, whether this is flexible working hours and arrangements (i.e. attending some events virtually), or asking colleagues to work differently, i.e. sending her additional information before meetings to give her more time to prepare.

## 5 What can we do?

Patricia detailed examples of ways that they think employers and organisations, such as Cordis Bright, can adapt to make people who are neurodiverse feel included and more comfortable.

These examples included:

### **1. Employers should be open to learning about neurodiversity**

It's important for employers to facilitate and make an effort for their employees to learn about neurodiversity. This will increase understanding and acceptance that neurodiversity is part of who some people are.

### **2. Ask people what their needs and requirements are**

Patricia discussed that there should be no problem in asking neurodiverse people about their particular needs at work, as it's important to ask about requirements, instead of assuming what these are. This is especially because everyone who is neurodiverse has different needs and uses different strategies.

Patricia linked this into employees having to ask for support with their needs in general, for example for long-term health conditions. Patricia discussed an example of giving new employees an opportunity to disclose their neurodiversity early on, with the premise of if they don't know then how can they help you.

### **3. Think about requirements ahead of time so onus isn't just on the individual**

Whilst individuals can disclose their needs and ask for support in the workplace, the onus should not just be on individuals to disclose, particularly as some people may not feel able to disclose for a variety of reasons. Patricia related this into when you receive your polling card in the run up to local elections, and it will ask about any access needs in terms of needing access for a wheelchair. However, it does not ask about other needs, e.g., if you would like to vote when it will be quieter if you have sensory needs and describe when these times might be, or how this could be facilitated.

### **4. Develop a neurodiversity policy**

Patricia described how she has helped her employer develop a neurodiversity policy, which then ensures that workplaces take into account that people will behave in different ways and shows neurodiverse people that they are needed, respected, included, valued, and supported.

If there is a neurodiversity policy in place that embraces all of these aspects, then people may feel more comfortable to disclose their neurodiversity and their needs.

### **5. Avoid stereotypes of neurodiversity**

Linked in to understanding the needs of neurodiverse employees and the development of a neurodiversity policy, it's important to make sure any policy or learning does not encourage stereotypes of neurodiversity, and that the policy affirms and embraces that every neurodiverse person is different.

## **6 Conclusion**

Our conversation with Patricia has been an opportunity to highlight the need to actively have open discussions around neurodiversity, to help create equitable social spaces.

At Cordis Bright, we hope to use the Neurodiversity Celebration Week and in extension, the Neurodiversity Celebration Month, to ensure we are consistently committed to Cordis Bright being an equitable, inclusive place to work, and to continue to work on understanding and embracing neurodiversity in the workplace.

As part of our internal Neurodiversity Celebration Month, we have also produced a blog post [on improving employment outcomes for autistic people](#), and a [Cordis Pulse Neurodiversity special edition](#).

We would love to hear your thoughts and feedback about this blog post. If you have any questions or feedback to share, please get in touch with Lucy Webster ([lucywebster@cordisbright.co.uk](mailto:lucywebster@cordisbright.co.uk)), Bonnie Butler ([bonniebutler@cordisbright.co.uk](mailto:bonniebutler@cordisbright.co.uk)), or Samyukta Srinivasan ([samyuktasrinivasan@cordisbright.co.uk](mailto:samyuktasrinivasan@cordisbright.co.uk)).